



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of J.C. YATES

October 10, 1915 - September 9, 2002

AMA #38613



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Transcribed & Edited by SS (11/2002), Updated by JS (10/2008), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

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## Career:

- Mid-1940s: Began building and flying Control Line models
- Served as the inspiration for Charles Mackey's book, *Pioneers of Control Line Flying*
- Won many awards, including awards received while flying as a team with Bob Palmer
- 1947: Formed a successful partnership with Henry Orwick and worked with him to develop the Orwick engine and the Y&O propeller
- Worked as a professional tool and die maker
- His designs and innovations were covered in national magazine articles
- 1948: Burbank Manufacturing Company kitted his Sirius design
- Organizer and instructor of the Burbank Model Airplane Club, which was formed in 1945
- 1948: Headed a fund-raiser to have a flying field built in his hometown of Hemet, California

## Honors:

- 1998: Precision Aerobatics Model Pilots' Association Hall of Fame
- 2001: Model Aviation Hall of Fame

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*The following information on J.C. Yates is taken from Charles Mackey's book Pioneers of Control Line Flying, which was published in 1995. A copy of this book is in the National Model Aviation Museum's Lee Renaud Memorial Library.*

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## Interview with J.C. Yates

By Charles Mackey

From Pioneers of Control Line Flying, pages 126 – 129

The year is 1981. It has taken 34 years to track down your childhood hero, J.C. Yates, but you have done it and it is not going well. Mr. Yates finds it uncomfortable to talk about himself and is embarrassed about his loss of memory surrounding many of the events that took place 34 years ago. You are quite aware of his uneasiness and come close to terminating the interview a few times, but Mr. Yates slowly gets used to the tape recorder and accepts you as a fellow flyer/designer.

J.C. was born in Fayetteville, Arkansas, July 8, 1915, moved to Neosho, Missouri, at the age of six. He moved to California at the age of 20, worked for Safeway Supermarket for two years and then went to work for Lockheed during World War II. Bob Palmer also worked at Lockheed at that time, but they met at the local flying field.

You tell J.C. that you met Bob Palmer at the Nationals one year and tried to talk to him, but he seemed very un-talkative. J.C. responded, “He doesn’t like to talk any better than I do.”

J.C. joined the Burbank Model Club and built a V Shark. A photograph of this airplane and another he built obviously patterned after it appeared in the March 2, 1946 issue of Collier’s magazine. The Dragon stunt ship appeared in the January 1947 issue of Air World magazine. The appearance of the Dragon was the first to prove that a Control Line stunt shop can look good as well as fly well.

J.C. tells you what he calls an interesting story about his friend Bob Palmer. Bob was running a homemade punch press, cutting out wing ribs for the “Madman” at Burbank Manufacturing Company when something went wrong and he lost the fingers on his right hand. Bob was always having marital problems at the same time and was feeling pretty low. J.C. convinced Bob to come and live with him for a while to give him time to heal. J.C. then got Bob interested in his new Stearman PT 17-inch design, a replica of Sammy Mason’s full-size stunt ship. They both started construction at the same time, but Bob finished first because J.C. had to work days. J.C. took the PT 17 Bob built to the 1948 Olathe, Kansas, Nationals and entered it as a team project with Bob. J.C. flew the 1948 stunt pattern to win the flying scale event. The plans and article appeared in the April 1950 issue of Air Trails magazine.

Both Bob and J.C. built models of J.C.’s Lockheed Serius that appeared in the February 1948 issue of Air World magazine. In the quest for more power, J.C. formed a working relationship with Henry Orwick of Orwick Engines that led to a partnership that lasted for two years and produced the famous Y&O props. J.C. dropped out of modeling in 1950 and did not even buy a model magazine until 1976. He regained interest when his granddaughter needed help getting her Cox PT-19 to fly.

