



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of DON MADISON



Written by JS (07/2015); Added to HP files by JS (03/2016)

The following was published in the July 2015 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the "I Am the AMA" column, written by Jay Smith.

I Am the AMA Don Madison, U.S. Air Force navigator

Jay Smith: How did you get involved with model aviation?

Don Madison: In 1935, at the age of 10, my Uncle Fred gave me a 10¢ stick-and-tissue airplane for my birthday and helped me build it. I shared it with my three best friends, which led to Saturday model building. Evening paper routes provided funds for larger Old-Timers and Ohlsson & Rice engine-powered Free Flight models and U-Control [Control Line].

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

DM: My friends and I rode our bikes 8 miles to Lindberg Field Airport [San Diego] on Saturday mornings to watch U.S. Army Air Corps cadets training in Ryan PT-22s. One weekend, a captain pilot let us all sit in PT-22 cockpits with leather helmets and listen to field traffic!

When we were 17, my friends and I volunteered for the Army Air Corps, were accepted into the Army Cadet program, and entered the military at age 18. After graduation, I was assigned as a navigation school instructor for 6 months at Hondo, Texas. I went to combat crew training in B-24 Liberator bombers and graduated as the war was ending.

At the end of World War II, I returned home, entered college, and received my mechanical engineering degree. After graduation in 1950, I was recalled from the active reserve group for Korean War service. I was assigned to a newly formed B-29 combat crew as a navigator in the Strategic Air Command.

I retired in 1975 after 26 years of active and reserve duty.

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

DM: My modeling hobby took a backseat to a military and executive career and raising a wonderful family. In 1975, I purchased an Aero Sport four-channel radio and several O.S. Engines and began building and flying Scale warbird planes. My interests were in detailing cockpits, paint, and weathering.

In 1987, my friend Dennis Caudle and I formed and chartered the San Diego County Association of Model Clubs, uniting the 13 local clubs. Club representatives met to discuss activities, problems, and general information. We were able to obtain three new flying fields from closed landfills which are still in operation.

I remained active until 2008. At age 87, poor eyesight and age took over so I concentrated on model building, club activities, swap meets, and AMA activities.

JS: What are your other hobbies?

DM: Besides modeling, tennis was my other hobby. Knee problems curtailed that, but a telephone call in 1994 introduced a new venture.

The widow of a fellow modeler called me for assistance in selling or disposing of her husband's model inventory. That developed into a longtime goal of giving back to the modeling community.

Eventually, my name and offer of assistance for deceased modelers spread around San Diego and has continued to this day. I am currently working on my 63rd estate.

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

DM: Many people have influenced my life and my parents always gave me full support and love in all my activities. Several top commanders in the Air Force taught me leadership and discipline.

My Christian faith has also been so supportive during my entire life.

JS: How would you suggest modelers plan for the disposition of their modeling gear after they are gone?

DM: I recommend they enjoy their planes, boats, or cars for as long as possible. Select a friend to follow your wishes after you're gone, including selling, donating to your club, or giving items away to beginning modelers or a charity organization. The aftermarket on modeling items has changed dramatically in the last 10 years. Many modelers have switched to electrics and Scale builders are disappearing.

I have enjoyed helping widows with their estate sales and receiving their kind cards and letters and continuing friendships.

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