



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of CLIFF WEIRICK

October 2, 1927 to April 2001 Started modeling in 1933
AMA #016



Transcribed by NR (04/2001); Edited & Formatted by SS (10/2002), Updated by JS (10/2008, 08/2023), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

Career:

- Late 1950s-early 1960s: Designed and built the DC-DC Converter for Reed Equipment; experimented with transmitters and receivers during this time also
- 1959-1960: Served as president of the Larks Club of Los Angeles
- 1961: Helped start and organized the well-known San Fernando Valley Flyers Club
- 1961: Started pattern competition using the old Reeds equipment
- 1961: Served as vice president of the San Fernando Valley Flyers
- Late 1961: Proportional came from Jerry Pullen; 1961-1966: he used this equipment
- 1963: Helped develop Bonner proportional radio system starting
- 1963: Helped formulate first rules and regulations for Goodyear Pylon and helped get them accepted by AMA
- 1964-1965: Won the Pattern event at the Nats
- 1965-1972: Won Pylon at the Nats
- 1965-1967: U.S. FAI Team Member; received third at the World Aerobatic Championships in 1965 and 10th in 1967
- 1968-1969: Served as AMA president
- 1987: Served as secretary of the Joint Military Radio Control Flyers Club in Oceanside, California
- Placed either first or second in most contests entered
- Worked with Jerry Pullen and Doug Spreng to develop the first digital proportional radio equipment

Honors:

- 1968: AMA Fellow
- 1989: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1993: Vintage Radio Control Society Hall of Fame
- 1993: Howard McEntee Memorial Award

The following three biographies are written by Cliff's friends. Charles Mackey wrote the following about Cliff, whom he called the "Blue Baron."

Clifford G. Weirick, AMA# 16: The Blue Baron of Oceanside By Charles A. Mackey

Cliff is much more than just another pretty face hanging around the flying field. Clifford was your 16th AMA president, a member of the 1965 World Champion Radio Control Pattern Team,

has several U.S. National wins in Radio Control events, and he builds, and flies his own full-sized aircraft. He was a champion motorcycle drag racer, he was a missile expert in the U.S. Navy, and he helped develop the type of radio control equipment we use today. There is more but that will do for starters.

Cliff was born October 2, 1927 in Wooster, Ohio. He was the oldest of 10 children and mastered the art of diaper changing at a very early age. His father was a “Jack-of-all-trades” and could do whatever it took to support the family. His mother worked for the Wooster Brush Co. When Cliff was six, he bought a model of the Monocoupe for 10 cents plus 1-cent tax. He stayed up late watching his father build the airplane. The next day he sold the airplane to a friend for 11-cents, bought another Monocoupe kit and built it himself. That was the start of a lifelong hobby that would ultimately benefit all of us who also enjoy the hobby.

The Wooster Airport was quite a long ride on a bicycle but it was worth it for Cliff because he could earn flight instruction by pumping gas and washing airplanes. It was a big help when he found out his flight instructor lived only a block away and he could ride to the airport with him. On Cliff's 16th birthday, his instructor, Clayton Tschantz told Cliff to pull the *J-3 Piper Cub* over to the side of the runway and let him out before he killed somebody. Then he said, “Now go fly.” That was Cliff's first solo flight – it went well, no fatalities.

Cliff wanted to join the service but could not pass the physical. The U.S. Navy was short on gunners so they lowered the height requirements from five-feet, four-inches to five-feet and the weight requirement was lowered to 100 pounds. The height was no problem, Cliff had a half an inch to spare, but he was a pound and one half low on the weight requirement. The understanding Navy doctor interrupted the physical and told Cliff to go have lunch. He did, came back, and passed his physical. Boot camp was at Memphis, Tennessee, and gunnery school at Miami, Florida. When the war ended, the need for aerial gunners dropped suddenly so Cliff became an aircraft mechanic and advanced as far as the rate permitted.

