



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of ANTHONY J. ("A.J." / TONY) ITALIANO



April 2, 1923 - October 4, 2013 Modeler starting in 1935
AMA #2386

Written and Submitted by AJI (02/1998); Transcribed and edited by SS (06/2002), Updated by JS (09/2009, 01/2014, 07/2014), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

Career

- 1941: Was the Wisconsin state champion flying in Class C
- Flew in a number of AMA Nationals, placing in some
- 1981-1993: President of the National Free Flight Society (NFFS)
- His ½-A Frenchy was included in Frank Zaic's 1959 and 1961 yearbook
- Initiated and produced the NFFS video, "The Joy of Flying Free"

Honors

- 1986: Goldberg Vital People Award
 - 1993: NFFS Hall of Fame
 - Recipient of over 300 awards total for modeling activity
 - 2003: Inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame
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The following was written and submitted by A.J. Italiano in 1998.

Tony's young days were spent in Waukesha, Wisconsin. As luck would have it, there were a number of early aviation enthusiasts in the Waukesha area. They flew over Tony's house because there was a very tall chimney on a factory located across the street to avoid. Soon, there was the Lindbergh flight, and close behind that were the flying over of some dirigibles. Then, in July of 1933, a group of Italian Air Force seaplanes flew from Italy to the Chicago World's Fair, which also intrigued Tony's dad. All of these events sparked Tony's interest in aviation.

Soon Tony found out that there were model airplane magazines and model kits on the market. He started to devour the data in the model magazines starting in the late 1920s to the early 1930s. He built a number of scale kits as well as some good flying Rise-off-Ground (R.O.G.) flyers. Soon he wasn't satisfied with that and wanted bigger challenges, i.e., engine-powered models to emulate the full-scale aircraft flying overhead. His father took Tony to the local flying field to get a close look at these marvels as well as to look at the kind of men flying them. Tony worked at odd jobs to gather the dollars to buy a Scientific Miss Philadelphia kit and an Ohlsson Gold Seal engine in 1937. He then discovered that there was to be a competition at the Curtiss-Wright Airport in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1938. He had to enter and compete. This was the start of a competitive career with challenges for Tony. From there on, he was building Class C model aircraft of his own designs at the rate of one a week during the summer. During this period, he had a job that paid a bit over \$5 a week, which was more than enough to support his interest. (Note: During this period, Tony was not at all interested in girls as modeling took all of his interest and money!)

Tony started a local model airplane club, Ground Pilots, to get all the local modelers together to fly, exchange ideas and have club competitions.

In the late 1930s, Tony decided that the materials he could purchase were not of the best grade and cost was too high. So, he started a model supply company in the basement next to his workshop. His brother, Victor, got interested in this venture and between them, they decided to buy items in bulk and sell them to modelers by whatever quantity they wanted at a much-reduced price from the packaged variety. Subsequently the brothers decided to go into the manufacturing of rubber-powered model kits. They organized the Supreme Model Supply Company and produced four kits with 24-inch and 28-inch wingspan designs. To this day, some modelers have copies of the plans and have stated that two of the designs – the Electron and Thermal Bagger – are very nice flyers.

Between 1940 and 1943, the brothers decided to open a retail hobby store in Waukesha, Wisconsin. Business was good and they had to move three times to larger quarters, each time in the downtown business area of Waukesha.

During late 1942 and early 1943, Uncle Sam decided that they could not handle World War II properly without the talent of the Italiano boys. Victor went into the Army and Tony went into the Army Air Force.

Tony proceeded through the cadet program training on PT-17 Stearmans, Vultee BT-13, and Cessna Bobcat UC-78. In early 1944, the Army Air Force decided that the Pacific operation would need many more transport flyers and so Tony trained on C-47s. Eventually Tony flew C-47 and C-46 transports from New Zealand to Japan. He was assigned to the 13th Air Force and later to Far East Air Force Headquarters Squadron. Last major assignment was as commander of Chofu Air Base located outside of Tokyo, Japan. Eventually he retired as a lieutenant colonel.

