



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of BRYANT THOMPSON

Modeler starting in 1938

Born July 1, 1929

AMA #L26



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Written & Submitted by BT (09/2002); Transcribed & Edited by SS (10/2002), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

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## Career:

- Served in the U.S. Air Force for 20 years
- Competed in at least 15 Nationals (Nats) starting in 1948; never took a first place, but did place
- Flew the first four-engine and later the first six-engine U-Control models at the Nats
- Runner-up for high points champion at the 1963 Nats
- Member of the “National Team Champions” team for four years
- Member of the U.S. Air Force model team; was U.S. Air Force worldwide champion four times
- Has over 130 trophies and plaques from model meets
- Set a national record at the 1960 National Association of Rocketry Annual Meet (NARAM); eventually held leadership positions with NAR and set a total of eight national and one world record in model rocketry
- Member and team manger of the 1970 FAI model rocket team
- Started model clubs at numerous Air Force bases
- Held offices in various model clubs starting in 1949
- Contest director since 1955; helped with judging and contest coordination at several Nats
- Appointed District VI Vice President in 1985
- Contest director of the Air Force’s 1971 Training Command Model Contest and the Air Force Worldwide Championships
- Involved with FAI as a facility manager and jury member
- Had three airplanes and five boats published; also had a few other modeling-related articles published in American and one British model magazines
- Started his own hobby shop in 1965; grew into two stores by his retirement in 1985
- Did public relations work for Midwest Products starting in 1978; visited about 200 hobby shops for them each year
- Became product manager of Falcon Trading Company in January 2000

## Honors:

- 1985: AMA Meritorious Service award
- 2002: Model Aviation Hall of Fame

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*The following autobiography was written and submitted to the AMA History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program) by Bryant Thompson in 2002.*

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## The Beginning

The earliest models I remember were Strombecker pre-carved models (the China Clipper) about 1934. I do not consider this modeling. In 1938, I started building Megow stick and tissue scale models (10-cent size). This continued until 1941 or 1942 when the Navy started the aircraft identification model-building program. I must have built 200 of these.

About 1944 my dad told me if I could build three rubber-powered planes that would fly across the hotel swimming pool where I was working he would buy me a gas model engine. It took seven planes, but I ended up with one of the first Ohlsson 23 engines built after the war.

My first U-Control was a Falcon Speedster, very underpowered. At this time, I lived in Santa Monica, California, and flew on the Roosevelt Grammar School play yard. There were about eight other modelers flying around this area. The contest was how many laps you could fly in one flight. At this time, a set of batteries (D cells) usually gave only five minutes ignition power, but I discovered wet cells and set a lap records of 138 laps before running out of gas.

I continued flying U-Control until late 1947 when I enlisted in the U.S Air Force and became an aircraft and engine mechanic then later a crew chief on the T33s and F94cs. In 1956, I was commissioned and became a missile maintenance officer working on the Snark, Atlas, and Minute Man.

## **Competition**

In 1948, I attended the Nationals (Nats) in Olathe, Kansas. I flew a McCoy Invader – an all metal, B speed job powered by a Dolling 29 (it was slow). The following year I flew a B17 G scale model and took second in senior. That was the first four-engine U-Control model flown in any Nats. Two years later, I flew the first six-engine B36 at a Nats in Dallas.

Over the years, I have competed in at least 15 Nats and never took a first place, but many lesser places. I was runner-up for high point champion in 1963. I was on the “National Team Champions” team for four years. Being in the U.S. Air Force, I competed in the U.S. Air Force model program and 11 times was on the Air Force model team that competed in the Nats. I was Air Force worldwide champion for four years (1963, 1964, 1965, and 1967). I’ve flown in so many meets over the years I can’t count them. I have over 130 trophies and plaques to help me remember them.

## **Experiments**

In 1960, I competed in the National Association of Rocketry Annual Meet (NARAM-2) in Denver, Colorado, and set a national record. This was at the direction of the Air Force. I developed an interest in model rocketry and the following year I was high points champion at NARAM-3 held at the Air Force academy.

I was on the board of trustees of NAR from 1962 to 1971 and vice president of NAR for five years, from 1963 to 1968. During which time I set eight national records and one world record (not accepted by FAI because AMA didn’t know how to apply for rocketry records and got it in

too late). In 1970, I was on the FAI model rocket team and competed in Vrsac, Yugoslavia, and was also team manager.

## **Leadership**

During the last 55 years, I don't believe there were but a few months that I was not active in a model club. I helped organize clubs at Tyndall Air Force Base (AFB), Moody AFB, Chitose AFB Japan, Amarillo AFB and Chanute AFB.

My last club was the Fog Busters of Fort Bragg, California, where I was safety officer for 15 years from 1987 to 2002. I have been president of several other clubs starting with Kessler model airplane club in Mississippi during 1949 and ending with the Chanute model club from 1980 to 1985.

