



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of CHARLES ALLEN MACKEY, JR.



Born June 10, 1931 Started modeling in 1938
Lifetime AMA #L1931

Written & Submitted by CAM (09/2002); Transcribed & Edited by SS (09/2002), updated by JS (08/2007, 03/2015), Reformatted by JS (10/2009)

Career:

- Worked at Clarence Indoux's hobby shop
- Served in the Navy from 1951 to 1953; continued building planes while on the Navy ship
- Started flying competitively in 1957 with his own designs for Control Line stunt and combat; won numerous first places
- Donated his first place trophies to the Indianapolis South Side YMCA; they were used to help promote contests at the YMCA
- First got a design published in Flying Models magazine after responding to a questionnaire
- Wrote the book "Pioneers of Control Line Flying;" proceeds were donated to the Precision Aerobatics Model Pilots Association (PAMPA)
- Worked for five years to get Control Line pioneers inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- Helped start the Grounded Gremlins model club at age 16 in East Saint Louis, Illinois
- After the Navy, started the Stuntmasters model airplane club in Indianapolis
- Contest director in Indianapolis and Garden Grove, California
- Worked in quality control for Cox Hobbies in Santa Ana, California, starting in 1965
- RSM Distributors, a kit manufacturer, produces his designs; they have also sponsored the annual Charles A. Mackey Open Control Line Model Airplane Contest since 1997
- Associate historian for the AMA, writing many biographies
- Advocate for and developer of the AMA's Pioneer Awards, which were presented in 1998 to 74 pioneers in model aviation
- Has had 21 articles published in modeling magazines

Honors:

- 1996: Received an award from PAMPA for innovation and historical significance
- 1997: AMA Fellow
- 1998: RSM Award for Outstanding Contributions to Control Line flying
- 1998: AMA Pioneer Award
- 1999-2002: Received four Design of the Month Awards for development of flying wings
- 2001: Gialdini Sportsmanship Award
- 2006: Model Aviation Hall of Fame and PAMPA Control Line Precision Aerobatics Hall of Fame inductee

The following was written by Charles Mackey in September of 2002.

I was born on a farm two miles west of Bargersville, Indiana, on June 10, 1931. I attended school in East Saint Louis, Illinois, and spent most of my summers on the farm in Indiana. My first memory of an airplane was when I was a small child. My grandpa was pulling me in a wagon and an airplane flew overhead. It looked like a toy to me and I tried to catch it. My grandpa taught me to say "airplane."

My first model was from the five and dime store in East Saint Louis. It was a solid model that consisted of two small pieces of balsa wood; the wing and tail were printed on one piece and the second piece of balsa was for the fuselage. This was wrapped in a small blueprint, approximately two inches square and held with a rubber band. These solid models sold for a penny.

My first flying model was a Japanese-made Rise-off-Ground (ROG) type that was constructed with a wire frame and covered with silk. It was powered with a rubber band motor. These airplanes were ready build and sold for 10 cents. They had a short life and never were very good flyers.

During World War II when balsa was not available, many of the boys in my neighborhood built solid models from orange crate wood. When model airplane engines and kits became available after the war, I bought a Merlin .23 and mounted it in an Eagle Mustang that was advertised as aerobatic. My interest then and now is in highly maneuverable airplane designs.

Clarence Idoux opened his hobby shop in East Saint Louis. I went to work for him and he became my hero as well as my boss. He taught me the basics of airplane design, wing loading, balance, etc. I attended the 1947 Nationals with Clarence and Mr. Harter of Harter's Hobby House in Belleville. It was at this Nationals that I met my second model airplane hero, J.C. "Madman" Yates and he taught me a little more about airplane design.

I went into the Navy in 1951 and continued to build airplanes aboard ship. I was discharged in 1953 and moved to Indiana. I went to work for Chrysler Corporation and married Phyllis Gasper in 1953. Phyllis has always been supportive of my hobbies and everything else I have done. We have two children, Daniel and Carol. Our only grandchild, Brian, was born in 1985 and at the time of this writing is 16-years-old and has become an excellent Control Line pilot and excels in Radio Control (RC) aerobatics.