Tony attended college and received his bachelor's degree in aeronautical engineering from Tri-State University in 1947. His first aeronautical job was as a stress analyst on the first largest jet engine developed in the U.S. during 1947. Later he joined General Motors as an engineer with the old AC Spark Plug Division (now Delco Electronics). He had many assignments in his 35 years with Delco. Most of his effort was in the electro-mechanical and electronics field. Inertial guidance was involved, which included the guidance system used on the Apollo project to the moon – and back! At the time of retirement in 1984, Tony was the executive responsible for all government activity at Delco Milwaukee, which at any one time involved eight to 12 major programs concurrently.

Tony's modeling activity continued during all of the above periods. In the 1949 to 1950 period, he even got into Radio Controlled (RC) modeling. He was one of approximately six people who started the Lakeland RC Club. Subsequently he and other Free Flight modelers organized the Bong Eagles. Both clubs are still in existence today.

Since Free Flight offered Tony greater challenges, he stuck with Free Flight and eventually became president of the National Free Flight Society (NFFS). At the time he took over, the membership was at approximately 700 and decreasing, and the Free Flight activity was declining. Tony led the drive to rejuvenate the Free Flight community into a doer type,

establishing schedules, budgets, fiscal control, improving the organization with aggressive people and improving the venue of activity. Tony and Hardy Brodersen worked closely to move on all fronts. Tony proceeded to find a really suitable site for indoor competition as well as outdoor sites. This, in turn, led to the establishment of the U.S. Indoor Championships (USIC) and subsequently the U.S. Outdoor Championships (USOC). Tony performed a great task to locate some indoor sites that could be obtained at a reasonable cost. In time he located the Johnson City, Tennessee Eastern Tennessee State University Mini-Dome, which has been the mainstay for the USIC due to the 116-foot ceiling and excellent relationship with the ETSU management. The USIC and USOC are rated four star competitions and are going strong today, which adds vitality to the Free Flight activity in the U.S.

Tony was the administrator and contest director of the USIC for 12 years. He also took on the task to organize the F1D World Championships at ETSU during 1988 and again in 1990. The first USIC was held at West Baden, Indiana in 1982.

The first USOC was held at Lawrenceville, Illinois in 1989.

Tony's awards, etc., include the following:

1941: Wisconsin state champion, SR, Class C

1959, 1961: Frank Zaic Yearbook included Tony's ½-A Frenchy

1981-1993: President of NFFS

1986: Goldberg Vital People Award

1988: First Class B Open, AMA Nationals; flew in a number of Nationals and placed in some

1993: Elected into the NFFS Free Flight Hall of Fame

1992-1993: Tony initiated and was producer of the NFFS video, "The Joy of Flying Free"

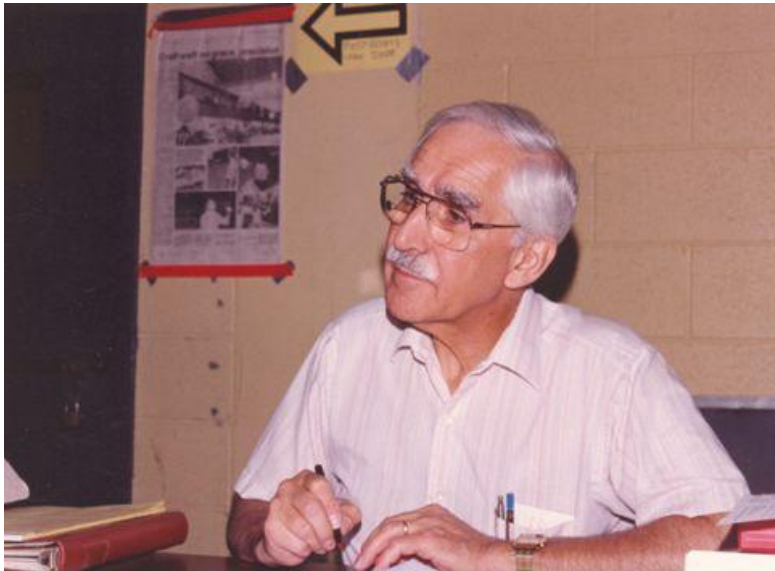
Tony was and still is active in F1A activity as well as in indoor and outdoor competitions.

Tony has garnered over 300 awards during his model activity.

*(signed) Anthony J. Italiano
February 9, 1998*



November 1946: Tony's self-portrait taken at Tri-State University in Angola, Indiana.



July 1988: Tony in Johnson City, Tennessee, at the ETSU Dome for the U.S. Indoor Championships. He served as contest director and contest manager.

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