
Biography of Col. ARTHUR H. JOHNSON

Modeler since 1928

Birth Date: April 24, 1920

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AMA Number: 2374

Written and Submitted by AJ (4/00)

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Career:

- First model, at age eight, was a Fokker Triplane
- 30-year career in the U.S. Air Force (after training with the Royal Canadian Air Force) included combat piloting during World War II, specializing in atomic defense and war planning
- One of his airborne shots of the F-100 is on the cover of a book called "Colors and Markings of the F-100 Super Sabre" written by David Menard
- Got permission to fly on Air Force bases for a few of the various Radio Controlled (RC) model airplane clubs he belonged to
- Served as vice president and treasurer under John Worth in an RC club while at Langley Air Force Base
- A charter member of the RC Hawaii Club on Oahu
- Joined the RC club at Andrews Air Force Base
- After retiring to Florida in mid-1971, got involved with local clubs and contests including the Tangerine Scale Contest in Orlando
- Flew for MetroDrama, an RC show enterprise in West Palm Beach in the early 1970s
- Manager of the AMA's Florida Air Show Team for 20 years
- First design (a .40 size version of the F-2E) was published in Scale RC Modeler magazine
- Went to his first Nationals in 1977; his 94-inch span P-38 was the largest model there and won a trophy
- Had plans published in Model Builder magazine
- In 1979 had plans for the Vroom Hilda published in Radio Control Modeler magazine where he later became a scale columnist
- Placed third at the 1983 ScaleMasters with his P-43
- His P-40 was the first 1/5-scale World War II model to fly in a major competition; it flew in the first giant scale competition at the 1980 Nationals and won the giant scale Nationals in 1981
- His P-35 was the first plane covered entirely in aluminum to fly in a major competition
- Wrote a club newsletter for 18 years for one of the clubs he belonged to
- AMA contest director and leader member
- Charter member of the National Association of Scale Aeromodelers
- Flew in the Top Gun Competition in 2000 as the oldest modeler and the only World War II combat pilot participating

Don Dewy of Radio Control Modeler magazine asked me for this biography a number of years ago. A shortened version was printed in two issues of the magazine in the mid-1990s. I have brought it up to date as of April 2000. – Art Johnson

I have been living in Florida for the last 29 years, which has gone by like the blink of an eye compared to the earlier years. Anyone my age can agree with that thought. As for earlier times, all of my school years through college were spent in San Diego, California, a super place to grow up when the city had less than 200,000 population (it is way more than 10 times that now). San

Diego was a Navy town, but it was also a major aviation center. I can remember watching from my home when the P6-Es and F4Bs were practicing dive-bombing on Kearny Mesa, now the home of the Miramar NAS (F-14s). Ryan and Consolidated had factories there and kids like me were building model airplanes.

It was Charles Lindbergh's 1927 flight alone across the Atlantic that made pilots the idols of kids growing up back then. My parents had taken me to visit the old Ryan factory when they were building the Spirit of Saint Louis. I later watched from the bluffs above the airport when Lindbergh made his triumphant return to San Diego after the Paris flight. Lindbergh Field, where he landed, is still the international airport for San Diego. Pretty heady stuff for a youngster looking forward to the air age.

So you might think that my first model at age eight would be of the Spirit of Saint Louis. Nope, it was a model of the Fokker Triplane. A solid model (boy was it solid!) made from the nice white sugar pine used to crate California oranges in those days. My leaning towards military aircraft was influenced by the pulp magazines of the day. The stories of the Red Baron and other World War I aces made great reading. G-8 and his Battle Aces, Air Trails and Phineas Pinkham and many others I have forgotten.

Solid models were interesting but it didn't take me long to decide that models were made to fly, a concept that I enthusiastically endorse to this day. In 1931, the rubber band was a primary power source and the rubber-engined Baby Rise-off-Ground (ROG) was my first model that flew. Later I decided that models were supposed to look like real airplanes and I built a number of the Cleveland kits for scale models. These were all supposed to fly with rubber power, but mine all handled like lead sleds. I built a few cabin Free Flights that did reasonably well with rubber, but gas came along in the mid-1930s and a few of my friends in the high school could afford engines. I designed and built a couple of gas models, but had to borrow an engine when we flew them out at the same Kearny Mesa I mentioned earlier. We even got the old GHQ engine from the kit to run for a short while.

