



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of CLIFF TACIE



Written by CT (2019). Reformatted by JS (07/2019)

The following autobiography was submitted to the AMA History Project by Cliff Tacie in July 2019.

The Model Aviation Story of Cliff Tacie AMA 44607, NASA 419

I have always been fascinated with flight and loved airplanes, as evidenced by a photo of 5-year-old “Bud” standing on the front steps of our house in March of 1951, proudly holding a balsa wood glider in my hand. I think that’s when it all started.

As a youth, I was lucky to have grown up in a house my father had built with his own hands on a hill across the river from a small private airfield called Baker’s Field. Every time I heard an engine sound, I could look over and see the light aircraft of the ‘40s and ‘50s taking off and landing. What a wonderful memory.

Like most modelers of my era, I started out building rubber powered stick and tissue models from the kits of Comet, Goldberg, etc. The local hardware store had a “Hobby Corner” where I spent all the money I accumulated by turning in pop and beer bottles for two cents each at the grocery store! As I approached my teens, I graduated to the Cox .049 engines and was hooked on powered flight. I can remember installing a Cox Golden Bee .049 in one of my Comet 36” span models. It flew great – until I put too much fuel in the tank, it caught a booming thermal, and the last I saw it was headed out over Lake Huron.

Although I enjoyed my free-flight models, when a group of “older guys” started flying CL models in a vacant lot behind the grocery store across from my house, I was introduced to the excitement of actually controlling my model in flight. I started building various CL models from Cox .049 to the huge Fox .35 models. I built and flew Ringmasters, Flite Streaks, and a Sterling profile P-51 with flaps. I also flew many ½A CL models in my back yard, putting down a tarpaper “runway” for taking off, having persuaded my supporting mother to hold the model for me.

Modeling took a back-seat when I joined the Air Force for a four-year term as a Communication Center Specialist during the period of the Vietnam War. I was fortunate to be stationed stateside during my tour. I spent 2½ years at Orlando AFB watching the B-52s from nearby McCoy AFB taking off over our heads. My last assignment was at the Suitland Weather Relay in D.C., and I lived on base at Andrews AFB, again enjoying the vision of airplanes taking off and landing.

After discharge from the Air Force, I returned to my home state of Michigan and after taking a mechanical aptitude test, qualified to gain employment with National Cash Register (NCR). This began my life-long career in field service with multiple companies, working on adding machines, cash registers, collators for IBM copiers, and finally medical devices for Becton Dickinson (BD). I’ve always enjoyed working with my hands and trying to “fix” things.

I resumed modeling shortly after moving back to Michigan. Living in the Mt. Clemens area, I was attracted to a group of modelers flying single-channel RC in a nearby vacant field. Now, this looked interesting! A local boat dealership, Anchor Boat, owned by Don Overmann, had a hobby counter on one side of his business. In addition to selling model supplies, he sold Heathkit, World Engines, and Royal Electronics radios that he built from kits. Through Don, I bought a World Engines Blue Max radio, joined the East Wings RC club and began to build my first RC model, a Goldberg Falcon 56 powered by an O.S. .35 RC engine. Before I could finish it, I was sent to the Denver area for several months of training for NCR, so while there, I completed the Falcon 56 and built a Jr. Falcon while I was at it. I tried to learn to fly on that .049 powered Jr. Falcon with the Denver R/C Eagles at their Cherry Creek Reservoir field.

Unfortunately, by the time the Jr. Falcon got high enough for my instructor, Jim Wilmont, to hand the transmitter over to me (no “buddy boxes” back then), I now had a glider – the engine ran out of gas. Training flights after that were relegated to the Falcon 56.

When I returned home to Mt Clemens after my NCR training, I began flying every weekend. Most of my models were sport-type, but I had a growing interest in Scale.

The first serious scale model I built was a SIG Clipped Wing Cub. Of course, it was powder blue and white, just like Hazel Sig’s, and I flew my first competition with it at the Radio Control Club of Detroit Scale Meet. I don’t remember how well I did, but as a result of this contest it was my good fortune to meet a couple of soon-to-be best friends, Skip Mast and Steve Sauger, local scale modeling notables.

Seeing my interest in scale, and apparently my potential, Skip kind of took me under his wing and began mentoring me in the skills required for scale competition.

Ultimately, every Saturday morning entailed meeting with the modeling group for breakfast and then heading to Henderson’s Hobby Shop for a show-and-tell session. Coffee and doughnuts were courtesy of Bob and Glenna Henderson! There I met another avid scale modeler and ultimately best friend, Ron Sears. Ron flew CL Scale and was a top competitor locally.

As a group, Ron, Skip, Steve, and I began attending AMA Nats scale competitions, Canadian Nats competitions, and regional Scale Masters Qualifiers like the Mint Julep Scale Meet.

Steve was an outstanding builder, and after he qualified for a U.S. Scale Team in F4C, he planted the seed for Skip, Ron, and I to set that goal for ourselves. I was fortunate to be a member of the U.S. Scale Team with Steve in Reno in 1982, flying my Spezio Tuholer. Skip, Ron, and I qualified for and competed on the 1984 U.S. Scale Team flying in Paris, and ultimately all four of us qualified two years later for the 1986 U.S. Scale Team competing in Norway. Ron flew in F4B, and Skip, Steve, and I flew in F4C. It was a real thrill and honor for us to be on the team together and be managed by the likes of Mike Gretz (F4B) and Dolly Wischer (F4C). It was a big deal locally, and Henderson’s held a big send-off party for us with a beautiful cake and poster of congratulations.

