



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of RICHARD P. (DICK) BYRON



Born August 28, 1941 Started modeling in 1947

Written by DB (08/2009); formatted and Edited by JS (09/2009)

Dick Byron wrote the following autobiography in August of 2009.

An Autobiography: Dick Byron

I was born August 28, 1941 in Weymouth, Massachusetts at South Shore Hospital. An interesting note right here is it was located one mile from the Ambroid factory.

In South Weymouth, there was the South Weymouth Naval Air Station. It had a blimp hangar with a 192-foot clearance; this was my first chance to see real aircraft up-close. I marveled at all the different sounds of the motors: an *F6F Hellcat*, the *F8F Bearcat*...wow, what sound! Then there was the sound of the *SNJ Texan* stationed at Squantum Naval Training Center. They were all painted yellow. Cachug, cachug.

Up until the age of five, my mother would take me to see them from the side of the road, where we would take photographs of them. They were so far away that you could not determine what they were sometimes, but I loved it. My heart was forever smitten with the wonder of it all.

In the spring of 1947, my mother told me that there was something called a hobby shop in Quincy, Massachusetts. She thought they would have models of airplanes and asked if I would like one. Silly her.

I remember the night we went. It was a Thursday, around 7 pm. We went in to the shop and she told the manager I wanted a model I could build. I remember him asking me what I wanted, and so as to not show my ignorance, I said a Piper *Cub*. Well, he showed me a yellow and red Strombecker *Sea Scout*. I was thrilled. With purchase in hand, we went home.

Now, you have to remember it was 1947. I was five and in kindergarten. I had not yet fully learned to read, but I did that night. I was determined to put this together and if it meant learning to understand the instructions, so be it. I did it. The next night I painted it with watercolors, red and yellow. It looked horrible, but I was proud.

The feeling I got from accomplishing the feat was not understood by me at that time, but it started a life long hobby that would never end.

I continued to build Strombecker wood models, and then progressed to plastic. The next Christmas I asked for a gas motor plane. I received a *Firebaby* with a Wasp .049 engine. I

was in heaven. I smashed my fingers for days and days until I had no more strength left. I was frustrated. We went to Capeway Hobby in Weymouth Landing. There, Jack Fisher finally got it running and showed me how to start it. I was electrified.

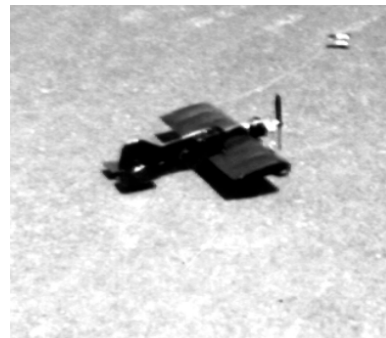
As I progressed, I desired bigger and better models. I finally had an idea that could help me learn to fly Control Line. I made a Control Line car. That's right, a car. It was a flat 5 by 9-inch board with a vertical motor mount and powered by a Cox .049 engine. I attached one line, the "up" line, to the front, and the "down" line to the rear. I would start the engine, hold the "down" line only, and slide my fingers down the line until I got to the handle. I would then hold my hand flat and slowly pull the "up" line, and as the car straightened out it would start moving forward. As I got more proficient at it, I could make it go very fast. If I pulled too much "up," it would spin out and crash, but that would only stop the engine and just occasionally break the propeller. It was a rush to say the least. It did teach me to use the controls carefully.

I progressed to a red Wen Mac *Aeromite* airplane. First flight: 9 laps and a crash. Second flight: 20 laps and a landing. My heart was going a mile a minute. I had flown!

As I progressed thru my early years, I tried every Scientific kit I could get. Fly, crash, fly, crash. Then one day I was told that there were actually model airplane books in the library. My heart pounded as I searched for them. When I opened the drawer that they were located, I found several *Model Airplane News* magazines. I sat for as long as I could and read everything there was in there. I was about ten years old then. I signed out every book I could and read each one as I had time, every ad and every article I could. I did not understand all I was reading but I was determined to find out what everything meant.

It was a love that you just have to understand was greater than any feeling I had ever felt before.

One thing comes to mind that had a profound effect on me. I saw a model called a *Foxy* by George Aldrich. It was cool and I decided to build a ½A version from scratch. I only had Cox .049s to use, so it had to be that. I built it and the darn thing flew. I was 11. I now realized that having the ability to build something from scratch and have it work was very inspiring.



