



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of HENRY (HANK) ANHOLZER



Modeler, Aircraft Mechanic, Modeling Teacher

November 10, 1922 – April 10, 2007 Started modeling in 1928

AMA #109822

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The following was originally written by Henry Anholzer in 1996, and then updated by him in 2002. Henry passed away in 2007.

I'm 79 (2002) years young and still doing my bit of spending money and enjoying the hobby of model planes. I have six flying Radio Controlled (RC) aircraft. Three are quarter scale and one 1/3 Fleet in process.

I try to go flying at least twice a week. No contests – just having fun and good fellowship and, believe me, model aviation has the nicest people.

My love of airplanes all started back in 1927 when Charles Lindbergh crossed the pond. I was five-years-old at that time my family moved from the Bronx, N.Y. to Jamaica, Long Island. Long Island had lots of open space for us kids to grow up. Settling down in the new neighborhood, I met two kids who liked airplanes, too. We all started building the solid model 10-cent kits. We got really good. To save money we went to the local lumberyard, bought white pine, and made our own scratch built.

We built a small airport next to my house with runways from cement and hangars from cheese boxwood. We sure were busy kids.

My dad, who was in full support of my ventures, noticed the article about joining the Junior Birdmen of America. I joined. Also, we could buy plans at 10 cents each. This is when I learned to build rubber band models, stick models, Rise-off-Ground models (R.O.G.s), and the twin pushers. I never knew rubber models could fly so high and with such long endurance. I was still in elementary school and all my spare time went into modeling.

Now headed for junior high – Shimer Junior High, I met a gang of guys who were always in trouble so I joined them, cut school, and got caught by the police a few times. I was really a juvenile delinquent, one step from going to jail.

In my travels, I met a kid named John who had lots of model plans. We decided to set up a shop in my basement. We split the cost to buy Model Airplane News.

I was still having problems in school. I would write my book reports on G-8 and his Battle Aces, Dare Devils and stories from Flying Aces.

John and I finished a big rubber job and tried to fly the darn thing in all the open lots. It wouldn't go. It was just too heavy. We had painted it silver and black. While we were trying to fly it one day, two kids came over named Arnold and Artie. They had lots of know-how with models, so we got together with them and built more models that really flew well.

Arnold worked for Western Union in Manhattan and knew all the hobby shops. He started buying supplies from Nat Polk. He had a store where we would walk down a dark hall and come out into a well-lit room. His wife did most of the work, giving us what we needed.

The next venture was going to a rubber contest in Central Park. I just couldn't believe rubber models flew higher than the skyscrapers. Henry Struck was always the big winner. With all of this happening, I started building better rubber models, but I couldn't match the flying I saw in Central Park. When I was playing hooky with my friend Artie, we would walk to Jamaica Sea Airport and watch and help the mechanics. The airport was a sandy field with a big rusted tin hangar. We were touching real airplanes and drumming fabric on Curtis Robins, Fledglings, Wacos, etc. This was for us.

We were both in trouble in school and I thought they were going to throw us out, but there was one math teacher, Mrs. Sargent, who liked us. I just couldn't figure her out. She knew we loved airplanes and built models. One day near graduation, she stopped us in the hall. "You guys should go to the Manhattan High School of Aviation Trades," she said. We didn't even know that it existed. After finally graduating from junior high, we enrolled at S.A.T. (School of Aviation Trades). Both of us found our slot and we worked hard and got good grades. When I graduated, I received an award for never being late or absent for three years. Thank you, Mrs. Sargent.

Before I went to aviation school, I was working in a film-developing lab. I put the prints in the dryer, and picked up and delivered the film for 25 cents per hour. With this money, I bought my first engine. I went to the Ideal Toy Co. in Manhattan and bought a two-cylinder Imp for \$5. Its fuel was dry ice and carbide. There was a brass generator with dry ice, carbide in the lower chamber and water in the upper chamber. We had to pull a plunger (ring) valve. This would cause the water to drip on the carbide and dry ice, forming a stinky gas that drove the engine. The engine was installed in a Megow Monocoupe, but it had no power. The airplane wouldn't taxi, so we hand launched it a few times without success. I sold the engine for \$2 to a guy who built boats. It was worse than the G.H.Q. Then we met a few guys who were building gas models. Now for another big venture.

