



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of JERROLD "JERRY" EARLE SMITH



October 30, 1925 – June 23, 2023

Modeler starting in 1935    AMA #20896

Written & Submitted by DG(03/2006) / JJS (07/2009)/ JS (12/2013); Transcribed & Edited by JS (09/2006), Updated/Reformatted by JS (09/2009, 12/2013, 08/2023)

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*Jerry Smith submitted the following autobiography in August of 2009.*

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I first saw the light of day in 1925 in St. Joseph, Michigan. I was born breech next to the jailhouse, and was followed by a twin fifteen minutes later who came out the normal way (and still lives in the state.) At the time, my granddaddy was the Sheriff and my dad was a Deputy Sheriff. I think that adequately explains my sudden arrival in this world!

My interest in model airplanes started in 1935, when I was just 10 years old, after seeing some full-size airplanes at the local airport. Not too long afterwards, I had my first ride in a Waco 10 flown by the airport owner, Leland Rosky. Sitting alone in that wide front seat with the wind rushing past, I could feel the vibration of that big OX-5 engine with that huge wooden propeller pulling us along. What an enormous thrill that was for me! Little did I know where that first experience would eventually lead me.

My modeling career began by building solid wooden models and stick-built models. The many solid models I displayed in my bedroom; I had a small workshop set up in one corner. My mother and sisters complained often about the balsa shavings, glue, pins, and the mess on my table, but isn't that the sign of a true modeler with work in progress? My trouble was that I constantly had something under construction, so the mess *always* was present! Comet and Guillow's kits were the order of the day, along with Comet balsa cement in the blue and yellow tube. You had to literally chew off your fingertips when they became liberally coated with it. Remember that?

The late Carl Goldberg was my mentor, and I built a few of his airplanes when the profit from my paper route would permit. Carl's *Zipper* and *Sailplane*, and even a Leon Shulman *Zombie*. The *Zombie* was lost to a thermal during its first flight, with a brand new Ohlsson .19 on the front. Those were just some of the Free Flight models that I remember flying in those early days. I also designed some of my own Free Flight models, which never gained fame but gave me great pleasure to fly because they were *my very own* design. My brother, Donavon, and I even built a Megow *Commander* together. Powered with a Brown Jr. gasoline engine, it was a great flyer. We had a small airplane club during that time with 6 or 8 members, called *The American Aces*. No meetings; we were just a group of youngsters that got together and flew models. I remember of having some wonderful times.

1943 saw me in the Army Air Corps. I enlisted while still in high school, was inducted into the Air Corps half-way through the year, and so never attended my graduation. My mother accepting my diploma on my behalf. I was sent to Miami Beach where I did my basic training, and then

from there I went to Spence Field in Moultrie, Georgia. I became an on-the-line trainee in Advanced Flying field equipped with AT-6s. Our daily job was preparing the airplanes for the Cadets to fly: cleaning the windshield, gassing them up, checking the radios with the tower, and all those technical things.

From there I was sent to Birmingham, Alabama, to Birmingham Southern College in particular, where I spent 18 months. The Upper Classmen hazed me every minute of the day and imposed all the regimentation they could think of. Our class was the last one through the college, so we didn't have any lower classmen to lay it on in return! From Birmingham, I was transferred to Love Field in Texas for Primary Flight Training. That training lasted only six weeks and then we were told that there were too many of us, so we were sent to Biloxi in Mississippi to attend B-24 school. Once we had settled in, an Air Corps General called us together and told us that we were to be discharged... for the convenience of the government! Wow! So that was the premature end of my military service, depriving me of the opportunity of making it at least to General! My brother finished his career in the Air Force after 30 years as a 3-Star General! I chose not to stay in. Consequently, I am one of the WWII veterans who is still on the upper side of the green...for the moment, that is!

On leaving the military in 1946, I went home to Niles, Michigan, where I found a job as a draftsman with the Tyler Fixture Corporation. It was a family owned business that manufactured display fixtures and walk-in coolers. I spent seven years there. In that time, I met and married the love of my life, Ann Costelluccio (in 1949). Of course, I soon simplified that last name to Smith. We are still together as this is written, following 60 wonderful years, and I could not have married any other woman who could have been better. According to Ann, I am a "kept man!" See, that's why I think she is a wonderful lady!