George Aldrich's Foxy

As I progressed, I wanted bigger and better models. I fell in love with a Berkley *Cessna 180*. I purchased it and when I looked at the kit, I was disappointed in its complexity. I studied it for several weeks and then decided to start. What I discovered is that when you look at the complete model and all its complexity, it is discouraging, but when you take each smaller portion and construct just that portion, before you know it you have finished the model.

That's what desire does to you; it forces you to learn the easy way to do things. I am so lucky I was able to learn that at a young age.

In early spring of 1955, I found out that there was going to be a model airplane contest at South Weymouth Naval Air Station. I decided to try to enter. I had a 1/2A Free Flight model and a Scientific 1/2A *Spitfire* Control Line Scale model.

My mom agreed to take me and drop me at the gate. It was only a one-mile walk to the hangar. Off I set. The gate guard stopped me and got me a ride in to the hangar. I found out how to enter and purchased my AMA license. I was so proud but had no idea what to do, so I just walked out to the Free Flight area and tried to get a flight in. Every time I would try the engine, I would go over the allotted time, so I just gave up. I did not understand, but eventually I learned what I needed to do in the future.

All this time, I walked everywhere and watched in amazement at all the models. Stunt, Speed, Free Flight, Radio Control... it was so much. I just took it all in.

I did not know you had to turn in your scale model, so I never did. I did not have any documentation, so it would not have mattered much. As the scale models were brought out to get ready to fly, I was just dumb founded at all the beautiful models.

I remember a blue *B25* that was flown several times and flew great. There was a Beech *Twin* that I fell in love with, too. It was painted very glossy blue as I remember. Then there was the olive drab *B25* that was so heavy that it took several laps to get enough speed to take off, only to stall and crash, straight in up to the engines. My heart sank.

It was getting close to 5:00pm, so I had to head for the front gate. I was able to get a ride there so my mother could pick me up. I was tired but so happy; I could not wait to tell my mother all about it. This was the beginning of a lifetime of fun and frustration. Wow!!!!!!

That fall, on a trip to the hobby shop, Whitey (the shop owner) told me that there was a gentleman that wanted to start a model airplane club. His name was Ed Herbert. Whitey gave me his phone number and I called him that evening.

In just a few days, we were going to hold our first meeting. Several kids, including Ed's kid, Steve, were there. What a marvelous feeling to be with other kids that liked models too.

As our meeting progressed, there was a plan by Ed to attend the 1956 Mirror Meet in New York City. Ed asked if any of us wanted to go, but there was one problem, he had room for only one kid. Two of us wanted to go, so Ed decided to draw straws to see who could. I won.



Saucer

I decided that all I could enter was the junior novelty event, so I had to come up with a novelty plane. I decided to design a flying saucer.

It had a McCoy .29 for power. I painted it white and put a pink heart in the middle with the phrase "LOTS A LUCK" on it. I got that saying from the Steve Allen show. After it was completed, I flew it. It did fly but not very well but that didn't matter, at least it flew.

Ed and Larry Stenhouse were entering the Navy Carrier event and I entered Junior Novelty. They did not win anything, I won third place. My heart was pounding when I found out. Prizes were somewhat unusual. I remember SpaghettiO's^R, a bottle of Mr. Clean, and a *F9F* plastic display model. It was gold to me.

The die was cast, winning was fun.

As the club grew its membership, we were all learning to fly Stunt, but Scale was what Larry Stenhouse was into. He had a *P2V Neptune* that was just beautiful.

I decided to try my skills at a twin-engine airplane, so I found a kit from Eureka of a *B26 Invader*. It took a long time to finish. I powered it with two Fox .35s that needed a smaller propeller to work. I was forced to cut and fit two propellers to make a four-bladed propeller, so I ended up making two of them.



B26

When I decided to try to fly it, I was very unsure, but away we went anyway. With both engines started, Ed launched it and it flew fast. As the fuel ran low, unfortunately, the inside engine quit first and the model came in on the lines and crashed. I was heartbroken, but not deterred.

Thru the summer and fall of 1956, we flew Combat and Stunt everywhere, in Brockton, Taunton, New Bedford... all over New England. Dave Cook from Brockton was a very big influence on all of us and he taught us a lot about Stunt and engines.