J.C. lives in Hemet, California. He has a large workshop next to his house that is full of Radio Controlled airplanes. He does not fly competition, but still designs, builds and flies model airplanes. Two points that should be raised: one, J.C. has no memory of charging his airplane dry cell batteries and thinks it is a foolish idea and two, the “Madman” plans drawn by Hi Johnson do not show ¼-square-inch wing spars and show more dihedral than the 1947 National airplane. I am happy to report that Mr. Yates is enjoying his old hobby in his retirement.

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*The following information about J.C. Yates ran on the AMA’s Web site, [www.modelaircraft.org](http://www.modelaircraft.org), shortly after his death in September 2002.*

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We have lost a “true legend” wrote AMA president David Brown and District X Vice President Richard Hanson.

“We have lost our childhood hero,” said Don Hutchinson, District VIII representative of the Precision Aerobatics Model Pilots’ Association (PAMPA).

J.C. (Jay) Yates was the inspiration for the book *Pioneers of Control Line Flying* by Charles Mackey who wrote the following in remembrance of the Control Line legend J.C. Yates. Charles Mackey wrote the following about J.C. Yates:

“Don and I were teenagers when J.C. Yates won our admiration. Now we qualify for discounted coffee at McDonald’s, but our hero is still J.C. Yates. We believe Mr. Yates started the trend to beautiful, high-performance stunt ships, the kind we fly today. We think of him as the father of modern day Control Line Precision Aerobatics.

“To understand the impact Jay had on the model airplane community, try to imagine a time when most Control Line contests could be won by flying a loop or a wingover. The airplanes were mostly converted Free Flight models or solid-wing box fuselages. Imagine opening a copy of Air World magazine and finding an article titled ‘Control-Line Stunt Flying’ by Charles Yates. (His later articles were signed J.C. Yates.) You see a photograph of a beautiful Control Line stunt ship with a backdrop of eight trophies. When you turn the page, you find a diagram of maneuvers that look impossible. There is no name for the airplane and no construction details. What would you do?

“You would probably do what I did and immediately start construction. When the airplane was 95% complete, a chance to attend the 1947 Nationals was offered and accepted. I was completely blown away when I saw Jay fly his new airplane, The Madman. It was even better looking than the one in the magazine and the maneuvers were faster than I could have possibly imagined.

“Bob Arnett, a teenage boy from Kansas, witnessed one of Jay's practice flights in 1947. Later Bob would become a national Control Line Stunt champion and he would write of his encounter with Jay, ‘The damn fool was doing things that I was afraid to think about.’

“My boss at the hobby shop, Clarence Idoux, used to say that Yates’ airplanes were 10 years ahead of the rest of the country and we all agreed.

“Jay achieved hero status for his contribution to the hobby, but in fact, he could have made hero status for his character alone. He was a gentleman, kind, patient, caring and had time for all of our questions. He was the Gary Cooper type, the kind of man we wanted to be when we grew up. I could not have completed the book about Pioneers without writing about J.C. Yates.

“In 1981 when I interviewed Jay in Hemet, California, he was a prominent member of Hemet Model Masters Radio Control Club. He helped raise funds to build a new Radio Control flying site by building highly desirable models and auctioning them off. The club's favorite airplane was the Yellow Bird that he designed, an easy-to-build, aerobatic trainer that became popular in the area.

“The interview with Jay brought to light the close relationship he had with Bob Palmer. Bob had lost fingers on his right hand while operating a punch press making parts for the Madman, and had recently lost his home, his wife, his daughter, and his job. Jay insisted that Bob and Bob's mother move in with him and his wife until Bob could recuperate.

“It was at this time that Bob built the Sammy Mason biplane that Jay had designed. He and Jay took the airplane to the 1948 Nationals, entered it as a team, Yates-Palmer. Jay won first place in the scale event by flying the complete AMA stunt pattern. The Yates-Palmer team was well known for their spectacular team flying. They flew Madman airplanes with Orwick engines at

speeds approaching 90 mph. Bob would fly the lead airplane with a 10-inch streamer mounted on the canopy. Jay would drop down from behind and cut the streamer while avoiding taking off Bob's rudder. They never chewed up a rudder and they never missed a streamer cut. There were many more thrilling parts in their routine, but they are almost too dangerous to write about!