The airplanes took a short hiatus during this time, but were not totally forgotten. One year later, we were blessed with a daughter, Sandra, who developed remarkable scholastic skills and was absolutely the best daughter one could ask for. She married an excellent man of her intelligence level, Don Bachand, and they now reside in Vacaville, California. I certainly have been blessed with a good wife, daughter, and son-in-law.

I have my dear wife to thank for my next job. She encouraged me to leave for a better line of employment that was more suited to my interests. I did so in 1951, and found satisfaction with Bendix Aerospace in Mishawaka, Indiana. This was fascinating work and I was in on the ground floor, designing a Navy SAM Missile named Talos. I did considerable design work on the fuel, hydraulic, and nitrogen systems needing components that were not available off the shelf; we had to design them from scratch! McDonnell Douglas built the airframe, while Bendix was the Prime Contractor. It was a job that occupied me for 38 years until, in 1987 at the age of 62, I retired.

In 1956, while I was with Bendix, I developed an interest in Radio Control airplanes. This was following a time watching them fly at a local model flying field. My first Radio Control model was a Carl Goldberg *Falcon 56*, powered by a Fox .19 and guided with a Citizenship radio. When it was ready to fly, I took it to a local field, and not knowing how to fly well, I let my friend Ed Brosure show me how. What a *huge* mistake! It went through a tree, and *that* was the

premature end of my *Falcon 56*. Not to be daunted, I built a Bill Winter *Krackerjack* and had much better luck with it

For a while, I was able to combine work with play at Bendix! I was able to fly some of their instrumentation experiments around by installing them in a Radio Control model. I had been able to show that it would be far less expensive to use a model than employ a full-size airplane to carry aloft their expensive instrument packages. Bendix did not need any further sales talk from me. In short order, they ordered in an 8-foot wingspan *Senior Telemaster* with a Super Tiger .71. In addition, not only did they instruct me on how to build it, but also provided workspace for me to accomplish that exercise as a part of my employment! How lucky can one possibly be?

Bendix had received a grant to investigate the possibility of low power radar. To determine that possibility, the *Telemaster* was required carry a Luneburg lens that comprised an 8-inch diameter ball weighing 7.5 pounds.

I mounted it above the wing right on the center of gravity so that it would have no affect on the model's balance. The *Telemaster* was powered by a Super Tigre .71 and used a Kraft 7-channel singlestick radio to control it. Prior to carrying aloft the \$7000 lens, I made up a dummy version of it to test the stability of the combination. At \$7,000 a pop, why not? On approach for landing, I found it necessary to employ a considerable amount of throttle because of the drag caused by the ball. Nevertheless, I flew the *Telemaster* for several years for Bendix, flying it in all kinds of weather, and repairing it several times until finally it was honorably retired.

At one time, they asked me to fly it with two feet of snow on the ground. As I had no skis for the model, I asked them to plow out a runway so that I could take off and land. The *Telemaster* had an 8-foot wingspan, so imagine to my chagrin when I arrived to fly and discovered that the ploughed-out runway was barely 8 feet wide! Happily, the flight went off without a hitch, which speaks well of the *Telemaster's* handling and the pilot.

On completion of the project, Bendix presented the now well-worn *Telemaster* to me and I subsequently flew it for a couple of years with a camera mounted in the fuselage, taking many aerial shots before finally handing the dark military green model over to a friend when I moved to Georgia.

It was in 1963 that I joined a local Radio Control club called the *Tri-Valley RC Club*, near South Bend, Indiana. I was proud to be one of the founders, present at the first club meeting and helping to form it, later becoming the second president of the club, and then later the newsletter editor for 8 years. For this, *RC Modeler* magazine awarded me the 1969 Newsletter Editor-of-The-Year award. That was the only such award they ever made - no other such award ever following mine. I was with that same club for about 25 years, and later I was made a lifetime member.

In 1974, Don Dewey, publisher of *Radio Control Modeler* magazine, took note of my page titled "Here's How" in our Newsletter. He telephoned to ask if I would be interested in writing and illustrating a similar monthly page for *RCM*. Naturally, I agreed and within a few years, I began to write and illustrate the *For What It's Worth* column. For some 30 years, I was on the *RCM*

staff as an associate editor, writing and illustrating the column, drawing plans and writing articles until the final issue in June of 2003.