When Cliff was offered the opportunity to attend electronics school, he grabbed it. He was a natural at electronics and graduated first in his class then went on to advanced electronics. Cliff was involved with the development of some of our most secret missiles that were tested using full-sized radio control airplanes as targets. He spent some time on the USS *Kearsarge* Aircraft Carrier where he managed the hobby shop and flew Control Line model airplanes from the flight deck and on a few occasions, half-A model airplanes from the hanger deck, just below the flight deck. Cliff spent time in Yokuska, Japan where he flew his jet-powered Control Line speed job that was equipped with his own designed after burner. Point Magu seemed to be the Navy Base where Cliff always ended up. He said he found a home there. While at Point Magu, Cliff developed a love of classical music. He would go on to collect every recording that Jussi Bjorling, his favorite tenor ever made. Jussi passed away before Cliff was able to meet him, but he did become good friends with his children.

Cliff redesigned Doug Spreng's airplanes called *Stormer*. He lowered the wing, added a symmetrical airfoil, and called it *Candy*. Cliff became the first person to win a national event while on active duty in the Navy flying his new airplane using a Howard Bonner radio. Cliff was discharged from the Navy in 1964 and went to work for Howard Bonner full-time. He won the

Nationals again in 1965 and was a member of the U.S. team that won the World Championships that year. Cliff also won the first pylon race held at the Nationals in 1965 and was a member of the 1966 U.S. Team that went to Corsica.

In 1966, Phil Kraft approached Cliff with a proposal that he could not refuse. He wanted Cliff to head up a new company that would be dedicated to manufacturing high quality, low cost radio control units. They called the new radios P.C.S. for proportional control system. The photographer who took Cliff's photo for the magazine ads suggested that they might be able to find someone with more attention-grabbing qualities than Cliff. He brought in a very pretty, shapely young woman named Charlene. Cliff had to agree and Charlene became the first of the female models who appeared in model magazines. Charlene and Cliff were later married and attended many contests together. She was called Charlie Brown and became famous in her own right for her charm and beauty.

The marriage was strained by Cliff's interest in airplanes, both models and full-sized. When Cliff brought home a trailer full of parts, it appeared to Charlene that he had wasted \$300 on a pile of junk, but in his mind, Cliff could see a beautiful Taylorcraft all finished and ready to go. It took Cliff one year to see his dream materialize, but the project did cause some disharmony. They were divorced after seven years but are still on friendly terms.

Don Dewey, owner of *Radio Control Models (RCM)* magazine with a proposal, approached Cliff. He wanted Cliff to run for AMA president because Don thought the AMA was heading in the wrong direction with the new AMA magazine that he felt was unfair competition with *RCM*.

Cliff won the election but liked the idea of AMA publishing its own magazine. Don eventually came around to Cliff's point of view and now is in step with the AMA program.

Cliff is proud of his accomplishments as AMA president and believes that it was one of the best things he ever did. During his term in office he had the opportunity to fly around the country (in a life threatening Cessna 310 owned by Kraft) speaking to model airplane clubs. AMA membership increased dramatically and he would live to see some of the long range plans come to pass with the new central facility at Muncie. The dream will be complete with two more sights, one on each coast.

Cliff laughs a lot and is a fun guy to be around but he is very strong-willed. When he left Kraft over a quality dispute, he "burnt his bridges behind him" and would not go back to pick up his National trophies. He moved back to Ohio, took over the operation of Kraft Great Lakes in 1973, and worked there until he got a call from Lee Renaud asking him to return to California and take over the radio division of Airtronics. Lee did not have to ask twice and Cliff was back in the land he loves.

I worked for Cox Hobbies, a model airplane manufacturing company that was purchased by Leisure Dynamics. L.D. also purchased Airtronics from Lee Renaud and decided to combine the two manufacturing sites. Can you imagine me stomping up to the front office demanding to know what this half-sized, half-finished Corsair airplane was doing in the my work area? I was told that it belonged to the new guy and he had the right to finish it on his own time, as it was

part of the acquisition deal. Cliff finished his half-sized Corsair and placed it in a hangar at the Oceanside Airport. He got a job at Carlsbad Airport, the neighboring city and commuted to work in his Corsair. The local Oceanside Newspaper got wind of his unusual escapades and ran a feature article on Cliff naming him the Blue Baron of Oceanside.

Clifford G. Weirick was inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 1989. He became an AMA Fellow in 1968 and a Vintage Radio Control Society Hall of Famer in 1993.

