



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of LOREN W. DIETRICH

March 19, 1930 - July 9, 2003 Started modeling in 1936  
AMA #382564



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Written & Submitted by LWD (01/2003); Transcribed & Edited by SS (02/2003)

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## Career:

- Was unable to compete as a youngster because competitions were too far away; set his own standards based on model magazines and the designs of Charles Grant and Earl Stahl
  - In 1944 chosen to be the president of a new U-Control club in Lodi, California
  - Led a model club for his students at Reedley College starting in 1961
  - His Tee Dee Bee magnetic actuator was published in Radio Control Modeler magazine in 1965; later his Randwagon design and accessories were published in the magazine
  - Worked part-time for NASA
  - Designed the Yogi Three, which was meant to be flown with payload
  - An AMA leader member from 1961 to 1968
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I became involved with model aviation soon after my birth on March 19, 1930. Though the world was still in a frenzy over Lindbergh's 1927 flight, my parents were deep into the Great Depression and unable to buy model supplies for an eager youngster. My father worked as a Ford garage mechanic and Mother supplemented that income by working as a chambermaid in a small hotel. One night, a roomer left a partially built stick and tissue model in the room when he checked out, and my mother presented it to me to keep my 6-year-old mind busy; indeed, it did for the next 66 years.

Flour and water paste gave us a crude glue for assembling the model. Several more dime store Ace Whitman models followed (sometimes purchased by visiting relatives) and blades, pins and model glue. We wrestled with the occasional non-flying (but recognizable) scale model. These led to a Whitman endurance model, the Falcon. Though the intended wing spar of 1/16-inch by 1/4-inch was mistakenly replaced by 1/16-square inches; the resulting incredible bow did not stop the Falcon from completing its first flight to the side of a mountain stream. Many years later, I had extensive correspondence with Jim Noonan, the Falcon's designer. Jim taught me many things, including the fine art of designing and carving rubber model propellers.

I flew all these early models in the northern location of Havre, Montana. The nearest competition event would have been over the prairie 100 miles away during the World War II gas-rationing years, which meant that any "competition" of mine had to be with my own ambition and so it remained. I set out to achieve flight with the models I read about in early magazines such as Model Airplane News, Air Trails, Flying Models and Flying Aces. The designs of Charles Grant and Earl Stahl set my standards.

My early flight experiments were with all the rubber models advertised at the time. Noteworthy examples were the two-bit aircraft from Scientific Models such as Raven, Wizard, Air Raider and Miss World's Fair. These led to the choice of the six-foot Scientific Mercury for my first gas model. It was powered (hah!) by one of the few model engines available in 1944 – the GHQ. Its

asking price (which varied from month to month) was \$20 for a kit of clunky and crude non-runnable parts. Well, I guess we junkers all had to learn the hard way. The completed Mercury never did fly with the cast iron GHQ. Perhaps it was just as well, because I later found that my wing assembly had three more degrees incidence in one wing than in the other. A slow roll was just waiting to happen.

Jim Walker's U-Control gave the young pilot more influence over the model's flight path. I can still remember Jim's American Junior (AJ) advertisement in 1937 or 1938, which asked the question: "Have you tried Hedgehopping the AJ Fireball?" It was topped with a posed picture supposedly showing Jim's Fireball performing this maneuver, so possible with U-Control and so totally impossible with every Free Flight the rest of us were flying.

My first "Ukie" (U-Control model) was then an AJ Airacobra, all-balsa glider with Jim's U-Control mechanism installed. Power was supplied by running the lines through the guides on a fishing pole and then "swinging" or "whipping" (Jim's terms) the plane through the air. Maneuvers required coordinated motion of both the pole and the control handle. Mine had many, many flights.

Our family chose this time to move from Montana to the San Joaquin Valley in California. My father built a huge six-foot by two-foot box to contain the Mercury, some kits and two flyable planes I had obtained for a total of \$20. The Baby Shark U-Control model and the Free Flight Spook 48 both mounted the same runnable Ohlsson 23 ignition engine. (At last! A runnable engine!) Off we went to California, the land of grape vineyards, orchards and fences where flying fields were very scarce. In Montana, I had flying space, but no Free Flight planes. In Lodi, California, I had many planes, but no space. Therefore, school grounds became our Kitty Hawk for Free Flight rubber-powered ships and the "room-room-room" of U-Control models from .19 to .60 ignition engines. Later, when I went to Stockton to buy one of the first Ray Arden glow plugs, we started flying the simpler .02 to .065 1/2-A engines in all-balsa craft. My favorite engine in this displacement range was the .049 Cub, flown from Walker Firebabies through 36-inch Ehling Free Flights, such as the Phoenix.

My two experiences with model clubs include one in Lodi about 1944 when I was chosen to be president of our new Ukie club. The reason was that I was a young happy modeling fella under whose aegis two young men from Los Angeles could fly their noisy, swooping Orwick-powered stunters without being run out of town by townfolk who treasured their previously quiet Sundays. My own contribution was a simple angular Box Car Ukie, which flew sedately behind my Ohlsson 60 until I grabbed the wrong fuel can at a public demonstration. This demo proved that my fuel (gas and oil) could combine with "hot fuel" (liquid dynamite) to create a varnish that would cause the Ohlsson 60 to slow down and then stop in a reaction to the hot sticky syrup on the cylinder walls.

The second club I had the privilege to lead was an in-house club started by my students in Airframe and Powerplant, mechanic trainees at Reedley College in 1961. We had Free Flight, U-Control and two early Radio Control (RC) models. I developed this RC flight into pulse rudder in a Roaring Twenty, Galloping Ghost in my own design Tee Dee Bee magnetic actuator – an early Galloping Ghost actuator designed by Herb Abrams (and driven by a radiosonde relay!)

and flown in a Goldberg Junior Falcon. This trusty old Falcon also flew cascaded varicomps and a home-brew throttle control on a Cox Queen Bee reed valve engine.

The Tee Dee Bee was chosen by Don Dewey to be published in a 1965 issue of Radio Control Modeler magazine. Don also published my Randwagon with later Rand GG actuators and my Cherrylark with fast-pulse Rand actuators.

In later years, I built and flew many proportional-control aircraft. One of my favorites was the 36-inch wing Flea Fly designed by Phil Kraft who also designed the radio. An experimental outgrowth of the Flea Fly was my Mock Fifteen, designed to give an impression of the X-15 research plane being flown by NASA (for whom I was working part-time).

A later design, meant to be flown with payloads, was the Yogi Three with wing and tail from an old Yogi Free Flight, originally designed by Jerry Stoloff. As now modified, it had a conventional fuselage with payload bomb bay, OS 19-powered and wing and tail now resembling the Old-Timer Kovell-Grant Free Flight. The Yogi Three at various times hoisted experimental loads such as 35-milimeter cameras, panoramic cameras, bombs, small and large parachutes, small and large gliders, Rise-off-Ground models and glide bombs. It is still active.

I was an AMA member this whole time and served as a leader member from approximately 1961 to 1968.

My companion during these years was a small 10-inch Snoopy stuffed animal given to me during my home-built years. I have never flown a plane without him.

*(signed) Loren W. Dietrich  
January 23, 2003*

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