Drawing magazine plans! That so often was an adventure in itself, as I am sure that other plans draftsmen have also found. No, those beautifully drawn plans that you see in the magazine pages are not put there by a printing press. A draftsman, like myself, sweated many long hours over his drawing board to draw and ink those plans on Mylar drafting plastic, starting with using the (often questionable) lines provided by the model's designer. Few model designers are good draftsmen, and those penciled lines, often quite shaky and many times devoid of any attempt to use a draftsman's triangle or T-square, arrived on my drawing board executed on a variety of mediums ranging from butcher's wrapping paper (unused, thankfully!) to brown paper or the back of wallpaper. Even many taped-together 8½ x 11 Xerox paper sheets were not unusual! It also was not unusual to find cross-sections quite obviously sketched out freehand, the designer not possessing a single example of the cheap French Curves readily available, even from such unlikely sources such as dollar stores!

Often it became necessary to loft out the side and plan view fuselage lines from scratch, before being able to re-plot the cross-sections. The same may be said about wing cross-sections, although I am certain that so often a *Florsheim* wing section (drawn around the sole of a shoe!) was utilized, the designer never having heard of the useful range of airfoil sections produced by NACA and other similar organizations.

In the very early 1980s, I joined the International Miniature Aircraft Association (IMAA) at their first meeting in Toledo, Ohio. It was here that I first became acquainted with Les Hard, who volunteered to be editor of first IMAA *High Flight* magazine. We became very good friends. In the beginning, I helped Les with the halftones of the pictures and also doing the photography and event coverage for *High Flight*.

Les certainly needed the help, and I gave him all the assistance that I could so that he could succeed in that post during my eight years of working with him. For my efforts in the IMAA, I was awarded a *Lifetime Membership* by the IMAA president, Don Godfrey.

After retiring from Bendix Aerospace, we moved to Acworth, Georgia, which was closer to my daughter, Sandie. Although Sandie moved away after a few years, Ann and I liked the area, so we decided to stay. I immediately found a Radio Control Club named the Roswell Air Force and flew with them for seven years. It was there that I met Slick Larsen, who ended up being my flying buddy and best friend. Very sadly, we lost Slick in 2007, and still very much miss him and his airplanes. He definitely was a dedicated modeler and builder, and a true friend to me.

On losing the Roswell flying site, I soon found another local club, Bartow County Model Aviation. At BCMA, I decided to just be a member and enjoy what the club had to offer... but could I *really* do that? I found myself helping out some, and later was made a lifetime member of the club.

That club also lost its flying site and I was once again without a place to fly. However, shortly after, I discovered the Georgia Model Aviators near Cumming, Georgia. It is a very good club

with 250 members, 65 acres of expansive flying area, and wonderful 800-foot runways that one could only dream, both grass and hard surface available. The only bad part is that I had to drive 37 miles to get there, but I made many good friends in that club, and a substantial part of modeling is the delightful people with whom one interacts and flies!

In 2006, I was again very fortunate to be inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. My good friend Don Godfrey helped to sponsor me, and my good friend Nick Ziroli presented the award to me down in Venice, Florida at a local fly-in.

It wasn't always airplanes all the time. I became interested in photography quite early on, pursuing that interest as a sideline hobby. My interest in that field was to photograph not only my own models, but the airplanes of other flyers, too, plus any other scenes and models that I thought were of interest. As it so happened, this later on became a useful tool for me since I combined both hobbies, thus increasing my ability to cover model events and shoot my own pictures.

I very soon became interested in taking photographs of models while they were in flight, making that particular skill my specialty. I have traveled to the model flying field many times just to practice taking pictures of models in the air, then returning home to study the results. I wanted to be the best at model aviation photography and also to become known for my superior in-flight shots. Once I was in position, and with the knowledge and the right equipment in hand, after considerable practice, I became successful in that endeavor. Eventually, my photos were on many well-known model magazine covers and I became recognized by my peers for my photographic ability. However, it took several years for that to occur and now, with digital photography and a good computer, I possess my own electronic darkroom and process all of my own pictures. My equipment provides me with complete control over what others will see. A good photographer never shows his bad pictures!

Following our move to Georgia, I met a fellow modeler and manufacturer, named Bubba Spivey, who then owned Lanier RC. He inquired if I would be interested in drawing plans for him, so needing something to keep me busy, I quickly agreed. This turned out to be something more than just drawing the plans. It was more like designing model airplanes and much more. My first Radio Control airplane design for Lanier RC was the *Stinger*, a mid-wing sport design that became extremely popular. So successful was it that I redrew it in several different sizes such that, in all, I turned out 23 Radio Control airplane designs for Lanier, the final design being the *Mariner* flying boat.