The new kids lived in the town of Idlewild. There was Roy, Gus, and Harold. Together we formed the Idlewild Gas Model Club. Our home field was the swamps of Idlewild. That's where John F. Kennedy (JFK) International Airport is now located.

After a day of flying, we were not allowed in the house until we washed the mud off ourselves with a garden hose, even in winter. The cellar would be infected with sand fleas. I didn't feel them until Ma got bitten, then "Quick Henry, the Flit." I also used the same sprayer to shrink the bamboo paper. We flew at Idlewild for a long time. The Sky Scraper Club from Brooklyn would come over on occasion. Two of the members were Leon Shulman and Sal Taibi, but they couldn't take the mud and swimming the creeks loaded with crabs to retrieve their models.

My first gasoline engine was a Bunch Mighty Midget. The airplane was the T.D. Coupe from Model Airplane News in 1937. It was scratch built, including drawing the plans. The engine was in kit form and had to be assembled. We almost wore the engine out by running it on the test bench.

We didn't buy many kits. Model Airplane News was the supplier of the plans, which had to be redrawn. All the dimensions were in the magazine. It almost took as long to draw the plans as it took to build the models.

The club went to the various contests, Hadley Field, N.J., Miller Field, Staten Island, N.Y., Philly Pa., Farmingdale, Long Island, Creedmore, Long Island and many more. Every contest is a story in itself. I never won anything. The planes I built were lead sleds, but we had fun. Three members of the club were a few years older and bought cars from the junk yard for \$25. At various times we had a 1929 Ford Model A, a 1934 Willies and a 1932 Ford Model B, the first V-8.

We also built a box trailer and towed it with the Model A Ford. We had many breakdowns, but did all our own repairs. I remember buying second hand oil for the Model A for 10 cents a quart. The Idlewild Gas Model Club grew with lots of good flying and lots of learning. It was something to see Joe Raspante setting up his antenna and radio with the telephone dial decoder. He did lots of checking, but the aircraft didn't fly until later years when Larry Davidson did the flying. I did see Joe's Snow White fly at Hadley Field, N.J. and he won the contest. He was some builder and flyer.

I kept building the various models and have all my engines to this day, except the Mighty Midget. The airplanes are long gone.

I graduated from the School of Aviation Trades (S.A.T.) in January of 1941. There were no jobs to be had without years of experience. I sent about 50 resumes to aircraft plants all over the country. Not one reply. My brother got me a job in a machine shop, the Akeley Camera Co., filing slag off castings. Then I moved to a drill press and later to a large turret lathe. My heart wasn't with it. The work was real boring mass production. My head was on airplanes. While I was working days in the machine shop, the aviation school sent me a letter to report to Brewster Aviation in Long Island City for night classes. I was going to be trained to be an inspector (18-years-old) in a class of about 50 people. After the six-week course, on the last day of the class, they took me to the department in which I would work. This was the sheet metal skin department and I had to inspect the dimpled rivet holes for cracks (dimples were used for flush riveting). After one day of checking with a magnifying glass, I quit, finding the job was too boring and stupid (18-year-old attitude). I was going to earn 50 cents per hour.

One bright day I got home from the machine shop and there was a penny post card (cost in 1941) from aviation school saying I could have a job with Pan American Airways (PAA), provided I could pass the physical.

I started on May 5, 1941 in the sheet metal shop; and the first job on aircraft was to drill a stop

hole in a little crack in the forward bulkhead of the Sikorsky S-42. Boy, did I fall in love with the PAA aircraft.

I worked on Boeing 314's, which were called "clippers," such as the Dixie, Yankee, etc. The S-42 was the Bermuda Clipper we called Old Betsy, which made the survey flights over the Atlantic and Pacific.

There was always lots of metalwork on the flying boats due to corrosion and hitting driftwood in waters all over the world. After a year and a half of doing all kinds of metalwork, from rebuilding sea wings to replacing hull bottoms, I was getting to be a good metal pecker.

