



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of NICK ZIROLI, SR.



Written by AMA staff (02/2000, 01/2017); Transcribed and Reformatted by JS (09/2006, 02/2010, 01/2017)

The following biography was printed in the February 2000 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

Nick Zirolì, Sr.

Nick Zirolì, Sr., 63, was introduced to a modeling career by his father at the age of six. His involvement has included all phases: rubber-powered and gas-powered Free Flight, Control Line and Radio Control. He flew his first RC model while in high school in 1952.

In the early 1960s, Nick created a part-time business called the Major Model and Manufacturing Company. By 1967, this became a full-time endeavor. Not only did the company manufacture model kits but it also built and tested feasibility study models for companies such as Grumman, Republic, NASA and others. The first rocket-launched RPV, Pioneer, along with a net recovery, was effected by Major.

Although the company is no longer in business, the Zirolì designs are available as plans through his service. In 1981, he produced a Fokker Triplane that was used in the film *The Neighbors*.

Nick has long been a competitor at local, state and national levels. Many Top Gun, Scale Masters and Rhinebeck events have been graced by his participation. Giant Scale fly-ins also are a big part of his flying activity.

An important element of events of this type is that they often feature many of his designs. These include such models as the Beech D-18, B-25, P-38, Corsair and DC-3. A number of his plans appeared in model publications, including a Taube, BV-141, Swoose, Sukhoi, Heinkel and others.

Nick has been honored with numerous awards. These include the AMA Distinguished Service, Howard McEntee Memorial, Vintage RC Society Hall of Fame, Quarter Scale Association of America and International Miniature Aircraft Association Honorary Life Member.

Those who know Nick ascribe one very important quality to him: his willingness to help others.

This can be witnessed through the fact his son is a very active competitor, buy many others received hours of his time in getting a model in the air.

The following was printed in the February 2017 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the I Am the AMA column by Jay Smith.

I Am the AMA
Nick Zirolì, Sr. Scale competitor and owner of Nick Zirolì Plans

Jay Smith: *How did you become involved with model aviation?*

Nick Zioli Sr.: Jay, I think I was born involved with model aviation. I can't recall a time in my life when I was not building model airplanes. During World War II, my father built a few stick-and-tissue models. I can remember a Wildcat and a P-51, but the one that really inspired me was a P-38 that did fly. From that day on, my life has been model airplanes.

I built every Comet "Speed-O-Matic," Joe Ott, and other model kit that I could get my hands on. A real treat was a Cleveland C-D Master kit that cost \$3.50. When I didn't have a kit, I would design my own using cereal box cardboard for formers and ribs. I got good at cutting spars and stringers from a pine board with a razor blade. My parents always made sure I had glue. I remember having to return the empty glue tube, made of lead, to the store to get a new one.

After WW II, I had a few engines and the glow plug came along. This made life easier for me and I built many Control Line models from both kits and plans. After 12 years, I graduated from high school in 1953, I took a lot of shop classes, I went to work for a company that made fine wire potentiometers.

There I met my wife, Marie, got married in 1956, and I have four wonderful children and now eight grandchildren. Potentiometers led to gyros and finally high reliability relays where I became a manufacturing engineer. Amazing what a life of designing, engineering, and building models can do for your career.

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

NZ: It has had a major impact on both my life and career. All the time I was employed in the electro-mechanical device industry I was building and flying mostly RC models. Most of my models were my own warbird designs.

The late Don McGovern, who was the editor of *Flying Models* (FM) magazine, lived in the area and wanted to publish my designs. So to add to my credits, I became a published writer. I've lost track of how many models and product reviews I've had in *FM*. It was difficult to get an article past Don but I did manage to get a number in *Model Airplane News*, *Radio Control Modeler*, and *Model Aviation*.

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

NZ: For the past 35 years, my interest has been in Giant Scale warbirds. Since my first giant model, a 93-inch span Corsair, I have been offering plans of each one that I have designed and built. There are more than 30 plans available. My son, Nick Jr., now oversees the plans business and has recently added the late Jim Pepino plans collection. There are more than 90 plans in the line.

JS: *What are your other hobbies?*

NZ: These days only models take up my time. I've always been interested in cars and in my younger years built a hot rod and some custom cars.

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

NZ: That's a tough one. I've met and dealt with so many people, both in the hobby end of models, but also aerospace projects I've worked on, who have influenced and educated me. Here I've only touched on the hobby part of my modeling career.

JS: *Looking back over your modeling career, what are you most proud of?*

NZ: Another tough one. Of course I'm most proud of my families - parents and immediate [family], for the support they've always provided. I'm very proud that my son, Nick, took to the hobby and general aviation. He's living his dream flying warbirds such as an AT-6, C-47, B-25, TBM Avenger, and more. I can't turn them [models] out like I used to, but I'm very proud of what I have done.

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