



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of RAYMOND (RAY) HEIT

Born July 29, 1920 Began modeling in 1929

AMA #99931



Written & Submitted by RH (11/1999); Transcribed by NR (12/1999); Edited by SS (2002), Reformatted by JS (08/2009, 07/2012)

Career:

- Early designer of Free Flight models
 - Designed the Scram, Bay Ridge Mike, Thermal Magnet, Scrappy, etc.
 - Was a contemporary of Bassett, Ehling and Sal Taibi
 - Designs were produced by companies like Capitol and Bay Ridge Model Airplane Co.
 - Published plans on his designs in Flying Aces
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*Raymond (Ray) Heit
Tehachapi, CA 93561
November 9, 1999*

*Norm Rosenstock, AMA Historian
Royal Palm Beach, FL 33411*

Dear Norm,

The enclosed biography was actually written last year for my local, Bear Valley Springs RC (Radio Controlled) Model Club. They were preparing to nominate me for the Hall of Fame. As it turned out, I was not accepted, but did receive recognition as an Old Timer, which is most appropriate for me.

Having received your request for a biography, I thought the letter sums up my past as best as it could be stated. Also enclosed for your interest is a 1977 letter to, Jack Bolton who wrote the, "Old Timer's Column" in Model Aviation. It also helps to describe my involvement. In addition, there is a 1993 copy from our local paper that further sums up my past contributions to model aviation.

Passing on this kind of information to the next generation is a wonderful endeavor. It can only give young people encouragement and a touch of imagination. That in my opinion is what it takes to provide them with motivation for the, "Wonderful World of Modeling." History has always been the best source of knowledge.

Once again, I congratulate you for the effort you are making. If there is any other information you may want, please drop me a note and I will be most happy to respond.

*Sincerely yours,
Ray Heit*

*Raymond (Ray) Heit
Tehachapi, CA 93561
Nov. 9, 1999*

*Norm Rosenstock, AMA Historian
Royal Palm Beach, FL. 33411*

*Dear Norm,
This is not so easy to do, trying to recollect and put into writing my over 70 years as a model
airplaner but here goes.*

*Born 7-20-1920, 1157 45th St Brooklyn N.Y. Began building model airplanes at the age of six or
seven, at around the time of the Charles Lindbergh flight, and I am still building. My current
project is a 1/5 scale, WACO 10 that is about 50 percent complete.*

*I am a senior member of The Bear Valley Springs RC Model Club, a neighborhood organization
with its own flying field. In addition to RC airplanes, we also build and sail RC sailboats. I have
a scratch-built RC 1/13 scale, 5 feet long, 7 feet high, all spruce planked model of the America
Cup Racer, Intrepid. It is about 25-years-old and still sailable. More recently, our club elected to
standardize with 1-meter class sailboats with this old man joining in. Regattas and racing in the
summer months has become the way of life in addition to watching the other members fly.*

*The first model club that I can remember at the bright age of eight or nine was the Gimbels
Department Store Model Airplane Club in N.Y.C. They introduced me to a graduated series of
rubber kit models called the Wanner Kits. Starting with a hand launched wire tailed, stick model,
then stick Rise-off-Ground (ROG) and ending with a cabin series. It was a great educational
program that was well thought out for that time and sadly, has never been repeated.*

*Other model clubs that I can remember in New York included, Junior Birdmen of America, NAA,
Polks' Metropolitan Model League, and I think I was part of the beginning of the Brooklyn Sky
Scrapers. It just may have not been called that then, but most of the outstanding history-making
members of the Sky Scrapers were in it.*

*Most of the Jr. Birdmen contests were rubber power, microfilm model, indoor events held in
New York City National Guard armories. Frank Zaic and his brother were the principal material
suppliers of lightweight balsa and other related material. They had a cold water flat, including
their model shop, several stair flights up, on the lower east side of N.Y. What lovely memories
that brings back!*

Contemporary club memberships included, Southern California Antique Model Plane Society, (SCAMPS), SAM chapter #13, a charter member of, Society of Antique Modelers, California Forty Niners, SAM chapter 449 and my present membership in the Bear Valley Springs RC Model Club.

My first model gas engine was of course a, Brown Jr. that my mother bought for me in about 1934 from, Bill Effinger's father (Berkley Model Co. then and now). They had a shop in Brooklyn in the cellar of their home that I can feel and still hear the balsa saws with young Bill cutting today. The price of the Brown then was the worldly sum of \$21.50 – a very expensive and precious commodity for those depression years.

Early model contest flying places in and around New York City included such sights as, Prospect Park Brooklyn, Van Courtlandt Park Bronx, Hadley Field New Jersey, and Creedmoor Long Island. I also was a contestant at the 1936 Nationals in Detroit and from there I competed at a DuPont event at Elmira N.Y. Never a winner, except at Elmira, but managed to place from time to time.

Most of the events held at Hadley Field N.J. were sponsored by the Kresge Department Store Model Club of Newark N.J. Ben Shereshaw was president at that time and enjoyed his acquaintance as well as competing against him. There were many other history makers at the Hadley Field events including Maxwell Bassett, Frank Ehling, Bill Effinger Jr., and a host of other great people.

In the mid to late 1930s, I designed several gas-powered models for, Angie of the Bay Ridge Model Co. in Brooklyn. The first was called the Bay Ridge Mike with a wingspan of four feet. Next came the Thermal Magnet that had a span of about six feet. To this day, from time to time I still see the Mike being advertised.

