



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of RAY MALMSTRÖM

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Transcribed & Edited by SS (07/2003), Reformatted by JS (10/2009)

Career:

- Published many model designs in magazines
- Contributed cartoons to most of the Runway publications
- Founded the model airplane club at Impington College in 1946 while he was teaching art there; as of 2002 the club was still active
- 2001: The club held a tribute to him that attracted about 40 examples of his designs

The following information on Ray Malmström comes from a book called International Model Builders and Their Models compiled by Bill Hannan and published in 2002. A copy of the book is available in the Lee Renaud Memorial Library, part of the National Model Aviation Museum.

Ray Malmström was an artist/teacher/author and an aeromodeler extraordinaire. His interests included virtually every facet of model building, and his creativity and enthusiasm were legendary. He published a remarkable number of original model designs in magazines over the years and contributed cartoons to most of the Runway publications.

During 1975, the late Doug Gillies and I [Bill Hannan] visited Ray in his Cambridge, England, home, and the following excerpts are from Doug's diary, edited in the interests of brevity:

“Ray Malmström is an elderly youth aged somewhere between 15 and 50 vintage, and upon our arrival full-spectrum three-way communication is instantaneous. Sheila Malmström, a marvelous host, supplied delicious refreshments as our animated conversation flowed on. Time stops, or maybe, is annulled...we view Ray's model den, Bill flies one of his single-bladed helicopters...we examine a multitude of photos and press clippings...and we go into the back garden and fly a profile autogyro.

“Ray produces a push-‘n-pull rubber-driven monoplane of about three-foot wingspan, and, as we eventually go outside to air it, we discover that the inevitable night has fallen; pitch-black night. Nothing daunted, we four (Ray's grandson, Peter, makes the fourth, complete with battery torch), pile into somebody's Mini car and navigate the velvet black lanes of Cambridgeshire. In five minutes or so, we arrive at the flying site and pile out of the Mini into a field of large dimension with vaguely seen cattle perambulating here and there. They are not so much seen by sight, but rather by their king-size pancakes under foot...

“All the while, Ray has been adding power knots to the rubber-motor of his push-‘n-pull, and eventually announces a ‘full keg;’ then poses the immortal question, ‘Which way is England?’ and launches the model in the general direction of Betelgeuse in Orion.

“The craft immediately goes into the fourth dimension and becomes invisible to us – but fleeting glimpses are reported of the model’s progress as it blacks out stars, or the fuselage faintly reflects light from the torch held by the youngest and most active member of our crew. Vector-location is also indicated by the ghostly cattle, who disperse to left and right of the model’s course as it whirs amongst the quadrupeds!

“Master younglegs retrieves the model whilst the three adults (!) stagger around chuckling, laughing, and effervescing in their utter freedom from life’s woes and delight at this performance. Ray makes another ‘twist ‘o the rubber,’ plus a few extra turns for luck, and this time the model goes even further into the wild black yonder, and we concede that all things are finite – and to venture again would tempt fate. So, in a pixilated state, we all five (four humans and an apparatus) squeeze back into the Mini and away we go to the Malmström residence.

“Words just cannot do justice to this experience – only those who were there can understand the sterling value...life is for living...Ray Malmström is one of nature’s livelier characters and to be in his company is to be truly alive.

“Ray makes me a present of his peanut scale model of David Livesey’s D.L.5 minimum aircraft and Bill received signed copies of Ray’s aeromodeling books. The time has come to say good-bye to this gentleman who has devoted a lifetime to imbuing thousands of people with the joys of model making.”

Ray Malmström’s father owned a toy store, where Ray first gained an interest in models – a fascination retained his entire life. While teaching art at Impington College in 1946, Ray founded the model airplane club, which remains active today. In late 2001, a club tribute to Ray attracted about 40 examples of Malmström designs. Famed editor Ron Moulton tackled the formidable task of judging the concours, bestowing the major award upon Terry King.

The keynote event was a mass fly-off of more than two dozen 1910 Hanriot caricature models, with the last-to-land winner being John Siddall. Thanks to David Deadman, Chris Strachen, Ken Sheppard, and Dave Burkin who supplied this information.

The following article about Ray Malmström ran in the April 2002 issue of Aeromodeller magazine in Great Britain and was submitted to the AMA History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program) by former Aeromodeller editor Ron Moulton.

Vintage Corner

We repeat Alex Imrie’s appreciation of Ray Malmström from *Aeromodeller* May 1986

The many designs generated by the talented Ray Malmström through his very active lifetime have been feted in our recent January and February issues. In the first, we turned the tables on Fliar Phil by running a pictorial on a dozen favorites, plus one for luck, then revealed a hitherto

unpublished 1963 original with full-size plan as redrawn by Terry King. Perhaps it escaped earlier attention because the Invicta was (almost) conventional.