Today, I still see some of those airplanes at various flying fields and can't help but indulge in a satisfied smile to myself. In the late 1990s, after 15 years with Lanier, ARF (Almost Ready To Fly) kits became very popular and so my services were no longer required. Some of the models I designed for Lanier later were converted into ARF kits, and later still, the Lanier company was sold to Great Planes Model Manufacturing.

This brings me current up to July of 2009, the time of this writing. I have lead a very full life, always keeping busy, always being inquisitive. Always doing the things that presented some challenge and providing great personal satisfaction, through the designing, building, and flying

model airplanes. That has led me along the road of extreme enjoyment and challenge. The skills required to design and build a Radio Control model are many and are sometimes difficult to attain, but only through much practice and, having completed and flown the new design, can one then see the satisfying result. At age 83, going on 84, I still fly Radio Control, cover events and also photograph and report coverage for various model airplane magazines. This has been my life's passion and will most likely be so until I pass on.

I must give great credit to my wife, Ann, for being so supportive and putting up with my passion throughout these past years. Without her, I would have never been able to pursue my wonderful, adventurous life with model airplanes.

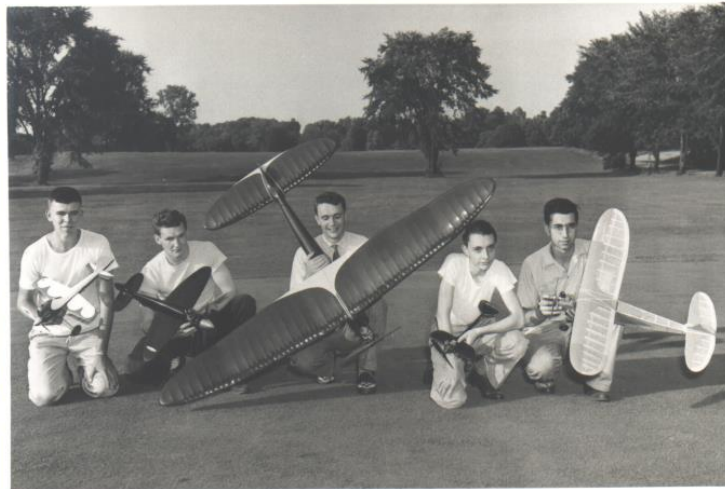
.....Jerry Smith



*1927: I had a twin named Janyce. Although we don't look alike, we were indeed twins. Here are we at two years, way before model airplanes and the Depression.*



*c. late 1930s: The original American Ace Club in Niles, Michigan at the terminal field where we flew. It wasn't the best place, but there was plenty of room for us to run and chase the airplanes. I can't remember their names, but that is me, third from the left, with the bushy hair.*



*1942: I can remember the newspaper (Niles Daily Star) wanted to do a story on our club, the American Aces. Here we are at Plym Park, assembled for the picture. I can still remember their names. (l-r) Gene Kent, John Hatfield, me with a Goldberg Sailplane powered by an Atwood Champ, Benny Abbott, and Art Peebles.*





*1975: After starting to work for RCM, I became acquainted with Chuck Cunningham from Texas. For three years, I flew down to Texas and helped Chuck with his Big Bird Fly-in, taking pictures for his event. I even built one of his airplanes called the Lazy Ace and had a great time flying it.*



*2009: Me with my Extreme Flight RC 50cc Extra 300, a far cry from the days at the Terminal Field flying site where running and chasing the models was common. I have seen and used much of the advancements in Radio Control through out the years, and the equipment we have today, I believe, makes now the good old days!*



*2009: Here I am at 84 enjoying life and still flying my favorite airplanes. How wonderful it is. I know it can't last forever so I am living every day to the most and enjoying the things I can do.*



*This was the logo on my column in my many years with RC Modeler magazine. It was fun but never did I expect to stay with them 30 years. I must have been in a rut and was happy with it.*



*1993: Me with one of my designs for Lanier RC. This is a prototype Giles G 202 powered with a 3W 80 twin engine. It didn't last long because somebody (?) forgot to check the ailerons... they were backwards! Another was soon built and flown to take its place.*



*2005: Here I am with SR Batteries' 100-inch Eindecker. I built it as a review for RCM and still have it in my hangar. I keep it to fly at Warbird events and days I want to fly something slow and easy. It is a great flying airplane and after I am gone some one else will enjoy it.*