We mentally raise our cups in a toast to the man who has given so much to the hobby. Here's to you Cliffie, the Blue Baron of Oceanside.

This section was written by his friend Marlin Kinning in the Model Aviation Hall of Fame application he submitted for Cliff in February 1988. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1989.

Cliff was born in Wooster, Ohio, on October 2, 1927. He built his first model airplane in 1933 at age six. Like most youngsters of that era, he built and experimented with both solid and rubber-powered models throughout the 1930s and into the early 1940s. As Cliff recalls, his first gas-powered Free Flight was a Comet Clipper powered by a Brown Junior engine. He built a number of the great Cleveland Kits, including the Albatross and Condor, enjoying a great deal of success with both of these complex models.

Cliff Weirick's interest in aviation spanned full-sized aircraft as well as models. He took flying lessons in his hometown of Wooster and soloed in a *J-3 Cub* on his 16th birthday (October 2, 1943). A year later, again on his birthday, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy.

His first Navy ship was the Aircraft Carrier USS *Kearsarge* where he and his modeling buddies were allowed to fly Control Line models on the flight and hanger decks. In addition to his duties as an aircraft electronics technician, Cliff ran the ship's hobby shop for four years and indicates that it was a great experience because so many of the ship's crew became modeling enthusiasts.

In 1946, while stationed in Kodiak, Alaska, Cliff tried his first Radio Control model. He built a Taper Wing Stinson (another Cleveland model) and installed an RCH radio system (Radio Control Headquarters), which he built from a kit. He alternated back and forth between Control Line and Radio Control models, adapting Radio Control to many different models during the early 1950s.

In 1953, he continued experimenting in Radio Control with Aerotrol radio equipment and a Sterling Tripacer. Also at this time, he discovered Howard McEntee and the great publication *Grid Leaks* published by Paul Runge. With this expert help and guidance, Cliff started experimenting and building his own Radio Control equipment.

In 1962, he teamed up with Jerry Pullen who was also experimenting with a semi-digital proportional radio control system. By the time he retired from the Navy in 1964, Cliff and Jerry Pullen were assembling a proportional control system commonly known as PCS. Cliff also worked with Howard Bonner and helped develop the Bonner Proportional Equipment known as Digimite. Cliff Weirick was thus on the leading edge of proportional Radio Control equipment and helped develop the electronics that are still used in today's hi-tech equipment.

From 1962 to 1965, Cliff won just about every pattern contest he entered. He won Class II pattern at the Nats in 1964 and again in 1965. He was a member of the United States Aerobatic Team in 1965 and 1967.

He placed third at the 1965 World Championships held in Sweden with his well-known Candy. In 1967, the World Championships were held in Corsica where he placed 10th flying a scale Chipmunk with one of Clarence Lee's custom K&B .60s. That same year, Cliff retired from pattern flying but remained active in Formula-I and Pylon Racing.

Cliff took first place in the Goodyear Pylon Event at the 1965 Nats (the first pylon race ever held at the Nats). He placed second at the 1968 Nats. In 1972, flying Formula-I, he won first place at the Glenview Nats in Chicago.

Although it is not generally known, Cliff Weirick was instrumental in helping to formulate rules for the then new National Miniature Pylon Racing Association (NMPRA) founded by Jerry Nelson. Cliff, in fact was NMPRA's first president. While Jerry Nelson initially conceived the pylon racing event, Cliff, Ray Downs, Joe Martin and other well-known modelers got together in Ray Downs' home and put together the basic Formula-I rules that remain pretty much unchanged today.

In 1966, Cliff went to work for Kraft Systems as Phil Kraft's executive vice president.

Cliff Weirick became president of the Academy of Model Aeronautics in 1968 and 1969. During his tenure as AMA President, he made many flying trips both for Kraft Systems and for the AMA. He visited dozens of AMA charter clubs and attended many model airplane trade shows on behalf of AMA where he unselfishly devoted most of his spare time to his fellow modelers. Cliff, by his own estimation, logged between 300 and 400 hours in the Kraft Systems' Cessna 310 and Cherokee 6 visiting AMA charter clubs in almost every state of the Union with the possible exception of the upper eastern part of the country.