Impington Village College Club incorporated a celebratory exhibition of Ray's designs within their indoor meeting, which was reported in the February issue. The success of the show, despite a day in which record rainfall flooded all the surrounding countryside, reached a peak with the issue of a plans list covering 194 models both as published in the British model press and including some 41 that have never appeared in print. Dennis Sharman had started compiling the bibliography before moving to Austria, then John Valiant updated the compilation and now runs the R M Plans Service.

Ill health precluded Ray's attendance and, sadly, as reported last month, he passed away peacefully in his sleep on December 15 [2001]. A memorial service is to be held at Harlton Village Church commencing at noon on March 1 [2002], followed by a reception in the Village Hall. All are welcome to participate with the family and members of IVCMAC in celebration of a wonderful life in an afternoon of "Friendship, Flying and Fun" as Ray would so often quote as his own definition of the spirit of aeromodeling.

It's appropriate that we revive Alex Imrie's interview, first published in 1986 and now re-illustrate as a lasting tribute to Ray Malmström, a man who has give so much pleasure to so many fellow modelers of all ages.

The Vintage Years of Fliar Phil

Ray Malmström's many contributions to the hobby are well known, and vintage enthusiasts who thumb through old magazines cannot fail to have noticed his cartoon work, both as article illustrations and as caricatures in series like "Caricaplanes" and "Aerobods of Note," not to mention the countless model designs (there were almost 200 of them during the last 60 years), that appeared in many publications worldwide, including *Aeromodeller*, *Model Aircraft* and *Meccano* magazine.

His model designs were often caricatures in the true meaning of the word and had "characteristic traits exaggerated in a ludicrous way." He did this to such good effect that most of us have built one or more of his models sometime or other. One thing all his designs had in common was that they all flew. They were simple yet different and were aimed mainly at the younger modelers and most of them could be built from the scraps of balsa left over from building conventional models, thus cost never suppressed the desire to construct a Malmström design.

Ray's earliest contribution to *Aeromodeller* was the *Pee Wee*, a baby indoor duration model of eight-inch wingspan that appeared in the November 1940 issue. It was followed by *Horus*, *Tom-Tit Tri-Plane* and the *Avenger* had mere sticks for motors, a profile fuselage and a high mounted "T" tail, altogether like a *Westland Whirlwind*; it was produced at the time when there was great interest in the indoor evening flying that included much of the RTP (Round the Pole) variety. His attractive *Kestrel* appeared in the August 1944 issue of *Aeromodeller*; being presented in half-size meant that for some time it was a chore to enlarge and one wonders how many readers built a model of this nice looking twin-engine (and twin-fuselage) fighter of 21-inch wingspan.

Its high-speed flights of 20 to 30 seconds duration were due reward for those who built it. Another smart design in similar vein appeared in the February 1945 issue of *Aeromodeller* magazine, the 20-½ inches span *Merlin MK 1* trim-motor fighter-bomber, again regrettably presented in half-size. Ray's description tells us the reasoning behind this type of model "...an attempt...to create a model that follows, without being a copy the general layout of a type of aircraft that has won battle honors in every theatre of war...In conclusion, the designer...believes that future development of, and research eventually will be directed to the production of models that are in real truth model aircraft..." This is the semi-scale approach that was common both before and during the war, but which gradually lost support due to the rapidity and ease with which flying scale models of real aircraft could be produced, especially after the coming of the miniature compression-ignition or diesel engine.

In October 1946, a full-size plan appeared in *Aeromodeller* for his twin-engine civil machine called Athene, whose shapely fuselage was built and fitted with efficient propellers, the power contained in the eight-inch long engine nacelles should, especially with today's know-how, produce a high-performing feeder-airliner. Ray was one of the old school who continued to make semi-scale models with exaggerated characteristic traits and never stopped using rubber power because of its obvious simplistic appeal to beginners; however, he quickly saw the advent of the small diesel and Jetex units as providing the ideal means of powering his creations and designed accordingly.

Another practice that he developed regardless of the page size at his disposal was to show important parts full-size, and some of his layouts in books and magazines are masterpieces of this art. Possibly his most famous creation was *Fliar Phil* – the antics that this cartoon got up to were legion, yet all the situations could be identified with the hobby. *Aeromodeller's* popular "Photonews" of the wartime years concerned full-size aircraft, but with the easing of the war situation, it slowly gave way to "Model News," a keenly read photographic section entirely devoted to models.

When we look at the 1945 issue of *Aeromodeller* magazine we see that this is merely a page of photographs with short captions, but from January 1946, this feature boasts a Malmström cartoon title, a different one being drawn every month for this purpose right into the 1950s – well past the end of the vintage period. More detailed captions defined them as "Selected items by Fliar Phil" and the amusing commentary by Ray on the photographs submitted by readers was to long remain a popular *Aeromodeller* item.

