



**The AMA History Project Presents:  
Biography of VIC CUNNYNGHAM, SR.  
Free Flight Modeler, Designer, Record Holder,  
Event Director, Contest Coordinator,  
Nationals Event Director**



June 27, 1917 - September 11, 2001    Started modeling in 1927  
AMA #980

Written & Submitted by VC, Jr. (06/1996); Transcribed by NR (11/1996); Edited by SS (2002); updated by JS (12/2005 and 09/2007)

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**Career:**

- Vice President AMA (West Coast) late 1950s and early 1960s
- Free Flight Rules Committee
- Free Flight Contest Board
- Contest Coordinator over 10 years
- Charter Member N.F.F.S with Carl Fries and Dick Black (West Coast Membership Chair)
- Nationals Overall Free Flight Director (1967)
- Nationals Event Director (too many years to list)
- Formed the Free Flight Association of the clubs of California
- Organized and directed the contest for the Cal Western Champs (this meet became the U.S. Free Flight Championships)
- Held nine national records
- Won over 150 awards including many at the Nationals (three firsts)
- Member the 8 Ball Society

**Honors**

- 1987: National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
- 1991: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame
- 1994: Blacksheep Squadron Spirit Award
- 1995: Model Aviation Hall of Fame

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*This biography was written and submitted by Vic, Jr. for his father, Vic Cunningham Sr.*

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**Vic Cunningham, Sr.**

By Vic Cunningham, Jr.

**Modeling History**

Vic Cunningham started building models in 1927 at age 10 in Winnetka, Ill. In 1930, his family moved to St. Louis, Mo. where his father saw his keen interest in model planes and arranged for model building lessons with Mr. Christy McGrath, one of the true pioneers in the very beginnings of the model aircraft hobby. In 1931, his first club was the Stix, Baer and Fuller M.A.C., which boasted over 500 members. This association with this fantastic club was to be only the beginning of a lifelong love of model airplanes and of many modeling friends.

Six of the Stix Baer and Fuller Club members are still gathering at contests and each other's homes after over 60 years as friends and competitors. This hobby is great in so many ways – it is not just for the relaxation or knowledge and skills it teaches us, but the camaraderie and fellowship it brings will last us a lifetime.

In 1936 at one of the Mississippi Valley Model Airplane Championships, Vic had the distinction of receiving some national attention when Model Airplane News (MAN) magazine published a picture of Vic and his wife Ann with their Twin-Pusher airplanes and told everyone about Ann winning third in the contest... and Vic was tenth.

So he was flying when there was no national organization and was one of the first in the AMLA, and the NAA, and of course, the AMA.

In 1952, Vic moved his family to California and became active in the West Coast modeling scene. But now he had his son Vic Jr. to teach and fly with in the many competitions they attended each year. Being a modeling family, it was always part of the family vacation to attend the Nationals (Nats). One day of flying at the Nats was always sacrificed so he could help officiate the Free Flight events. At the 1967 Nats, he was the overall director for all of the Free Flight events.

Vic, along with his good friend (and later AMA president), Howard Johnson, worked with the Los Angeles Parks and Recreation Department to sponsor and run the Cal-Western Model Meets. These contests were later moved to Taft and became the United States Free Flight Championships.

He was an AMA contest coordinator and, in an effort to better organize the clubs and activities in California, Vic contacted all of the clubs and started the Free Flight Model Airplane Association of California. This organization is still active today (under a different name) and still runs the U.S. Free Flight Champs.

As a vice president of AMA District 10 when only one vice president covered the whole area, he was a very busy person. He has also served on the Free Flight Contest Board and the Free Flight Rules Committee.

At age 75 (in June '92), Vic is still a very active modeler, attending contests from Lawrenceville, Ill. and Jean, Nev. to Taft, Calif. He has spent countless hours authenticating and building many of the twin-pusher type rubber models of his youth.

### **Career Highlights**

- Hall of Fame National Free Flight Society
- Hall of Fame Society of Antique Modelers
- Vice President AMA (West Coast) late 1950s and early 1960s

- Free Flight Rules Committee
- Free Flight Contest Board
- Contest Coordinator over 10 years
- Charter Member N.F.F.S with Carl Fries and Dick Black (West Coast membership Chair)
- Nationals Overall Free Flight Director (1967)
- Nationals Event Director (too many years to list)
- Formed the Free Flight Association of the clubs of California
- Organized and directed the contests for the CAL WESTERN CHAMPS (this meet became the U.S. Free Flight Championships)
- Held nine national records
- Designed the Space-Rod which has set over 15 national records
- Won over 150 awards including many at the Nationals (3 firsts)
- Member the 8 Ball Society.