In 1942, I was asked if I wanted to transfer to the West Coast and work at Treasure Island. In the meantime, I signed up for the Air Force pilot training and was waiting for a date to take my physical. I accepted the transfer to San Francisco and drove there in my 1937 Chevy convertible coupe. I had two passengers in the front seat (Jim Thorten and Rinkavage) and all our tools in the rumble seat. The trip is another story.

We arrived at Treasure Island 11 days later and started to work on the Martin M-130s (China, Philippine and Hawaiian clippers). Then there were the G.I. Clippers, the Martin PBM3R, and the Consolidated PB2Y3. We rebuilt the floors to support heavy cargo and removed all the excess weight.

They put me in charge of a bunch of women to manufacture and install the flooring. I had four months of that kind of work and I had enough. Please, send me to the South Pacific to get away from all those women! Boy, I didn't know what a good deal I had.

I was then scheduled to go to Honolulu. We were to leave at noon on Nov. 20, 1942 aboard a Boeing 314, 18601. We left at 5 p.m.

There were 19 flying hours ahead of us to cover 2,000 miles. We were the mechanics from the sheet metal shop – Jim Thorton, Tom Barile, Ed Ratte, and I. We shipped our tools in the bridal suite, which was one compartment. It was stripped of all interior paneling to save weight for war-time cargo.

We took off in D compartment and, with the spray from the water, we couldn't see out of the window until the plane got on the step. The flying smoothed out when we got in the air. We could see the Bay Bridge and flew over San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge.

That night the moon was out and the Pacific looked beautiful from 8,000 feet. We flew all night and half the day. All of us had a tour through the flight deck with the captain and sat down at the engineers' station learning how to read the instruments. We were shown how to record the operation of the engines, fuel flow, generator load, etc. on a how-goes-it sheet on every hour.

After a good meal with white tablecloths and real silverware, we were treated like kings. There must have been 10 passengers on board, besides us. All were Navy brass. When it came time to sleep, I had no bunk. I had to go in I compartment with the toolboxes and sleep on some life

preservers.

The metal floor was cold and the preservers were uncomfortable. Later in the flight, dawn was breaking. A Navy man got out of his bunk, so I sneaked in and fell asleep. He came back, peeked in the curtains, and left me to sleep for a couple of hours. We talked after I woke up and he was a pleasant man and of high rank. Being a 19-year-old, I didn't know the different ranks.

We had breakfast together and after breakfast I signed his short snorter and he signed mine Adm. Chester A. Nimitz.

When we landed in the water at Pearl City, the putt-putt handed a line to the engineer and towed us into the dock. The man in the putt-putt was Little Joe. We got to be good friends. Once we arrived in Honolulu, we were given a place to sleep and put to work on Ford Island. Five other mechanics and I had to do heavy maintenance on two PBMs and to get it done in 48 hours. Both Aircraft were tired and they were put back in shape with very little sleep on our part.

The work increased tenfold and more men were coming from the States. In those days, we got to be all around mechanics, from doing fabric repairs to engine servicing. During my two and a half years in Hawaii, I flew back and forth to the States in Boeings and PB2Y3s. The PB2Y3 took 12 hours. It was faster than the Boeing. The PBMs were based in Honolulu and did the island hopping with cargo and troops. They followed the progress of the war.

Meanwhile I went back to school to get my aircraft and engine license. Now they are called A&P. I also got my ground instructor rating. I did some teaching for the Navy on aircraft sheet metal and spent two and a half years doing all kinds of aircraft and engine repairs, including changing engines over the water on the flying boats.

A little side story, of which there are many: when working over the water, we would stand on the mechanic steps that hung on the sides of the engine. We dropped lots of tools in the water and, as we had to buy our own tools, we decided to make a diving helmet from a hot water tank, doing the cutting and fitting to one of our tall and husky mechanics. When it was all finished, we hooked up the compressed air, the safety rope and off into the water he went. Everything went fine until he disappeared from sight and a wild pulling on the rope ensued. We pulled him out in a hurry and found the water over his nose in the helmet. He nearly drowned.

The next idea was to build a large electro magnet with a two-inch diameter steel bar welded in a horseshoe shape and wrapped with miles of waterproof wire. We went out in a rowboat and hooked it up to two aircraft batteries. It worked great, except the aircraft docks were floating, and held in place with anchor chains, and the magnet usually was drawn to the chains. We did retrieve some tools, but very few compared with what we lost.