It was during this period that Radio Control really got off the ground and became a strong force. Cliff modestly says that he had nothing to do with this phenomenon, but the fact is he was the driving force that initially gave Radio Control the needed push down the road to popularity.

In 1976, Cliff left Kraft Systems and went to work for KGL of Ohio, a Kraft Service Center run by Jack Yarger. Cliff remained in Ohio for about a year and during this time obtained plans for a one-half scale bent-wing *F4U-1 Corsair* from War Systems of Santa Paula, California. He started building this wood, foam, and fiberglass airplane in Ohio bringing the partially built airframe back to Oceanside, California, after he left KGL. He completed the aircraft in the latter part of 1979. Typical of the man, this impressive airplane was as meticulously built as were his models. The Lycoming-powered machine sported a complete Navcom system, which Cliff built himself from a RST 720 channel kit; retractable landing gear, including tail wheel; electronic trim systems; as well as many other custom-built accessories. Cliff flew this aircraft throughout most of the western states, finally selling it in January 1986.

Cliff worked for Airtronics, Inc. from late 1976 through 1978 and helped introduce the Sanwa, LTD. line of Radio Control equipment to the United States. Cliff left Airtronics for a couple of years, returning when Lee Renaud took over Airtronics. Since that time, he has worked for that manufacturer and distributor as managing director, radio services department. In this capacity, he continues to serve the aeromodeling industry and hobby as he has done, in one fashion or another, all of his life.

As previously stated, Cliff has been a full-scale pilot since age 16 and before he was grounded in 1986 because of vision problems, he had accumulated more than 5,000 hours flying time. His private pilot's license includes a multi-engine rating and he has flown many different aircraft from Curtis *Robins* to jets with a few *Pitts*, *Baby Aces*, and *Pietenpols* thrown in. He has personally owned a *Stearman*, a *BT-13*, a *Taylorcraft*, and the ½-scale *Corsair*.

Today [1988], Cliff continues active in modeling and from his home in Oceanside, California, comes forth a continuous flow of outstanding Radio Control aircraft. His workbench currently sports a quarter-scale version of his beloved *Corsair*.

Cliff's friend James L. Simpson wrote the following information about Cliff's life.

Vaya Con Dios, Cliffie **["Go with God, Cliffie" – English Translation]**

By James L. Simpson

I first met Cliff (Cliffie) Weirick some 38 years ago. He was in the U.S. Navy and I was in the U.S. Air Force. I am amazed that most people do not recognize there is a difference. We both laughed about people thinking we were in the Army. Jack Albrecht was in the U.S. Army. There is a difference and, of course, the three of us knew it and enjoyed lots of friendly banter about the differences. Jack calls Cliffie "our sailor boy." I teased Cliffie about the Navy being 176 years of tradition unhampered by progress, and dared him to explain where "abaft the fantail" was on a ship. Big grin here!

Later that year Cliff was an entrant in the West Coast Championships held at Turlock, California. Stan Powell of Sacramento was the contest director (CD) and I was his assistant (seedy)! Cliffie was already associated with Howard Bonner's company and was flying pattern very well (with a prototype proportional radio). The various prototypes won almost all the top places (Darrell Usher placed highest with the already old-fashioned reed radio), but it was clear proportional was the thing to have.

I amused Cliffie with a story about a Bonner servo I had which required tension on the power lead to work. He (and Howard) did not believe it and nearly fell out of their shoes when I told them I was flying it in my plane! We all went over to the pits and I took the wing off my plane and showed them how I tied a rubber band into the power lead and hooked it on a peg to provide the necessary tension. When I unhooked it, the servo would not work. I thought Cliff was going to laugh himself to death. When all settled down he brought me a spare servo from his box and took mine back to the factory to find the problem – which happened to be a dirty transistor lead

to which solder would not stick. What made it work was the point where the lead was clipped contacted the solder when it was pushed down (by a finger or the rubber band). That experience cemented our lasting friendship and was often recalled with mirth at subsequent meetings.