*With such a fine list of accomplishments it is my pleasure to submit his name to the AMA for consideration for the distinguished Hall of Fame Award.*

*Sincerely,*

*Vic Cunnynggham, Jr.  
Covina, CA 91724  
AMA 11554 CD*

**AMA News  
Academy of Model Aeronautics  
5151 East Memorial Drive  
Muncie, IN 47302  
Model Aviation Hall of Fame 1996**

Each year the Academy accepts nominations for the Hall of Fame award. This honor is bestowed upon individuals who have contributed to the advancement of the association and aeromodeling in general over a significant period of time. Each candidate's qualifications are reviewed and voted upon by a panel consisting of past presidents of the Academy.

In 1995, five individuals were granted the Hall of Fame award. The following biographical sketches provide information attesting to the contributions to aeromodeling made by each of the recipients.

At age 78, Vic Cunnynggham is still very much an active modeler in the free flight arena of competition. As an illustration of his continued interest and activity, the association of Southern California Free Flight clubs, FFMAC presented Vic the first Spirit of Modeling Vic Cunnynggham Award, an annual perpetual award, in 1994.

Vic began his modeling career in 1927 at the age of 10 in Winnetka, Ill. Three years later, his family moved to St. Louis, Mo. where he began to be tutored by Christy McGrath, one of the modeling pioneers from the St. Louis area.

In 1931, he joined a club of 5,000 members maintained by Stix, Baer & Fuller, a large department store in the St. Louis area. Vic began to receive national attention, in an interesting fashion, when a national magazine published a picture of Vic and his wife, Ann, with their twin-pusher airplanes. The information detailed Ann's winning third place in the contest while Vic placed tenth!



Upon moving to California in 1952, Vic became very active in competition. Additionally, he began to officiate in contests. In 1967, he served as the overall director for Free Flight events at the Nats. He was a very early member of AMA having begun his flying under the banners of the AMLA and NAA.

Vic served as an AMA contest Coordinator, Vice President of District X and the Free Flight Contest Board. Working with Howard Johnson, who later became an AMA president, the sponsorship of Cal-Western model meets was achieved through the Los Angeles Parks and Recreation Department. These later became the United States Free Flight Championships held at Taft, Calif.

Vic is a member of the Hall of Fame for both the National Free Flight Society and the Society of Antique Modelers. As a charter member of the NFFS, he became the West Coast membership Chair. He is also a member of the very select 8-Ball Society.

Vic has held nine national records and designed the Space-Rod, which has set 15 national records. He continues to spend countless hours authenticating and building many of the twin-pusher type rubber models of his youth.

Vic is able to share modeling experiences with his son, Vic Jr., who was taught to build and fly models at a very early age. Certainly, a continuing highlight for Vic is to be able to gather together with other members of the Stix, Baer and Fuller Club at their homes and over 60 years of camaraderie as friends and competitors.

Vic is welcomed to another group of modelers who dedicated themselves to the advancement of aeromodeling: the Model Aviation Hall of Fame!

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*This is a copy of the letter Vic received from the AMA.*

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*Academy of Model Aeronautics  
5151 East Memorial Drive  
Muncie, In. 47302*

(317)287-1256  
FAX (317)289-4248

July 3, 1995

Mr. Vic Cunnyngham Sr.  
314 N Albert St #76  
Exeter CA 93221

Dear Mr. Cunnyngham Sr.,

*Congratulations! You have been selected as a recipient of the 1995 Model Aviation Hall of Fame award. This award is given each year to a very few modelers who have, over the years, given outstandingly to the promotion, development, and advancement of aeromodeling in the United States.*

*You should feel proud of this selection for a noteworthy panel of AMA Presidents has selected you out of many worthy nominees for this year's award.*

*My heartiest congratulations to you and a sincere thank you from all of the AMA family for all you accomplished in helping to make this hobby the wonderful activity that it is!*

*We will be in touch at a later date to arrange for a suitable presentation at your convenience.*