I became interested in flying competition in 1957. My main interests were Control Line stunt and combat; I flew my own designs. The trophies seemed to come very easily and I soon developed the attitude that all the first place trophies belonged to me. After I had acquired quite a few I did a little introspection and was embarrassed when I recognized my greed. This was in conflict with my Christian upbringing. The Indianapolis South Side YMCA agreed to accept my trophies and use them to promote contests. At that time, the YMCA had two flying circles behind the main building and they seemed to hold a contest every week until the trophies ran out. Several national Control Line stunt champions developed their flying skills at the YMCA flying site.

The Flying Models magazine editor printed a questionnaire in the magazine. He wanted to know what type of model airplanes readers wanted to see in the magazine. I responded to the questionnaire and soon received a letter asking me if I had any such airplanes. I did and that was the start of my magazine article publications.

My wife and I toured the U.S. gathering information for the book, "Pioneers of Control Line Flying." It was such a pleasure writing the book that it seemed wrong to make a profit from the effort, so we donated the proceeds to Precision Aerobatics Model Pilots Association, known as PAMPA.

I became an advocate for the pioneers, but soon became frustrated at my inability to get any of them inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. It took about five years of effort (not full-time) and working with three past AMA presidents, John Worth, Keith Storey and Cliff Weirick and later Jerry Neuberger to pinpoint the problems and to come up with solutions for the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. These solutions were implemented and should be in effect in 2003. All of my Control Line heroes were inducted into the Hall of Fame prior to the new system implementation, but I still believe it was worth the effort.

I have belonged to many model airplane clubs, but was instrumental in starting two. When I was 16, I located a meeting place and helped start the Grounded Gremlins in East Saint Louis, Illinois. When I got out of the Navy, I started competition flying and organized the Stuntmasters model airplane club in Indianapolis. I was a contest director in Indianapolis and in Garden Grove, California.

When we moved to California in 1965, I went to work for Cox Hobbies in Santa Ana, California. I started as an inspector and worked my way up to manage several departments. I was responsible for all quality control, both incoming and outgoing and conformance to all government regulations. I also managed tool design, mold building, customer service, manufacturing engineering, and engineering testing department. It has been said that Cox was the largest producer of internal combustion engines in the world, even more than General Motors and I believe it to be true. My model airplane experience gave me a big edge at Cox and I had the pleasure of working with model airplane greats Dale Kirn and Bill Atwood.

The model airplane community has been very generous to me and I am appreciative of all the recognition I have received. I have received an AMA Fellowship that was awarded to me for my work on the "Pioneers of Control Line Flying" and for the donation of the proceeds of the book and for the model airplane articles I have written. I am grateful to RSM Distributors (kit manufacturer) for producing my designs and for sponsoring the annual Charles A. Mackey Open Control Line Model Airplane Contest. As of this writing (September 2002), we are preparing for our fifth contest. I am grateful to PAMPA for the award they presented to me for innovation and historical significance, and also for the Gialdini Sportsmanship Trophy. I received the AMA Pioneers Award and I have received four "Design of the Month" Awards for my development of flying wings.

One award that I am particularly proud of was presented to me by Anita Storey. Keith Storey was dying of cancer when he commissioned me a watch to be made that had the emblem of the Charles A. Mackey Open Contest on the face. Keith passed away and never got to see the completed watch and told Anita to present it to me for my work for the pioneers and the Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

I was given the title of Associate Historian for all of the biographies I wrote for the AMA.