Our club was called the Weymacks, and there were about 24 to 30 kids in it.

The next year (1957), we were intense contest goers. The big contest was the Yankee championships [Nats] held at the naval air station. There were 800 or so contestants; it was huge. I decided to enter Novice Combat, an event for beginners. I flew a Sterling *Yak 9* with a Torpedo Greenhead .35 engine. The flier I flew against flew a *T-square* - we had a heck of a flight. I cut him twice and then killed him. Just as that happened, his engine died overhead and his model fell and hit me on the back of my neck. It knocked me to the ground, but did not make me crash. I remember finally hitting the propeller on the ground

to kill the engine. At that time, you were scored by your cuts and kills, plus time in the air. I was astounded to find out that I finished first. I still have the brass plate from the trophy. Later I found out that the kid I was flying against had just won the Mirror Meet.

We progressed and improved thru all types of Control Line aircraft. Stunt was my favorite but Scale came in a close second.

We even tried indoor flying, hand-launched glider, and all. One of the most wonderful things about it was we could use the Boston Amory and had a teacher that was pretty good. His name was Lee Renaud. This was a very good learning experience. Lee took a liking to me and he gave me one of his gliders to copy. It was covered with green Japanese tissue and the fuselage was painted black. It was so light I could not believe it. He showed us how to select balsa. Lee explained everything. What a guy.

I believe it was 1959, in March - we had an invitation to fly at the Boston naval yard. Dave Cook was the organizer and I was requested to bring a Class 2 *Corsair* to show. Due to the fact that it was on TV (WBZ in Boston,) they wanted me to fly it. I did. The only problem was that the deck was 100 feet wide and the lines were 60 feet, so I had to fly over the edge. Just as luck would have it, the engine throttled down and the *Corsair* hit the edge of the deck, but it jumped up back on the deck and all was well. We flew off the *Wasp* carrier of WWII fame. What a feeling.



Corsair

That summer was to be my last for a while. I flew in the Yankee championships [Nats], and then on July 29th, I joined the Army.

It was my desire to be a helicopter mechanic and that is what I did. Through my eight years in the Army, I had a tour in Korea in the 15th Aviation Company of the 1st Cavalry Division in the demilitarized zone. While there, I built a *Smoothie* and flew in the local contest, winning first place.

On my return from Korea, I went to Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Wow, I was close to home, so I decided to reenlist and buy a car. Three months later, I was on my way to something called Vietnam. 42 days on an aircraft carrier escort named *The Card*. *The Card* was the carrier that was sunk in Saigon Harbor by the Vietcong later in the war.

There was not much modeling from that point until 1967, when moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado. I tried to build and fly, but the altitude was too much for me and I decided to move to Lincoln, Nebraska. That was it.

Just after my arrival, I was driving north on 48th Street. and heard the sound that makes your heart just quiver. Waaaaaaa, waaaaaaa. A Control Line Stunter was in the air. I made a quick turn around and met all the local fliers. The next day, a trip to the hobby shop produced a Fox .40 and a Sig *Banshee* kit. I was back.

In 1976, I decided to attend the Nats in Dayton, Ohio. I learned much from watching every one fly Control Line Scale. I went home and decided to build a Royal *A6M5 Zero*.

The Royal kit was my choice and it came out great. This aircraft won the Nats in Sport Scale in 1979 through 1982 and in 1987.



A photo that has great meaning to me



Dick Byron, Black Sheep 1 Pappy Boynton, and Mike Holtzen at the Millard Aviation Day.

1978: Millard, Nebraska; Picture from Model Aviation magazine



My Texan won a spot on the 1982 world team. This is the new paint scheme.



In 1988, I took a Stafford B-24 to the worlds and we placed second as a team. It had 4 OS 25s for power, rotating gun turret, retracts, flaps. What a pull in had. It weighed 14 lbs.



A profile KI 45. Unfortunately, it is gone now.



I have competed with a Partenavia P-68 C-TC. It had two OS 25s, flaps, a leaflet drop, and weighed 9 pounds. It was a good flier.



And finally, my KI 83 1/2A multi-engine entry.

I found it very rewarding to be asked to write the Control Line Scale column for *Model Aviation* magazine from 1980 through 1982. It was too much of a time consumer, but fun nonetheless.

That is it for now.

Thanks,

Dick Byron
AMA member from 1955

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AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