*Sincerely,  
Don Lowe  
President*

### **Other Awards**

National Free Flight Society (NFFS)  
#14 Hall of Fame Award 1987

Society of Antique Modelers (SAM)  
Hall of Fame Award 1991

Model Aviation Hall of Fame Award 1995

Blacksheep Squadron  
"Spirit Award" (First Recipient), 1994

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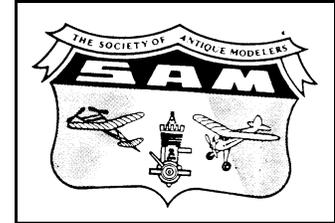
*The following excerpt is from the September/October 1995 issue of SAM Speaks, the publication of the Society of Antique Modelers.*

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## Vic Cunnynggham, Sr. Honored

Vic Cunnynggham, Sr., holder of nine National Records and designer of the Space-Rod (holder of 15 National Records), has been named to the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. Vic is one of a small handful of people who have been so honored by all three major aeromodeling organizations: AMA, NFFS, and SAM. In addition, Vic was the first recipient of the Blacksheep Squadron *Spirit Award* in 1994. He is perhaps best known for his many years of successful Free Flight campaigning with Al Vela's Maxi Boy design.

Vic started building models in 1927 at age 10 and the first club he belonged to was the Stix, Baer and Fuller M.A.C. of St. Louis, which had over 500 members. Vic has had a lifelong fascination with twin pushers, and has spent countless hours authenticating and building many of the twin pusher models of his youth. Vic moved to California in 1952 and, along with his son, Vic Jr., (designer of the Geodetic Galaxy) became active in the West Coast modeling scene.



He and Howard Johnson, a former AMA president, organized the Cal-Western Model Meets in Los Angeles, which later became the US Free Flight Champs, the west's largest contest now held at Lost Hills on Labor Day. Vic also was an AMA contest coordinator, and in an effort to better organize activities in California, he created the Free Flight Model Airplane Association of California, an organization composed of virtually all Free Flight clubs in California. The group has had several names, and is now known as the California Unified Free Flight Model Airplane Clubs (CUFFMAC), and is the sponsor of the USFF Champs.

Vic was also a charter member of the National Free Flight Society (NFFS), an AMA Nats Event and Overall Director, a Contest Coordinator for 10 years and member of the AMA Free Flight Rules Committee and Contest Board. At 78 years old, Vic may still be seen at Free Flight contests nationwide with his twin pushers. He is a deserving member of Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

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*The following is taken from the May/June 1991 issue of SAM Speaks.*

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### **SAM Hall of Fame for 1991**

Beginning in 1989 at the Jean Nevada SAM Champs, SAM has announced a yearly selection of 10 famous modelers that we feel qualify for recognition for their contributions to model aviation.

It has been our practice to name old time modelers from the various different areas of participation in model aviation.

These areas are defined as model design, model competition, writer or publicist, hobby supporter,

engine designer and leader in the SAM movement.

The committee, headed by Jim Adams, SAM President, has just made this list available. The names were chosen from a long list of nominations submitted by the SAM membership. The list for 1991 is as follows:

Jim Bohash  
Johnny Brodbeck  
Vic Cunningham  
Dick McCoy  
Claude McCullough  
J.G. "Bud" McNorgan, first SAM Director  
Tim Dannels, SAM Publicist  
Mickey DeAngelis  
George Perryran  
Jerry Stoloff

These selectees will be recognized with the presentation of awards and life memberships in SAM immediately following the SAM business meeting on Oct. 9, 1991 at the Nevada Landing Hotel, located in Jean, Nevada. The time of the presentation will be 8:30 p.m.

### **National Free Flight Society (NFFS) Free Flight Hall of Fame Awards**

What a wonderful world we live in! How fortunate we are that every once in a while we come across individuals who are very benevolent in disseminating their knowledge.

The recognition this year includes a number of such individuals. The Hall of Fame Awards this year are to persons who have contributed to the welfare of model aviation through various means, such as developing building plans, developing excellent competition kits, associating with the competition and club scene and in general, freely performing duties in the administration of model activities.

With these individuals in the picture, the model builders throughout the United States and the world have benefited greatly.