Apart from the activities mentioned, Ray found time to produce a number of books for which he wrote, drew, and photographed the entire contents. These included the four Eagle Books of Model Aircraft, Model Boats, Model Cars, and Model Spacecraft, also two books published by Arco, one on model spacecraft and the other on aeromodelling. All these are sought after by collectors nowadays. His space-age contributions led to a series of models printed in color on the back of an international breakfast cereal company's products, and Ray admits to slipping secretly into Tesco's to admire his handiwork on the shelves!

Art and Aeroplanes

Grandfather Malmström was a Swedish boot maker who took an English wife and settled in this country [Great Britain] setting up a business in London; a son, Ray's father, was also business-minded and kept a toy shop in the Southsea area of Portsmouth and in the late 1920s stocked various flying toys including some of the Appleby card model aeroplane kits. It was the sight of these excitingly boxes models that fired Ray's imagination and, as we shall see, started him off on aeromodeling. But there was also school, and, after attending St. John's Secondary School, the young Malmström studied art at the Southsea College of Art, and apart from continuous model building, naturally developed an interest in full-size aviation.

A fascinating aspect of his early modeling, which showed a business-like approach, concerned his offer to the pilots of the air service operators running to the Isle of Wight and Jersey to make scale models of their machines. He sold models of the DH 48 Dragon to pilots of Jersey Airlines who operated that type from Southampton to Portsmouth and to the pilots of Southampton, and to the pilots of Southampton, Southsea, and Isle of Wight Aviation Ltd operating a deluxe Westland Wessex, Monospar, and Fox Moth to the Isle of Wight miniatures of their aircraft. With this money, he was able to take flying lessons with the Portsmouth Aero Club on Gipsy Moths, and also when space allowed, he accompanied F/O Brown on flights in the Wessex.

With the approach of war, as his art studies allowed, he undertook work of national importance when he joined the Auxiliary Fire Service and it was during this period that he made the Pee-Wee indoor model which was flown in the confines of the fire station. Enterprising Ray sent the design to *Aeromodeller* and it appeared the following year, his first published design. Finally, he took his art teacher's diploma at Brighton in 1939 and this led to an appointment as junior art teacher at Kendal Grammar School.

The outbreak of war made this employment short duration, but Ray found time to form and run an active model aeroplane club at the school. However, soon in 1940, he entered the RAF [British Royal Air Force] and AC 2 Malmström was trained as an armourer serving with Number 249 (Gold Coast), 71 (Eagle) and 56 Squadrons. One of many interesting stories that he tells of his RAF service took place at North Weald when, as a corporal, he was working on a Hurricane IIC armed with four 20-milimeter Hispano canon. The CO brought an Air Ministry photographer out to the aircraft and allowed him to sit in the cockpit while Ray lingered nearby. Suddenly the guns went off with a shattering roar as the photographer caught up the fire button with his camera gear. Ray was stone deaf for three days! Eventually the RAF found out that he was a trained teacher and Ray was posted to a training unit and eventually became sergeant armament instructor to be demobbed shortly afterwards.

He returned to teaching in 1946 when he took up an art teacher post at Impington Village College which is close to Cambridge; he was to remain there for 40 years and finished up as head of art studies. Needless to say, he lost little time in forming a model aeroplane club at the school – this rejoiced under the name of Model Air Squadron with himself as CO. Hundreds of youngsters passed through that club. Ray received many letters from aeromodelers all around the world who were his pupils. Some of the founder members are still in the club, which is a very successful one and attracts enthusiasts from all over Cambridgeshire who regularly travel up to 50 miles for an evening session at the Village College.

Ray's Recollections

Although the foregoing is an attempt to tell something of Ray's background. Just how the youngster from Southsea with the Swedish name started into the hobby is best related by Fliar Phil himself. He indulged in a bit of nostalgia during our interview in 1986:

"I was about 12-years-old when my father, dear soul, succumbed to my repeated onslaught and bought me my first model aeroplane kit. And what a kit! An all-cardboard affair, designed, I feel, by someone who certainly had little aeronautical knowledge, but made up for it with an immense and touching faith in the gods! It was supposed to build up into a model of the fascinating little Wee Bee I Beardmore monoplane! Gosh – that cardboard resembled good quality sheet iron! Only a particularly evil smelling virulent variety of fish glue could hold it together.

"My father, sweat wreathing his bald but noble napper, did indeed manage to get the fearsome airfoil section (?) wing to stick, but unfortunately, only to the backside of his trousers – this act of unquestioned dedication was achieved by accidentally sitting on it. The resulting model was, in the light of subsequent efforts, a catastrophe that put World War I, the Wall Street crash and the General Strike rather in the shade. But bless its reinforced cardboard heart; it set me out on our great hobby of aeromodeling.

