

The following was published in the June 2017 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the “I Am the AMA” column, written by Jay Smith.

I Am the AMA **John Lorbiecki, Air National Guard F-16 pilot**



Jay Smith: How did you get involved with model aviation?

John Lorbiecki: I got involved with model aviation through my old man [John Lorbiecki]. Everything I've accomplished in the sport was thanks to his passion and contagious enjoyment for the [hobby]. It all started when I was only two or three years old. We went to the Johnson City, Tennessee, Indoor Nationals in the late '80s.

There were numerous contests scattered throughout the years to follow, but it wasn't until 2000, when I was 14 years old, that things got serious. We went to the Outdoor Nats in Muncie, Indiana, and for the first time [I] was exposed to the latest and greatest FAI carbon-fiber models. I remember how impressive the power models were - built strong, light, [and] with amazingly high-aspect ratios that somehow found a way to climb like they didn't have any wings at all. They just shot straight up like they were on a rocket-powered rail.

Through some very friendly fellow modelers, my old man and I left that contest with a lot of new knowledge and a rejuvenated bug to compete at that level.

JS: How has model aviation impacted your life and/or career?

JL: I owe a lot to the sport of model aviation. Besides the pure enjoyment of flying and the skills one naturally gains as you progress through the sport, I also got to do things I never would have been able to without it.

During high school, I competed all over the globe. Slovakia, France, and Ukraine were the three locations for the world championships I competed in over the years. I got to see the world a bit and meet countless great people while doing so.

Model aviation also helped shape a definite career choice in aviation and when it became time to apply [for] those jobs, it gave me an interesting line on the resume as Free Flight World Champion.

During my interview to become a fighter pilot, we spent a surprising amount of time talking .about Free Flight. Besides the standard academic requirements, they really wanted to see someone well rounded that participated in extracurricular [activities]. The experiences that the sport gave me 100% helped me get into the cockpit of an F-16 [Viper].

JS: What disciplines of modeling do you currently participate in?

JL: Currently powered Free Flight is the niche. [It] always has been and I don't see that changing. F1C is the greatest class we have in my humble, but accurate, opinion. Lately it's been difficult getting out there these last few years, but it'll happen here and there.



JS: What are your other hobbies?

JL: Race cars and airplanes. Monday through Thursday are dedicated to the Viper and being deadly good at it. The weekends that aren't [spent] flying models are at the racetrack or local airport. I fly a Pitts Special that I would like to start competing in [full-scale] aerobatics with.

I compete in drag racing with two different cars. One is a rear engine-bracket car that runs 8.00 [seconds] at 165 mph, the other is a fun Nostalgia Front Engine Dragster that has gone 7.25 [seconds] at 185 mph. [I] also decided to get into motorcycle racing this year, so next week I will get my racing license and will compete in road racing my Buell 1125R in an amateur league.

JS: Who (or what) has influenced you most?

JL: The old man is to thank and blame for all of this. He raised my sister and me with an example of hard work, dedication, and a powerful self-produced motivation. If you don't know how to do something, but it's worth doing, figure it out and then [get] really stinking good at it. Things that are worth doing are worth overdoing. Moderation is for cowards. Thanks Pa! You'll always be to blame for my full garage and empty wallet.

JS: What advice would you give someone looking to get into military aviation?

JL: I'd say first, congrats on having a goal and [being] willing to go after it. Second, do as much research as you can. Think about what you want to fly and who you want to fly for, then go after it and don't make excuses for the endless hurdles that will try to knock you off your path.

The easiest way is to get good grades in high school and to get accepted into a military academy of your choice. We currently are 1,200 fighter pilots short in this country. If you make it to the Air Force Academy or Annapolis, you definitely will have a chance to fly jets. ROTC is the next best choice. Do well and play the game. By the end of college you could have a free degree and a pilot slot waiting.

My path [was] a more difficult path, but one anybody could do is to join the Air National Guard as an enlisted member. Use the free tuition and part-time status to knock out a bachelor's degree. Take the needed tests and apply to every unit that has a jet you would want to fly!

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