A.J. Italiano  
Chair - Hall of Fame Committee

Committee Members:  
Hardy Broderson  
Robert Dodds

Free Flight Hall of Fame Awards

The National Free Flight Society has announced the recipients of the Free Flight Hall of Fame for 1987. The Society is extremely proud to recognize their contributions to the development and continuity of Free Flight model airplane activities throughout the USA and the world.

VIC CUNNYNGHAM SR. - a designer and flyer of great outdoor models for early years. An active leader in the promotion of model education and AMA activities.

DR. JOHN B. MARTIN, JR. - Recognized leader in the promotion of Peanut Scale activity, initiator of the Peanut Grand Prix and an all around coordinator of Indoor activity in the Florida area.

WALT MOONEY - A most prolific designer and documenter of Rubber Peanut Scale models. When you think Peanut Scale, you automatically think Mooney.

JAMES A. PATTERSON (deceased) - A well-known top-notch competitor in the 1950's and 1960's. A member of the USA FA teams for three times in Power and Rubber. Impressive history of wins at the US Nationals.

CHARLIE WERE (deceased) - An old time model educator for the park system in the San Francisco area for a number of years. A thinker and developer of new ideas to improve model flying. A producer of exceptionally detailed high quality rubber kits for the discriminating builder.

DONALD ZIPPY (deceased) - A very successful promoter of model activity for many years in the Northwest area. A very influential person in obtaining facilities for the general good of the area modelers. Also a Jet Speed modeler with a winning record.

Awards will be held during the 1987 Nationals, (Lincoln, NE) at the NFFS Symposium on Tuesday, July 14, 1987.

*(Right) c. 1989: Vic, Sr. built this "Duplex" Rubber model. Vic, Jr. covered and decorated it.*





*c. June-1935: A photograph of Vic, Sr. in a window display at the Pader Drug Store.*



*c. June 1990: Four Generations of AMA Membership: The Cunnynghams: (L-R) Kenny, Vic, Jr., and Vic, Sr. (In front) Kyle, all are holding their AMA Cards. This photograph was first published in Model Aviation as the first family with four generations of AMA membership.*



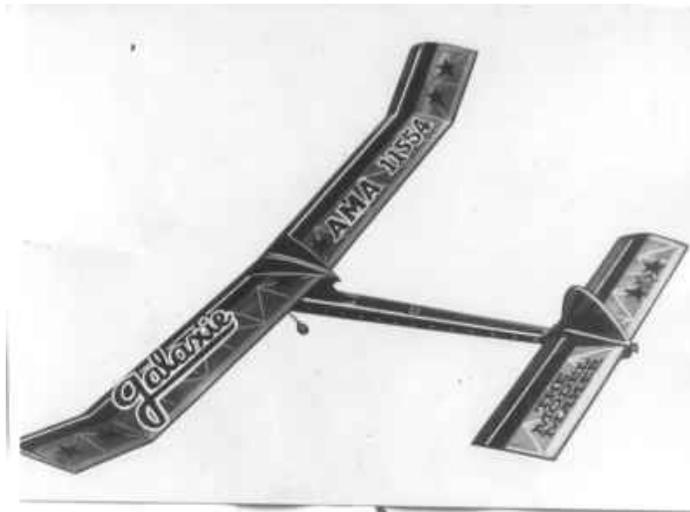
*Just a little bit of Grandpa's Antique Hobby Shop.*



*c. 1968: At the Nationals in Olathe, Kansas, Vic, Sr. won first place with Vic, Jr.'s design model.*



*c. 1936: Vic, Sr. with wife Ann six years before Vic, Jr. was born. Ann won three events in the 1936 Mississippi Valley Model Airplane Champs. Vic Jr. came from a true model builder family. This photograph was published in Model Airplane News.*



- c. 1961: *American Modeler Annual* published the “Space Rod,” designed by Vic, Sr. and Vic, Jr., and deemed it “the Winningest Design in America.” In 1972, the *Galaxie* by Vic, Jr. won the 1/2A Open four out of four years. Between the two designs, they won over forty U.S. Nationals and records.



- c. 1989: At the *Sam Champs*, Ralph Prey, Contest Director, awards the first place of “Team Entry” to Vic, Sr. and Vic, Jr.



*c. 1960: (L-R) Dave Vincent, Vic, Sr., Vic, Jr., and Howard Johnson (then AMA President) all set records with the Space Rod design. Vic, Jr. set six of the records. This photo was featured in the 1961 issue of American Modeler annual magazine.*

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