*1968: I remember this one. It received the Best of Finish trophy at the Toledo Show. The plans were drawn by Don Mc Govern. However, I renamed it the Wild Goose. I had the airplane mounted on a rotating stand for maximum display. Yes, I did fly it quite a bit. It was not a “hanger queen.”*

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*Don Godfrey submitted the following with his Model Aviation Hall of Fame application for Jerry Smith in 2006.*

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March 15, 2006

“Hall of Fame”  
Academy of Model Aeronautics  
Muncie, Ind. 47302

Dear Sirs:

As per enclosed candidate for Hall of Fame Award, Mr. Jerrold “Jerry” Smith, I would like to offer my prospective of this fine man.

I have known Jerry very well since 1980 when I formed the IMAA on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1980. Jerry wrote and worked for RCM for many, many years. He designed many giant scale and non-scale models that were 100% winners in every category. His biography is enclosed, a resume of his accomplishments for AMA and the wonderful sport of flying Radio Control model airplanes.

To my mind, there could not be a better candidate for the Hall of Fame Award. At age 80, his vitality is enormous and continues working as though he were 40 years young. Jerry has a wonderful sense of humor and whomever he touched over the years has been better off in meeting Jerry.

I strongly recommend that you consider this very worthy man for the Hall of Fame Award. He is long past due for this honor. Thank you.

Yours Truly,  
[signed]  
Don Godfrey, AMA 5165 CD  
Pioneer Award  
Hall of Fame Award  
IMAA Founding President, 1980-1986

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*The following was published in the January 2014 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the "I Am the AMA" section. The interview was conducted by Jay Smith.*

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## **I Am the AMA**

### **Jerry Smith, Aircraft designer, photographer, and writer**

*JS: How did you get involved with model aviation?*

JS: I was 10 when I received a model airplane kit for my birthday. Not long after, I had my first airplane ride in a Waco 10. This was the beginning and infused a passion that has been a lifetime of model aviation for me. It has been interesting to live during the advancement of technology in RC. I have seen and experienced much of it.

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

JS: In the late 1960s I became interested in building, designing my own airplanes, drawing plans, and writing about what I did- passing this along through the model media. Don Dewey, publisher of *RC Modeler* magazine, offered me the "For What It's Worth" column, which I spent 30 years writing before the magazine went under.

During the early 1980s, I helped Les Hard with the International Miniature Aircraft Association (IMAA) newsletter during its formative years. Then in 1988, I went to work for Lanier RC and spent 15 years there. Through all these years, it has always been model aviation – a passion that never left me.

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

JS: I have never been the best pilot I thought I could be, but getting them up and down in one piece seems to satisfy my demands along with flying many different types of airplanes. I spent many years using glow engines because that is all we had at the time. Then, in the early 1980s, I became interested in Giant Scale and began flying gas-powered aircraft.

I remember, back in the day, one of my gas airplanes was a Brown Jr.-powered Megow Commander. Today, I have no glow engines, but I fly large gas models and electric airplanes. My interests throughout the years never turned to helicopters.

*JS: What are your other hobbies?*

JS: I became interested in photography in the 1970s to have total control over my articles, which required pictures that were submitted to the magazines. I studied from books I purchased. After many years of use, I feel proficient with a camera in my hands.

For the last 10 years, I have focused on model airplanes in the air and have been fortunate to have some magazine cover shots. All of this took much practice to accomplish. Photography has fed my passion for model aviation and now at 88, I am still able to fly and write about model airplanes. With good eyesight, there is no age limit in our hobby.

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

JS: It is without a doubt Carl Goldberg. I knew him well and we used to discuss model airplane design every time we met. I remember one point of discussion was how Carl used to place his so-called wing spars down the center of the rib, rather than on top and bottom. This was always a topic of conversation with us. It got to be fun after a while. However, I respected Carl and his knowledge of model aircraft design and learned much from him. He was a good friend to all modelers.

*JS: You designed several models for Lanier RC. What was most important to you when designing a model?*

JS: While working with Lanier RC, my goal was to present an airplane kit design that would be desirable, accepted, and popular with the modelers. The very first Stinger was designed by Wayne Voyles, Lanier shop foreman, which was an 84-inch, G62 design.

I took that design, with some changes, and made it into four different sizes of Stingers, which became very popular. I wanted to promote the Lanier RC image with good RC model kits. That's what I really had in mind.

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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