It wasn't often that I finished in first place in competitions, because my building skills weren't quite up to the level of some of the other competitors, but thanks to above-average flying skills (something sorely lacking among my scale competitors at the time), I usually finished within the top five places.

Primarily a kit builder, I also designed and scratch-built several unique models, including a 1/4-scale Spezio Tuholer, which I flew in Reno at the 1982 World Championships and featured in a 1983 *Model Airplane News* article, and a tri-motor Italian Savoia-Marchetti SM-81, which I flew at the 1986 World Championships in Norway. The "Spaghetti Bomber" (so named by one the more colorful modelers in our local Saturday morning breakfast group, Tom McCoy) is now at the AMA's National Model Aviation Museum in Muncie. My latest scratch-built design is the experimental/home-built Volkswagen-powered Thatcher CX-4.

I've never lost my love of airplanes. I finally decided that I'd like to fly full-scale airplanes, so I earned my Pilot's Certificate for SEL in June of 2004 in a 7ECA Citabria. Like everyone else with a new license, I made all the "\$100 Hamburger" runs, but it wasn't too long before I discovered that something was missing. I've always loved to watch airplanes fly, and that's what's missing in flying full scale. I realized that modeling gives me the best of both worlds – flying and watching my airplane! After a couple of hundred hours in my logbook, I elected to let my Medical lapse and haven't flown full scale since.

Even though I no longer compete, I still love to build. I always have a project on the table, and I get my "flying fix" regularly at one of the fields of the local clubs to which I belong: Radio Control Modelers of Baltimore, Sunday Flyers, and Chesapeake Bay Miniature Aircraft Association.

Building and flying model airplanes has been a long and satisfying hobby for me throughout my life, and I consider myself very fortunate to be able to pursue it still. I will forever value my good times and good friends that I've enjoyed in my modeling career.

Significant Modeling Achievements

- AMA Leader Member and Contest Director.
- Attended multiple AMA Nats as a contestant in RC scale events from 1980s to early 2000s.
- Worked at several AMA Nats as RC Scale Event Director in the 1980s.
- Qualified and competed in multiple U.S. Scale Masters Championships.
- Competed in many Top Gun Invitational tournaments, including the first one in 1989.
- Member of three FAI U.S. Scale teams representing the United States in Reno, NV (1982), Paris, France (1984), and Oslo, Norway (1986).
- 1st place in FAI F4C Team Selection in Louisville, KY in 1985.
- 1st place in Open Precision Scale at 1983 Westover Nats in Chicopee, MA.
- Competed in multiple Canadian Nationals in RC Sport Scale.
- Past President of the Skymasters R/C of Michigan club.
- Flight Judge at Top Gun.

- Developed “Simply Scale Scoremaster” software application, used several years at Top Gun Invitational and Nats RC Scale events.
- Newsletter Editor of *Replica*, newsletter of the National Association of Scale Modelers (NASA).
- “Simply Scale” columnist for *Model Builder* magazine.
- Published plans and building article on my 1/4 scale Spezio Tuholer in the August 1983 issue of *Model Airplane News*.
- Produced scale model research articles “How To Get Started In Scale,” “Scale Presentations – Pulling It Together,” and “R/C Scale Contests – Guidelines To Success”.
- Designer Scale Static Judge multiple years at the Toledo Weak Signals Expo through 2017.

The below photographs were provided by Cliff Tacie.



1951: Cliff (“Bud”) at age five, Port Huron, MI.



1989: Cliff with own design scratch-built Savoia-Marchetti SM-81. 4th Place Expert, 1989 Top Gun Invitational.



2002: Cliff with 1/4 scale Aeronca L-16A built from Bud Nosen “Champ” kit. Gemini Twin power. 2nd Place FAI, 2002 Top Gun Invitational.



1986: U.S. FAI Scale Team, Oslo, Norway. Left-right: Mike Gretz, Cliff Tacie, Jeff Perez, Steve Sauger, Julie Abel, Ron Sears, Dolly Wischer, Skip Mast.



2015: Cliff with kit-built electric Auster AOP-9.



2018: Cliff with 1/4 scale SIG Clip Wing Cub, Gemini Twin power; Tom Czikk with Skip Mast's electric C-130. Mint Julep Scale Meet.



1984: Cliff with team members Ron Sears (left) and Skip Mast (right), test taxiing SIG Citabria 115 in front of Le Bourget Field terminal in Paris, France.



1981: Cliff's 1/6 scale SIG Citabria and 1/4 Bud Nosen Citabria. Flown at AMA Nats, Canadian Nats, and Mint Julep Scale Meets.



1985: Cliff's 1/4 SIG Clip Wing Cub. Gemini Twin power. 2nd Place Sport Scale Expert, 1985 Westover Nats.



1996: Cliff's 1/4 scale Paul Ennis Flybaby from the Walt Moucha kit. 12th place Expert, 1996 Top Gun Invitational.



1996: Cliff's 1/4-scale Gary Loncor Flybaby from the Dynaflite kit. Flown in Pro-Am Class at Top Gun Invitational.



2010: Cliff's 1/4 scale Clip Wing Cub in Swiss markings. Gemini Twin power.



2012: Cliff with his own design scratch-built Thatcher CX-4 and Dynaflite PT-19.



2019: Cliff with latest project, a SIG 1/4 scale full-span J-3 Cub. Gemini Twin power.

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AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

