



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of BRAD LANG



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Written by JH (10/1999) and JS (07/2012), Video by AMA staff (11/2018), Transcribed & Edited by JS (04/2011, 11/2018)

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Watch Brad Lang give an AMA Expo volunteer, Stone, a flight in his AT-6 Texan here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76Qx6cR-JSs&feature=youtu.be>



*AMA video, published by AMA on November 5, 2018.*

*Description: "Model Aviation is a Lifelong Passion at AMA Expo West 2018, So many model aviation enthusiasts had a lifelong passion for aviation sparked by modeling, and AMA Expo is fuel for that fire! In our final video from the show, we'll hear from real enthusiasts who discovered their passion for aviation through modeling, and we'll meet the next generation of aviation enthusiasts who are finding their life's path with aviation at AMA Expo."*

*An AMA blog post with more information about Brad Lang, including photos, can be found at <https://amablog.modelaircraft.org/blog/2015/05/05/ama-member-brad-lang-to-fly-p-51c-in-arsenal-of-democracy-flyover/>.*

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*The following biography of Brad Lang was written by Jim Haught, published in the October 1999 issue of Model Aviation magazine.*

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## **Profile: Brad Lang** **Pattern or Pitts, T-6 or 757, this Bumblebee loves to fly** **By Jim Haught**

Bumblebees aren't supposed to be able to fly, but this one has flown more than most.

From Pattern models to commercial airliners to full-scale aerobatic aircraft, Brad Lang (aka "The Bumblebee," after the paint scheme on his full-scale *Pitts S-2B*) has covered quite a bit of the

aircraft spectrum.

The 40-year-old Lang is a First Officer for Delta Air Lines, based in southern California; he has qualified for the full-scale Advanced World Aerobatics Championships, held in Mnichovo Hradiste, Czech Republic; and has flown Radio Control models – primarily in Aerobatics – for more than 20 years.

We felt that this unusual trifecta of aircraft accomplishment would be of interest to our readers, and Brad took time out from a busy practice schedule for the following interview.

*Q. What got you started in modeling?*

A. My Dad (Donald W. Lang Sr., one of the Tuskegee Airmen) and I used to go to the airport in Newark to watch the full-scale aircraft fly. On the way home one day in 1973, we saw an RC model being flown, and we stopped to watch.

So my first exposure to RC models was seeing Jersey Jim Martin flying a Pattern model. Soon I got my first radio – a Kraft single-stick – and bought an S-Ray with an Enya .19, which I still have. Two years later, I had graduated to a .60-powered *Super Kaos* for Novice Pattern.

*Q. Did your Dad fly models, too?*

A. With his full-scale experience, my Dad thought it would be easy to fly models, but he found out how difficult it was. And with him working two jobs, his time was limited, and he eventually left the modeling up to me.

*Q. What were some early modeling influences?*

A. At one point early on, we knew that we needed some help, so we joined the Central Jersey RC Club. And Steve West really took the time to explain things.

I knew Dave Brown as a premier Pattern flier, and met him for the first time when I was at Purdue. I was flying a Sig *Komet* in a Pattern contest at Kokomo, Indiana. I saw Dave and Lewis doing 8-point rolls, and I thought a lot of their airmanship.

Dave and Patton were early Pattern heroes. They were able to fly with such discipline and precision! They were a pleasure to watch.

*Q. What led you to Pattern competition?*

A. I like the precision – the precise maneuvers – and I felt that would be the most challenging part of modeling. I felt that I would be flying the aircraft, rather than the other way around.

In Pattern I felt that I was challenging myself; I was not trying to beat others, just myself.

*Q. You still use single-stick transmitters, which is unusual these days.[1999]*

A. It's how I learned to fly, and what I'm comfortable with. And I saw guys like Rhett Miller (1970s Pattern Champion) win with them, so why not?

*Q. You fly models, a Pitts and commercial aircraft. How do the aircraft types compare?*

A. The principles of flight are the same, and physically understanding what's happening to the vehicle is important, regardless of type.

A big difference, though, is that when you're on the ground flying a model, there are no G-forces affecting you. That's a big problem to overcome.

I train for this by running, speed skating, and other activities. And I work my way into building up G-tolerance by doing less-complicated maneuvers for a while after I've had a layoff. It takes about a month to build this up.

But there's a mental component, too: Am I feeling prepared mentally to withstand this many Gs? This is the most important and most difficult part.

*Q. Describe the full-scale flight scoring.*

A. 40% is Known sequence, given to the pilots the previous year; 40% is Freestyle, where the difficulty of maneuvers must add up, and there are a minimum and maximum number of maneuvers that can be flown; 20% is an Unknown sequence, never seen before being flown. It's like a 3-D chess match.

There are five flights: a Known, a Freestyle, and three Unknowns.

*Q. How do you prepare for the Unknown – or can you?*

A. It's a little like an improvisation in music- you hope you don't hit the wrong note.

*Q. What makes the best pilots stand out?*

A. You try to add your own style-your own personality. I like to pop right off the line and accelerate to vertical quickly. I try to make everything crisp- with a sharpness to my flying that is highly accurate and will appeal to the judges. When they see that crispness, that makes my style successful.

*Q. Does flying models help you visualize successful full-scale maneuvers?*

A. Yes, the Hammerhead, Loop, Rolls, and 45-degree angles.

When I was flying Pattern in Dallas, I worked with a spotter; we were always critiquing each other. In full-scale, I use a coach, and we recently began using videotape – it helps to verify what the coach is saying about your flying.

*Q. What's in the future for your aerobatic career?*

A. First, I want to be successful in Advanced (this was Brad's first year on the team.) Then I'd like the challenge of making the Unlimited team.