“Recognition of Jay's contribution to model aviation would not come until late in his life, but it was appreciated by him and his family. The first acknowledgment came at a luncheon in Hemet, California. Jay was presented with a copy of the book, *Pioneers of Control Line Flying*, signed by all who attended.

“The second acknowledgment was a dinner held in Hemet, California, and attended by the Hemet Model Masters, Knights of the Round Circle and Jay's family. The first presentation was a painting of a Lockheed Hudson, the airplane Jay helped build during the war. The second award was a beautiful plaque made by De Hill. It had an Orwick engine, complete with a working spark ignition and Y&O prop. Jay had been in partnership with Henry Orwick and helped in the development of the first specially built Control Line stunt engine. Tom Lay, Bill Netzeband and I, contributed the Orwick engine.

“The next award was a beautiful plaque inducting Jay into the PAMPA Hall of Fame. Keith Trostle, a charter member of PAMPA's Hall of Fame, made the presentation. Jay also received the Model Aviation Hall of Fame award presented by Rich Hanson. Jay's family and many members of the Knights of the Round Circle attended.

“This was the last club meeting Jay ever attended. He had planned to attend one other meeting where he was to be presented with the first laser-cut kit of his 1946 Dragon but instead the presentation was made by RSM Distribution's Eric Rule at Jay's home.

“Mr. Yates is survived by two daughters, two sisters, six grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. There are no words to express our loss.”

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*The following obituary for J.C. Yates was published in the December 2002 issue of Model Aviation magazine on page 180.*

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J.C. “Madman” Yates, or Jay as he preferred to be called, was one of the last surviving pioneer heroes of Control Line flying. A designer, builder, flyer, and humanitarian, he unselfishly gave instruction to many children and beginners through the years.

He was elected to the PAMPA Hall of Fame in 1998 and the Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 2001.

Jay began building and flying Control Line airplanes in the mid-1940s. He may have been the first in Southern California who could perform loops, figure eights, and upside-down flight, all in the same routine.

He was the inspiration for Charles Mackey's book, *Pioneers of Control Line Flying*. “Jay achieved hero status for his contribution to the hobby, but in fact, Mr. Yates could have made

hero status for his character alone. He was a gentleman, kind, patient, neat, knowledgeable, caring and he had time for all our questions,” wrote Mackey.

Jay teamed up with Bob Palmer, and the two amassed a large number of trophies. In 1947, Jay formed a successful partnership with Henry Orwick, and they developed the Orwick engine and Y&O propeller, still in use today.

A professional tool and die maker, flying model airplanes was always just a hobby for Jay. He was responsible for many designs and innovations that became the subject of national magazine articles. His 1948 Sirius even became a kit by Burbank Manufacturing Company.

Jay was an organizer and instructor of the Burbank Model Airplane Club, formed in 1945. In 1948, he headed a fund-raiser that built a flying field in his hometown of Hemet, California.

J.C. Yates was preceded in death by his wife Marjorie. Two daughters, two sisters, six grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren survive him.

The following photographs and captions are taken from the AMA’s website. They ran shortly after the death of J.C. Yates.



*Jay Yates holding a Quickie design he built. This was taken on his last visit to Hemet Field.*



*Photograph of Jay taken in 1995.*



*Two replicas of Sammy Mason's PT-17 designed by Jay Yates and built by Don Hutchinson.*



*Jay testing his Orwick engine.*



*Eric Rule presenting Jay with the first laser cut kit of the Dragon.*



*Rich Hanson congratulating Jay on his induction into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame.*



*This was taken at the Hemet Model Master's meeting where Jay received his Model Aviation Hall of Fame award. Top row (L to R): "Wild Bill" Netzeband, Bill Heyworth, J.C. Yates, Rich Hanson, Charles Mackey and Dale Kirn. Bottom row (L to R): Lucky Pyatt, Bob Whitely and Bart Klipinski.*

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