I have been a contest director since 1955. In 1977, I was appointed chief judge for U-Control stunt at the Nats. In 1978, I was appointed to the Nats executive committee as Control Line manager (1978 to 1982) then facility manager (1983 to 1986). In 1985, I was Nats' manager for the Reno Nats. In 1979, I was contest director coordinator for the first Trans American Radio Controlled (RC) race from Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles, California, to Las Vegas, Nevada. In 1985, I was appointed District VI vice president to finish out the term of Bob Underwood and was awarded AMA's Meritorious Service award.

## **Contest Leadership**

I was appointed contest director in 1955 and directed meets such as Amarillo, Texas' all-scale meets during 1958 and 1959, and three meets in Wichita Falls, Texas, in 1962 and 1963. I was also the contest director of contests at Chanute AFB III from 1965 to 1966.

After I retired from the Air Force in 1967 I was hired by the Air Force to be the contest director for the 1971 Training Command Model Contest and then to direct the Air Force Worldwide Championships. I then took the Air Force team to the Nats in Chicago, Illinois.

I was facility manager for three FAI meets – Control Line in 1984, AirOlympics II in 1989, and Aero Scale in 1982. I was on the FAI jury at the scale team selection meet in 1984.

## **Publishing Experience**

I've had only three airplanes published, first the Chow Hound – a team racer (the Air Force's best) – in Air Trails magazine in March 1952. Then my Miss Max (a Free Flight) in American Modeler magazine in July 1962. The Ringer was published in Model Airplane News magazine in July 1966 and again in Model Builder magazine in February 1985.

As of late, I've had several RC scale boats published in Radio Control Boat magazine. The first was a two-part article in the November 1994 and January 1995 issues covering the construction of a California fishing trawler called the Cato Brothers. The second boat, also a trawler, was called the Tara Dawn and was published in May 1996. My third, a swordfish boat called the

Ocean Challenger, came in August 1998. My next boat was the Hercules, a San Francisco-based ocean-going tug in August of 2000. The last boat to be published, the Marie L. Hanlon, another San Francisco tug, was in the June 2000 issue.

There was also an article on converting from electric power to flow in June 1999. In February 2000, Marine Modeling International magazine (British) printed my article and planes of the Crowley 19, another San Francisco Bay tug.

## **Hobby Industry Involvement**

I first started working at Aero Hobbies in Santa Monica, California, while attending high school in 1946 to 1947. Then I joined the Air Force. I worked part-time in a hobby shop in Biloxi, Mississippi, while stationed at Kessler Field.

In 1959, I produced a kit for a hand-launched glider, the Rise, and sold them locally around Amarillo, Texas. In 1965, I opened a small hobby shop just outside the gate of Chanute AFB in Rantoul, Illinois, and named it Slot and Wing Hobbies. It was a very small shop – 450 square feet. I had not planned it as a moneymaker – it wasn't – but it was just my way to learn the business before I retired from the Air Force in 1967. Just then my landlord decided to retire and move to Arizona. This allowed me to expand into his store area, giving me 2,000 square feet. I built a larger slot car track and increased my inventory.

During the next few years, business increased and I opened a second store in Champaign, Illinois. This was about the same time Tower and Horizon were being formed. In 1985, I retired again and sold both shops. I sold the Champaign shop to my daughter, who later (when she was married) sold it to my son, Mark, who still operates it. I moved back to California.

In 1978, Frank Garcher of Midwest Products talked me into doing public relations work for Midwest. While I was traveling back and forth across the U.S., I was to visit all the hobby shops along my route. I have visited about 200 shops each year. During this time, I visited shops in Hawaii, Alaska, Korea, Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, England, France, Germany, and Italy. In January 2000, I became product manager of Falcon Trading Company, a subsidiary of Midwest Products dedicated to the sale of imported almost ready-to-fly RC aircraft.

*(signed) Bryant Thompson  
September 2002*



***1959: Bryant refuels his C-119 at the U.S. Air Force (USAF) Worldwide Championships. He was the high point champion.***



***The B-17G, built by Bryant, won second places in senior scale at the 1949 Nats and third at the 1950 Nats.***



*1963: Bryant, with the USAF Championship team at the California Nats, greets a Navy commander at Los Alamitos Naval Air Station.*



*1963: Bryant launches his rubber-powered entry at the Nats.*



*1951: The first Air Force team*

*Front row from left: Capt. Alfred St. Clair, Capt. Pelham Burnett, Lt. Gen. Robert W. Harper, Jr., CG, ATC, Maj. Gen. C.V. Haynes, CG Sheppard AFB, PFC Evan B. Hull and T/Sgt. Frederick D. Benthall*

*Back row from left: Sgt. Robert Sugden, PFC Tom Baker, Cpt. Edwin F. Wallacher, PFC Donald H. Ogren, PFC Mark Brown, Sgt. George Mueller, M/Sgt. Ernest L. Tyler, Cpt. Robert F. Olszewski, Capt. Eugene Comotofski, PFC Herman E. Stubblefield, Capt. C.E. Burtner, PFC Ronald Kambestad, Sgt. Bryant A. Thompson, Sgt. James A. Summersett*



*1959: Bryant with his C-119 at Chanute Air Force Base. The model had been flown at the 1955 Nationals.*

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