*Q. How long will you continue to fly in competition?*

A. As long as I can keep the freshness of it. I look at guys like Clint McHenry, who won the full-scale Nationals, and Ed Hurt, who's one of the oldest Pattern fliers around, yet he still has the vitality.

Flying is fascinating for me- all forms of flying. There's something beautiful about it that is simply unique – being in an aircraft above the ground.

*Q. You have a secondary interest in Warbirds. What is their appeal?*

A. I like *T-6s* and *Mustangs*, because of the Tuskegee Airmen (see below); I checked out in a *T-6* when I was in Texas. I'd like to own or part-own one someday. And there's nothing quite as dynamic as a big radial. These aircraft can be used as good educational tools, too.

*Q. How important is it to you that flying is an activity that you and your father have shared?*

A. It helped to give me a sense of direction and added to our relationship. It was another way to cement the bond between parent and child.

*Q. Any advice for current or future pilots?*

A. Have the picture in your mind: *I think I can do this*. Use visual imagery – make a picture in your mind of where you want to be.

And a number of Unlimited pilots use maneuvers perfected by Hanno Pretzner [former Pattern World Champion] and others. Modelers can learn a lot from attending full-scale events – it can give them new ideas.

## **The Red Tails**

*The Tuskegee Airmen downed 409 enemy aircraft (and sank a destroyer!) during World War II. They were known as The Red Tails for the color of their aircraft, and never lost a bomber they escorted.*

Brad Lang's pride in his father's accomplishments as one of the original Tuskegee Airmen is quite evident in conversation. Moreover, Brad is now a member of the Airmen too. I asked Brad what his father had told him about the Airmen days.

“My dad never really talked a lot about it until recently,” he said. “Later, when I heard some of the *PT-17* and *T-6* stories, I got a sense of the history involved.”

It has taken many years for the Airmen and other groups to be properly recognized for their contributions to the armed forces. Lang does not feel that self-promotion was a trait of the Airmen.

“For so many years,” he said, “their history was put under the table, for whatever reasons.”

But the Airmen are proud of what they did – aren't they?

“I think his generation was a bit more humble and reserved, and regarded what they did with a sense of duty,” he said. “There’s a sense of pride, but it’s more internal.”

Brad has some regrets about not being more aware of the Airmen when he was younger.

“I wish I had put the puzzle together earlier in life-what they were doing- rather than have to watch it now (on TV specials, etc.),” he said.

He joined the New Jersey chapter of the Airmen “to help preserve the heritage and legacy – to help pass the torch.”

-Jim Haught

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*The following was published in the July 2012 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the “I Am the AMA” column, written by Jay Smith.*

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## **I Am the AMA**

### **Brad Lang CAF Red Tail Squadron Leader**

*JS: How did you get involved with model aviation?*

**BL:** I was fascinated with things that flew. I built Revell 1/72-scale plastic models in grade school. I read lots of RC modeling magazines and started flying the CL Cox PT-19 trainer.

One day our family was driving home from New York City and I saw a fast-moving model flying without lines. We pulled over to watch. The RC pilot was “Jersey” Jim Martin and he was flying his Banshee.

Jim stopped what he was doing to talk to us about his aircraft and flying pattern. Jim was humble, approachable, and creditable. His flying was deliberate and precise. When we left that flying site, I had one thing on my mind; I wanted to be a Pattern pilot. I was hooked.

*JS: How has model aviation impacted your life and/or career?*

**BL:** Model aviation helped me think about achieving goals that I thought were unattainable at first, but ultimately achievable with hard work and dedication. I had to use my brain to build an aircraft and once built, believe in my own ability to fly it successfully.

I learned about the science of flight which later made learning full-scale flight concepts easier. This was particularly helpful when I started competing in full-scale aerobatic competitions in the 1990s. There is always something to learn and learning can be fun - and very challenging.

*JS: What disciplines of modeling do you currently participate in?*

**BL:** I haven’t flown a Pattern contest in years, but I enjoy the classic Pattern-type models. Currently I’m trying to keep a JHH F-4J Phantom in one piece. In general, I’m not an electric [power] enthusiast, but I have a Great Planes Ultimate biplane, which allows me to fly locally.

*JS: What are your other hobbies?*

**BL:** I enjoy jazz piano and cycling.

*JS: Who or what has influenced you the most?*

**BL:** My parents. They always encouraged us never to quit and to have high standards. Also, by aiming high and expecting to win, you'll push yourself to be successful in whatever you do.

My father and I joined the Central Jersey RC Club (CJRCC). Chris Christiansen and Steve West were very helpful, as were other CJRCC members. As my interest in Pattern flying grew, I started flying in contests with others my age.

There was a young man around my age named Donnie Abati flying a Mach 1. He was talented and also interested in Precision Aerobatic flying. We attended a few Pattern contests together. I learned a lot from watching others fly.

*JS: How did you get involved with the Red Tail Squadron?*

**BL:** At the US National Aerobatic Championships a friend told me about a Commemorative Air Force (CAF) P-51C restoration that was taking place in South St. Paul, Minnesota. This aircraft was going to be dedicated to educating the public about the Tuskegee Airmen.

My friend had met my father, Donald W. Lang Sr., who was a Tuskegee Airman, and he thought I'd be interested in becoming involved with the group restoring it: the CAF South Minnesota Wing.

In the past year we've developed an outstanding ground-support exhibit, the RISE ABOVE traveling exhibit. The exhibit features a 30-minute movie on a panoramic movie screen with an inspirational message about rising above personal challenges.

The exhibit is on the road 35 to 40 weeks of the year, reaching into local communities and connecting with the CAF P-51C Mustang at airshows. It has been well received throughout the country.

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