In 1944, I headed back to the States to work at South City Airport, which is now San Francisco International Airport. The old flying boat hangar is still there, but now it's a warehouse.

After eight months at South City doing line maintenance on the flying boats and freezing to death over the water, I started my own business at the Belmont Airport, repairing crop dusters and

reworking World War II surplus airplanes to meet CAA requirements. Most of the airplanes were artillery spotters.

I purchased a 1941 Taylorcraft that had made a pancake landing, broke the fuselage in half, and distorted the wings. This extra work I did on my own time and I was just getting set up with a nice shop and a good living, when came the word to go back to New York.

The flying boats were phasing out and being sent back to the Navy. The Douglas DC4s were replacing the boats – a sad deal for us boatmen. There were approximately 50 men transferred back to the Marine hangar at LaGuardia Airport, which still stands. The Marine Terminal was a historical landmark and was later returned to its original condition.

I was put in charge of a section to re-build eight Douglas B23s and convert the aircraft from bombers to executive aircraft. It was a major program. We had 10 airplanes and used two for spare parts. Juan Trippe used one (NC4000), Roscoe Turner bought one and various companies purchased the others, such as G.E. and Corning Glass.

I became good friends with Rosco Turner's mechanic and talked to Mr. Turner on several occasions. He was a hero of mine when I was a kid. The war was ending and the Lockheed Constellation (L49) was arriving and then the Boeing B377 Stratoliner a few years later.

PAA put me in training to send me to Gander, Newfoundland for a year, and then two years in Johannesburg, South Africa. I was also engaged to my future wife (Ruth). My wife and I knew each other since we were 16-years-old when I was flying Free Flights at Idlewild. She would hold the airplane while I cranked the engine. She always came to the field with her father.

Well, I didn't go on Foreign Service. They put me in the inspection department instead. We were married and lived with the in-laws to save some money to buy a house. Not going on Foreign Service confused the living arrangements.

Model airplanes again saved me. When I moved in with the in-laws, I brought my workbench over and installed it in their basement. The in-laws thought that was great and it kept me out of sight.

Being an inspector now with PAA, we had lots of training and written tests on all aircraft systems. Model building took a back seat. That was 46 years ago. My wife doesn't go to the local fields with me but she still goes to the out-of-state fly-ins.

PAA sent my wife and me to the Douglas plant in Santa Monica, Calif. in 1952. I was to inspect the DC-6B while they were being constructed. It was a very interesting job to see all those bits and pieces go together and work just like a model, but only on a little bigger scale.

At this venture, I met Howard Hughes (another big hero of mine). He was having a DC6B built for a secret project. He had six inspectors on one airplane. We had one inspector for two airplanes. They drove Douglas crazy with their demand for super perfection of aircraft parts. Douglas had to remove the airplane from the assembly line to keep the factory in production.

Howard's inspector made Douglas change the wing center section three times. The center section consisted of four engine nacelles, landing gear wells, and wing structure to outer wing panel attachments. The fuselage was lifted over the center section by a large crane system, lowered and bolted in place. In some cases, lining up the attaching holes was a problem. Howard's boys didn't like that. They wanted perfect fit. One morning Howard came to the factory, dressed in his long overcoat and brown fedora, with men from his factory who removed the airplane, towed it across the field and into a big circus tent. The parts were sent across the field to Howard's men to finish the airplane.

Much later we found out it was to be set up as a television broadcasting station for educational films. It would fly over various cities and broadcast, similar to a satellite of today. This was in 1952. When the Douglas project was done, I flew back to New York in the last aircraft I had checked out. My wife and I went back to our little house, which was a handyman's special.

Always busy with the house, the models took a backseat. The house was in the middle of 200 acres and I was always saying, "What a place for Free Flight!" I did fly one model with a model "B" Ranger engine. It flew, but the Ranger didn't have much power. I would fly it from behind my garage. Now all the farms are gone and there is no place nearby to fly – just houses and more houses. In the fall of 1952, I took a three-month leave from the inspection department to teach in the aircraft and engine shops at Aviation High School. I liked teaching, but it became repetitious, so I gladly went back to PAA. At that time, another fellow, Ben Gentile, and I rigged up our two Jeep station wagons as repair shops. We drove to Long Island airports and serviced airplanes and engines. We finally ended up at the Smithtown Country Club, which was an airport plus all the other typical country club toys. Recently they closed the field and built a county court system on the property. Having two jobs in those days was the norm.