Cliff got hot that year and started winning almost every event he flew. The next year, we were flying in the Las Vegas Radio Control meet on the Henderson dry lakebed. I had a glass fuselage Orion and a scale *Mooney Mite* I built in six days. Cliff had his then new but, soon to be famous Candy. His outstanding flying impressed Frank Hoover's son (CG) and he convinced the kid that flying with his thumbs on top of the sticks was responsible. We had a heck of a time convincing CG otherwise but were finally able to prove it with the score sheets. I was going to give Cliff the “what for” for corrupting CG but just when I was about to do so I heard Cliff telling an enraptured audience that the real secret was the weight of his plane. He had them heft it and convinced them so off they went to add ballast to their planes. I realized then that Cliffie was quite a kidder because he used planes built by me in the testing program for the new Bonner proportional and I knew how important wing loading was to him. What he did not tell them was how big the *Candy* was. It had a huge wing, the wing loading was light in spite of the weight, and that is why it flew well. Well, that and the fact that he had genuine talent and flew so very well.

At the Nats that year, Cliff cleaned up in pattern but also won the provisional Formula-I pylon races with a *Midget Mustang* owned by Maurice Wood of Oklahoma City. Guess who built the plane? And who never let Cliffie forget it!

A couple of years later we were at the Winter Nats in Tucson and were hanging out in the room where the Formula-I planes were being static judged. We were sitting side by side and teasing about Navy this and Air Force that when the judges picked up my *Ballerina* and weighed it – then announced for others to hear – that it was 10-ounces too light. Cliff started to raise heck, but I quickly shut him up and told him it was my plane. He said I could not fly it that light so I showed him a huge Master padlock I had in my pocket, and convinced him that it rode along on every flight. You should have seen the frown and heard the snarl as he said he would insist on it being weighed EVERY time we flew against each other (all in fun of course). I am telling you these stories because they illustrate his wonderful character and love of fun just for the fun of it.

I often wished I had been stationed in California because so many friends were there but when Cliff married “Charlie” Brown, I truly wished I had been in on the building of the plane, which was a wedding present. Some time later, we were again at a pylon race and a rain shower appeared from out of nowhere and drenched us good. My dear friend Gil Horstman (now deceased) and I shared a blanket with Charlie as the three of us huddled close. I realized real quickly that she and Cliff were another outstanding example of my long held theory that opposites attract. Charlie was very beautiful and very intelligent, and I made sure Cliffie knew all of that! Another big grin here.

Many years passed way too soon and the last time I got to see Cliffie in person was at the Toledo show. We had been trudging around on the concrete and took a break, got some food and retreated into the seating area where we could watch the “trudgers” and just talk about old times. Now, folks I am here to tell you friendships like this are worth more than gold and a heck of a lot

more important than winning a dozen championships.

I know Cliff knows that and he's helping Gil Horstman get a race organized just so they – and others like them – can enjoy each other's company while they watch us struggle on in the twilight of our lives. Their wait for us to join them will be very short but, to a lot of us, our wait will seem like forever. Does not matter. We will all be together sooner than any of us think, so, Cliffie, see ya soon, buddy – and you better be able to tell me and Jack why you all salute the back end of a ship when you go aboard. We are betting you will have to use the “T” word. Tee hee hee.

Cliff was unselfish, humorous, talented, funny, fortunate and a real friend. I am going to miss calling him on the phone occasionally, but pay attention, I may yell at him.



Cliff won the Nats the second time in 1965 with his new Candy.



Cliff (right) working on his Stearman aboard the USS Keatsarge



1965: U.S.A. Team members Captain Ed Kazmirski (left) and Cliff with unidentified Swiss woman holding the model airplane, Candy



1965: U.S.A. team members (left to right) Ralph Brooks, Zel Ritchie, Cliff, and Ed Kazmirski



This was a \$300 pile of junk in Charlene's eyes, but a beautiful Taylorcraft in Cliff's mind. He restored it to its original beauty.



The restored Taylorcraft



Cliff flying over Bonsall, California in his half-sized Corsair



Cliff and Charlene's wedding photo, displaying an unusual wedding gift.



Cliff's championship drag racing Harley Davidson.



*1989: Cliff receiving his Model
Aviation Hall of Fame award from
John Worth*



Cliff Weirick

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