"Early days included flying the inevitable Warneford spruce and silk jobs, and then on to that great design by dear much respected RIP – the *Cruiser Pup* – my model of which departed this life a couple of thousand feet up over Portsmouth Harbor, 12 minutes OOS. Long flights with a Burd Thermalider (cost of kit about three bob – 15p – with a machine or saw-cut balsa propeller), an introduction to the joys of scale with a *Captain Pages Racer* – a Comet kit from Sweetens in Blackpool and a monstrous five-foot span rubber-powered *Rearwin Speedster* – another dreamboat from Burd. And it flew!

"Recall the days when it was considered a sign of moral turpitude (not to say indecency) to turn up on one's local flying patch with a Wakefield that sported less than a couple of dozen sylph-like stringers encasing its streamlined figure. Flew Coplan's *GB3* and Scott's *Flying Minutes* with success. Built Cahill's *Clodhopper* (ugly brute! – the model, not the bloke), but it tried conclusions with some decidedly unfriendly telegraph wires which did absolutely nothing for its subsequent trim! Great streamliner days those – until Dick Korda wrote "finis" to the streamline syndrome with his slab-sided masterpiece.

"About this time helped to run the Portsmouth MAC [Model Airplane Club] and founded the Kendal Grammar School MAC. Lots of keen aerobods, but then yours truly (and some of his senior pupils) got mixed up with the RAF in a five year stint.

"Back in the teaching biz once more, founded the Impington Village College MAC in 1946 and, like the famous brand of whiskey (thank you, I don't mind if I do), IVCMAC is still going very strong. Got aeromodeling included in the official curriculum and discovered what a help it was to both the bright lads, but especially to those whom educationists describe rather delicately as 'the less able.' There was nothing 'less able' about 'em when they got the feel of balsa in their souls

and the lovely reek of dope up their ‘hooters!’ Even the headmaster smiled as their gliders glided and Control Liners circulated and the Free Flight jobs washed out most of the glass in the greenhouse of the gardening section! Now some of the lads of those days – and since – are designing and building better than the ‘ole man!’

“So, I got beaten often, and that was right and proper and gave me a lot of satisfaction. Good to see the younger generation taking up the challenge. Some say that I can still give them a run for their money. Perhaps, or maybe they are just angling for a cuppa at my expense in the College Common Room!

“Heck of a lot of memories – contest, meetings, rallies, demonstrations, static displays and, above all, the privilege of knowing some of the greats. P.E. Norman, Pete Wright (high speeds and head gear), Bill ‘Gipsy’ Dean, George Fuller (dixielanding aloft), Rushy, Houlberg, Evans, Boys, Towner and those still prominently ‘in-the-vigor’ as the Chinese use to describe their warriors in battle. All of them aeromodelers who set standards and technical achievements for me and the rest of us lesser mortals that, alas, I could seldom, if ever, emulate, but whose influence I have been eternally grateful for and, indeed, continue to be.

“My cartoon period (not to be confused with Picasso and his Blue Period) for *Aeromodeller* and Model Aircraft was a lot of laughs. Cartoonists sometimes say they lack friends, but I never did a cartoon of an aerobod without making a new one, which says a lot for the real friendliness of the aeromodeling fraternity, for some of my efforts could hardly be described as flattering.”

The Malmström Trophy

In 1985, Ray Malmström expressed the wish that S.A.M.E. should make an annual award in recognition of any outstanding contribution to aeromodeling made outside the framework of the Society and its competition program. The proposition was accepted and Ray generously provided a handsome silver trophy that was inaugurated in 1986.

What Ray could not have expected was that the awards’ committee recommended that Ray himself should be the very first recipient for all his work in encouraging youth to take up the hobby and for his adoption of aeromodeling within the curriculum at Impington Village College.

So a unique situation arose at the annual BMFA Dinner when Ray was presented with the trophy which bore his name as well as being the well deserved 1986 winner.

The true merit of this now well established trophy is best indicated by the list of subsequent winners. The sequence of names is no less than a listing of people who represent the very lifeblood of aeromodeling through their unselfish efforts in the promotion of associated interests which are each so important to the parent body.

Recipients, in order have included Paul Masterman and the Free Flight News, the Shuttleworth Trust and ASP Ltd, Gordon Counsell for his work in the RAFMAA and SAM, Arthur Searl for the LMA and Woodvale, Andy Crisp for his Free Flight contributions, Neil Tidy for the Laser Engines, Steve Midson for encouragement of youth through simple models, Bob Smith for

promotion of BEFA, Kevin Brown for promotion of hand-launched gliders and “Heave Ho” and the latest in 2001 was John Godden for the North Area Free Flight News. A worthy list of true volunteers.

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