Here's where model building came back into my life. I was sitting on my dead duff one day in the inspection office, when one of the directors, Jeff, came in. I did not know him at the time. He asked the chief inspector, Charlie Cassens, if he knew anyone who built models. Well Charlie, knowing I was a modeler, called me into the front office and asked if I could build a model of the Boeing 707. It would have a wingspan of 39 inches. I don't remember the scale, but it had to be accurate. Jeff said, "We will pay you labor and material." I built it out of pine. The model was used in planning hangars and the terminal building.

Later many companies came out with models for planning and advertising, but mine was the first. After I completed it, I gave them suggestions on hangar layout for maintenance. At a later date, the director, Gus Ririe, asked me to join the planning department. Three of us, Gus Ririe, Hank Meyer and I studied and made educational trips to Pratt and Whitney, Boeing, the Air Force and many aircraft and engine component manufacturers. We learned lots of new things.

Then came PAA's decision to make New York's JFK our main overhaul base for the new jets. Mia was still overhauling the piston engine fleet. We added two more engineers to the payroll, and planned and built hangars and engine overhaul shops in New York.

Again, my model building experience led to and became a big part of my job. We laid out the

work on paper, and built models of buildings, machines, and engine test cells. With working normal hours on the day shift, and the house almost caught up in repairs and modifications (at least the rain wasn't coming through the roof), I ventured into another area of modeling. One of the Valley Stream (Long Island, New York) Village Board members said they needed help with the Cub Scouts. I became a "Den Mother" to the Weblows.

I went to several board meetings where we were given the theme of the month, such as making stuff out of paper plates, race cars that were 90% complete, etc. How boring, but not for me.

Here I am with 12 kids in my basement and what to do? I asked, "Do you kids want to build an airplane you can sit in?" They went all out.

The next week when they came over I had the plans drawn in chalk on the basement floor – wings, fuselage, the works. It was for a 12 feet high-wing monoplane, and we called it the Spirit of Saint Louis. We started building with wood I had picked up at the local dump and cut into strips. Before you knew it, the kids, 11-years-old were using hammers, wrenches, an electric drill, and jigsaw. Some of the strips they enthusiastically hammered into the cement floor. The meetings were on Friday night. It was so successful they came over on Saturday morning.

I had the kids go to the library to get all the books on Lindbergh and his airplane. They researched and built the instrument panel. They were getting to know aviation.

We finished the airplane and it was entered in the various local parades. It always got applause from the bystanders watching. I wrote a play around it and the kids acted it out for the Cub Scout annual meeting. It was great. The kids still wanted to build airplanes, so we started the Vanguard Model Club, named after NASA'S first successful rocket.

Free Flight was the thing at that time. All the kids joined the AMA and things were going great with bigger and better models. We did most of our flying in Deer Park at the east side of a small airport near a heavily wooded area. Once we lost several airplanes in the woods, so we rented a J-3 Cub at the airport and went looking for them. We found one, directed ground personnel in the correct direction by yelling from the airplane and pointing with the throttle pulled back. College and the Army called, and the club disappeared after about four years.

My facility planning work came to an end when the jet engine overhaul shop was completed. In the shop, I helped design I now became the assistant foreman. When PAA bought new engines and aircraft, I was put back into facility planning to tool up for the new equipment. I had the best of both worlds.

The big change to the airline industry was the introduction of the Boeing 747. When we first saw the aircraft on the drawing boards, we were just amazed at the size and the passenger capacity. All the facilities around the world had just become obsolete to handle such a large airplane.

The planning started, and I was made supervisor then manager of a group of engineers, to design the new maintenance and overhaul base at JFK Airport. The overhaul base consisted of hangars with four 747 aircraft positions, with one bay being for overhaul, a half million square feet of

engine and accessory overhaul, plus the modification of two existing hangars. It was the biggest planning job in PAA history and it all started with a handshake between the Boeing president and Juan Trippe of PAA. Twenty-five 747s were purchased at a cost of \$25 million each.