Recently a friend, John Ferrer and fellow club member decided to build a copy of the Thermal Magnet. John is a talented professional engineer and a great model builder, but asking me to remember details of how and what I did more than 60 years ago blew my mind. In any event, John did complete the Magnet, as a Radio Control land-and-seaplane. The construction did make use of his great skills, and it looks and flies great. It is quiet an emotional experience to see something that was created as a kid to be recreated again. Needless to say, it was a thrilling experience that brought back wonderful memories.

In addition to the, Bay Ridge Model Co., I also did kit design for the Capitol Model Co. of Brooklyn. As I can remember, those designs were all rubber powered scale models.

Besides designing kit models, I also wrote a few articles and designed two models for, Flying Aces magazine. The first was Scram in July 1938 and then came Scrappy in May of 1939. I have

a copy of Scram hanging in my shop that I built about 20 or so years ago. Never been flown, looks too pretty to dent.

Speaking of the Scram, reminds me of having dinner with Sal Tabi and his wife back a bit ago when I found out that he lived in California not too far from where we were at that time. During the course of the evening he reminded me that I had asked him to cover the Scram, for magazine pictures and then if I remembered what I paid him. Well as he tells it, Sal was paid with a gas tank from a Brown Jr. Thinking about it now, that did not seem like very much compensation but as Sal said, in those days it could not have been better. So much for value difference today.

At another date, I ran into Sal at Taft Airport in California where he was competing in a SAM Contest and he wanted to know where my model was. I mentioned we were parked a bit a way and if he could give us a lift over. Well this model was the real thing, a Piper Navajo that I flew into Taft from Long Beach airport. Needless to say, it was fun to be together again, just two old Brooklyn boys, some boys!

Obviously, from my meeting with Sal Tabi at Taft you know that I flew airplanes – just another part of my life that I sadly quit about 13 years ago when I turned 65. I did have a commercial license with an instrument rating and about 2,000 hours of SEL time.

That about sums it up for my modeling except to say that I still enjoy building very much. The only difference between then and now is the time it takes. Then, with your nose to the glue, a good-sized model would involve two or three days of work. Now a year is within the realm of reality. So much for responsibility and priorities!

What follows is a letter that Ray Heit wrote to Model Aviation columnist Jack Bolton in 1977. Jack's column was called "FF Old-Timers."

*Mr. Ray Heit
Los Alamitos, California 90720*

*Mr. Jack Bolton
Springfield, Virginia 22153*

Dear Jack:

I have enjoyed your, Model Aviation Old-Timer's Column ever so much. It's always been difficult for me to accept whether the title refers to the Old-Time models or old time modelers.

This letter has been long delayed, having been framed in back of my mind but just not allowing myself the opportunity to write until I noticed a picture in the January issue of Model Aviation. This particular picture, copy enclosed, showed a lovely young lady, Shelly Mathews, displaying her father's model, Scram.

Just so happens I designed and built the original Scram for the Flying Aces magazine and it was published in July 1938, Volume 29. Scram was one of several models that was designed by me for the magazine back in my model Hey-Day when I was at the grand old age of 17. Well, with a little arithmetic you can now understand my previous remark concerning Old-Time Models or Old-Time Modelers. Needless to say how thrilled I was to see something I created at the bright age of 17 has now become a genuine antique and was duplicated exceptionally well by Shelly Mathew's father, Doc Mathews. Doc's model has been scaled down from the original that had a wingspan of seven feet and was powered with the eternal Brown Jr. Interestingly and quite coincidental, I just recently finished an almost exact duplicate of, Scram, photos enclosed. The model has taken nearly eight months of work to complete. This I mention by way of comparison to the several days it took to finish a model back in the good old days. Back then, it was an all-consuming hobby whereas nowadays I must place my modeling in its proper priority. This means when I can sneak out to my shop and bury myself in balsa and glue. When I mentioned an almost exact, the current Scram is outfitted with Radio Control for throttle, rudder and elevator plus re-enforcing of wings and empennage. Other than that, it's authentic original, even to the color, red, and cream. Haven't had chances to test fly yet so it still looks pretty.

Concerning the good old days, they took place while I lived in a place called, Brooklyn, New York. It was from there that I associated with many of the successful old-timer's including the gang from the Brooklyn Skyscrapers.

Contest flying then was for a good part held at Hadley Field in Brunswick, New Jersey, where I competed against all the champs, Kovel, Bassett, Zaic, Shereshaw, Ehling, etc. Never came in first but managed a trophy or two occasionally for seconds and thirds. Of course, there were the usual annual trips to the Early Nationals in Akron, Detroit, and St. Louis. It was on one of those ventures that I was partially sponsored by the Polk Brothers, Irwin and Nat.

Building model airplanes was and still is one of my favorite hobbies. Takes me so much longer to build one today but the solid enjoyment and therapeutic relaxation is all there. I gave up competition years and years ago, but never the thrill of building and getting a model to fly right.

We now live in the sunny warm climate of Southern California having moved here seven years ago after living on Long Island, New York for 25 years. California permits me to enjoy with the least effort, all of my play toys that include flying, sailing, skiing and, of course, model building.

Concerning my flying, I hold a private license with commercial and instrument ratings and have been running around through the skies for the last twelve years or so. Guess I represent a good example of what is so aptly said, "The only difference between a man and a boy is the price of the toy."

Keep up the good work, Jack, and if any of your readers who remember me are still around, I

sure would enjoy hearing from them.

*Sincerely,
Ray Heit*

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