Another accomplishment in model aviation that I am proud of is the 1998 Pioneers' Award. I was concerned about many of the older airplane heroes passing on before they received any recognition. I contacted my district vice president, Rich Hanson, and asked him to request a special mass induction into the Hall of Fame. Rich asked me to write a proposal. I did and Rich presented it to the Executive Council. George Aldrich seconded the motion and it was passed. The AMA president and some of the Executive Council felt that a mass induction into the Hall of Fame would lessen the prestige of the organization. After much debate, lots of work from John Worth and Norman Rosenstock, we reached a compromise that increased the number of Hall of Famers inducted that year and gave Pioneer Awards to 74 deserving modelers.

It has been great fun!

Publications

1. September 1957, page 11, *Flying Models*, "Blue Bird" (first article)
2. September 1958, page 26, *American Modeler*, "ME-109"
3. October 1958, page 13, *Flying Models*, "Luck" (combat plane)
4. June 1959, page 28, *American Modeler*, "Junkers Gobbleswantz" (1958 National Champ)
5. September 1959, page 25, *Flying Models*, "Profile"
6. February 1960, page 18, *American Modeler*, "Spitfire"
7. February 1960, page 20, *Model Airplane News*, "Lark"
8. March 1960, page 18, *Flying Models*, "Crusader"
9. March 1961, page 12, *American Modeler*, "Carousel" (1960 Junior Stunt Champ)
10. May 1961, page 24, *American Modeler*, "Kite"
11. February/March 1961, page 17, *Flying Models*, "Monster" (offset engine/wing)
12. August/September 1962, page 24, *Flying Models*, "Hummingbird" (Multi-event National Winner)
13. May 1963, page 163, *Model Airplane News*, "Control Line Stunt Judging Machine"
14. 1962/1963, *Aero Modeler Annual*, page 62, "Delta Stunt"
15. August 1967, page 17, *Flying Models*, "Starlight"
16. September 1967, page 48, *American Modeler*, "Liberty Bell"
17. November 1981, *Modeler Builder*, "A Tribute to Oba St. Clair, Part I"
18. December 1981, *Modeler Builder*, "A Tribute to Oba St. Clair, Part II"
19. March 1995, PAMPA, "Pioneers of Control Line Flying" (Book)
20. March 1996, *Flying Models*, "34 FN" (Tri-plane Stunt)
21. September/October 1996, *Stunt News*, "Crop Duster" (Grandpa's bi-plane)

22. March 2006, *Model Aviation*, "Pvt. Kool's Bipe"
23. December 2006, *Flying Models*, "Snow Bird"
24. May 2007, *Flying Models*, "UFO #16"
25. July/August 2007, *Stunt News*, "Crackpot or Genius" (Francis D. Reynolds)
26. September 2007, *Back Yard Flyer*, "Fun Butterfly"
27. April 2008, *Flying Models*, "Backwards Flyer"
28. June 2014, *Model Aviation*, "X-Stream"
29. September 2014, *Fly RC*, "Red Trim II"
30. March/April 2014, *Stunt News*, "The Amazing Stuka" (design by Austin Moss)
31. May/June 2014, *Stunt News*, "Control Line History is in the Good Hands of the AMA"
32. July 2015, *Control Line World*, "Charles A. Mackey Looking Back"

(signed) Charles Mackey
August 29, 2002



Above: 2001: Charles holding an original design, the Radio Batwing Radio Control



Right: Charles standing next to original paintings at an art show in Fallbrook, California The top painting is Old Biplane and the bottom painting is a Spitfire.



1959: Charles holding two experimental diesel-powered airplanes



1999: Charles starting his original Big Red



(Left to right) Joe Kirn, Cliff Weirick (past AMA president), Charles Mackey, and Bill Netzeband. The group was working on a Hall of Fame project.



Charles Mackey (left) and Jim Lee preparing to test fly Charles' original design, called the Grandpa's Bipe.



1998: (From left) Lew Mahieu, Charles, Brian Mackey and Phyllis Mackey in front of the National Model Aviation Museum in Muncie, Indiana.

Charles firing up his original RC fun fly flying wing.



1958: Charles at the Nats, holding a Lark design.

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