The building and facilities took three years to complete. PAA wanted to be first again across the Atlantic with the new aircraft. Before the inaugural flight, I had to get the ground equipment and a spare jet engine to London fast. The only way to get the engine there was to fly it in a 707 freighter. Surface transport would be too slow and time was running out.

Back to my model building again. We built a 707 cargo cabin with the side loading cargo door. In my basement, I made a wooden engine and a shipping stand from a Pratt and Whitney engine drawing. All pieces were made to scale.

I lowered the engine into the shipping stand by removing the fan case and first stage fan. The model showed we could do it with one-inch clearance through the door. There was no time to try the full-scale airplane. The word came from my boss, Vice President Klein Mitchel, to get that engine to London and go with it.

We disassembled the engine as planned, installed the core into the shipping buck. Everything worked with a minimum of modifications. The engine had to go in the freighter rear end first. This was the way the model worked. The loadmaster said, "We are going to load front first." I showed him with the model it would not work. He tried, but had a clearance problem. The engine couldn't make the 90-degree turn. He removed the engine and loaded rear end first. It went in with the clearance of a pencil. I couldn't figure it. The model gave us one inch. I looked at the cargo door and it had a double molding around the doorframe. This was where we lost the 3/4 inch.

I flew with the engine to help unload it and reassemble it in case that was needed. The crew spent one day in London. I bought a bunch of model airplane magazines. The first 747 made the inaugural flight, round trip from New York with no incident. The 747 is a great aircraft. Model building was a large part of facility planning. We built a model jet center showing all the buildings, hangars, taxiways and the radius needed for turning aircraft. Models were used for many things.

The next project I was assigned to was to build an aircraft service maintenance dock. This unit was to surround the 747 with scaffolding for the inspectors and mechanics to reach every part of the aircraft under service. The project would cost \$2.5 million. I wrote the functional specifications and the winner of the bid was to build a model before approval of construction.

The model cost \$5,000 but saved us lots of changes at a later date. When we pulled the first 747 into the service dock, the whole hangar crew stopped work to see it fit. My stomach was doing back flips as I ran around the airplane checking various clearances from all levels of the dock. It fit like a glove, except for the space under the outboard engines. From the bottom of the engine to the work platform, it did not have sufficient clearance for a mechanic to stand upright. The model showed us the insufficient clearance, but we did not see it ahead of time and that's the only thing we missed. Model experience came into my professional life time and time again.

In 1973, George Dade came into my life. He bought the remains of a Jenny, formerly owned by Charles Lindbergh, which was stored in a pig barn in Coggin, Iowa for 46 years. I got together with George and helped set up a shop in his basement and the restoration began. Three years later, we completed the Lindbergh Jenny and also built a new uncovered fuselage and tail assembly to view the type of construction done in 1917 or 1918.

I also built a model of the Jenny with all the rigging (Royal Kit). George Dade used this model when he spoke to various clubs and City Fathers to push for an aviation museum on Long Island. The museum, now called "The Cradle of Aviation," became a reality in 1978 when the County Fathers gave us two hangars and a firehouse at Mitchel Field in Garden City, N.Y. The firehouse holds the administration office and restoration shops. I was a volunteer restoration supervisor for 10 years. We have restored and built many airplanes, engines, and artifacts.

One of our volunteers is Joe Kovel, a modeler. We sometimes get together and talk about the good old model days. The RC clubs on Long Island have a model show once a year, displaying their airplanes in the hangars with the full-scale aircraft and we draw quite a crowd.

The show is covered by the AMA in club events. Many PAA retired fellows are working on the old airplanes at the museum. We have a corner of the hangar where we display some nostalgic items from PAA.

We have restored 41 airplanes and every one needed work. Some were basket cases and some were merely put back together. Some of my projects were the wing of a Grumman G-21, a Brunner Winkle Bird, built in Brooklyn, N.Y. in 1929, Admiral Byrd's Fairchild FC2W2, now in a museum in Adm. Byrd's Virginia hometown, restoring the Jenny the second time, various engines, etc. Now I am 74-years-old and still pursuing the hobby.

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