High school in San Diego did its best to head me for a military career, but I didn't know it at the time. Three years of ROTC and graduation a month after age 16. Modeling took a hiatus at this time while I worked for a year on a couple of California ranches. This look at the real world made college seem like a must. These were depression years and there were no student loans. An early interest in photography helped me out and I was able to pay my way with photos for the San Diego Union and the Los Angeles Times newspapers. Mostly shots of pretty college girls – and to this day I manage to sneak a photos of a pretty girl into the magazines once in a while.

At this time, I had visions of a career as an aeronautical engineer and talked to Claude Ryan about my prospects (same Claude Ryan who built Lindy's bird). He suggested that I should go for a flying career instead. The Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) had just started and he thought I should try it. I always suspected that he must have seen my high school grades. Anyway, I took his advice and signed up for the program with the ground school part handled by the San Diego State College. Uncle Sam footed the bill for the flight part. I got my sister to sign the papers OK'ing me for flight training. I was still a teenager and I didn't think my parents

were shot in the arm with the flying part. My first flight in an airplane was my first lesson. The 40-horse Taylor Craft survived all my efforts to do it in and I was soon the proud possessor of a legal pilot's license. I got a driver's license later when my parents decided that if I could fly, I should be able to drive a car. Yeah, they found out about the flying lessons.

In 1941 I had turned 21, was still in college and the war in Europe had been going on for two years. There was no student exemption from the draft and all my older friends were already in one of the services. I signed up for Aviation Cadets, but was told there would be a six-month waiting period. I had visions of the ground pounders getting me first. I already had good reports back from friends who had joined the RAF and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). I visited British Columbia on a trip to Seattle (I knew a girl up there) that summer and before I could turn around the Canadians had talked me into signing up for the RCAF. I was off on a lifelong career.

I went through the British Commonwealth Air Training Program along with everyone else who signed up. However, I already knew how to fly and time in the Tiger Moths used in primary training was pure fun. In fact it was all fun until we had to night fly in the Manitoba winter in the old Cessna Crane's (Bamboo Bombers in the U.S.). Forty below zero was no weather for a California boy.

I was on leave visiting the West Coast when the Pearl Harbor attack came and ditto when Jimmy Doolittle attacked Tokyo. I got my wings and was commissioned pilot officer in his Majesty's (King George the VI) Royal Canadian Air Force in April 1942. My orders to England were canceled while I was on embarkation leave. The U.S. had intervened to get the thousands of Americans who trained with the Canadians transferred to U.S. armed forces. I was assigned to the RCAF Ferry Command while waiting and managed to fly a variety of planes around Canada while based in Winnipeg. In between flights, I also managed to meet a Scottish-Canadian girl who didn't see too much wrong with airplanes and pilots and who liked to travel. We were hitched the day before I transferred to the U.S. Army Air Force (AAF) and she is still hanging around.

May of 1942 was a major milestone in my life. One day I was a pilot officer in the RCAF and the next I was a second lieutenant in the AAF. The U.S. military board traveled across Canada on a train and did the honors town to town as they went – physical exam and all the rest. They told us we could have our choice of Army, Navy or Marine service – they had that right. I grew up in a Navy town, but knew I had trained in twin-engine birds. The AAF P-38 sounded a lot better to me than the Navy PBY. It was the AAF hands down. Of course, I later flew most of the Air Force birds, except the P-38 – that's life.

The guys transferring from the RCAF figured we could go straight to combat when we arrived in the U.S. Instead the AAF put us all to work as instructors. They were adopting the lessons learned by the British in their air training plan and they figured we could pass some of that knowledge on. In my case it was a single-engine advanced school in Texas flying AT-6, P-36, P-40 and P-43s. The Lancers were used mostly to train Chinese pilots. The bulk of the P-43s

produced went to China. I built a solid model of the P-40 I was flying and started a couple of Cleveland scale kits, but modeling was taking a back seat with the pressures of big time flying.

A thousand hours later, someone discovered that I had originally trained on twins and they needed instructors to check out new pilots to tow the Waco CG4 gliders with C-60s (Lockheed Lodestar). Three months of this was literally a drag. When we got the guys checked out, they let us volunteer for combat. By that time I was ready to go in a biplane. Luckily they wanted experienced pilots for the Martin B-26 program, which had been in a lot of trouble. It was off to Del Rio to check out in the short wing jobs and then to Florida for training with a crew. This was the time of the “one a day in Tampa Bay” legends. I personally thought the B-26 was a Cadillac compared to the B-25 and I liked it from the start.

The last bit of stateside training took me and nine other pilots to Eglin Field to check out delivering Navy torpedoes from the B-26. This tactic for the B-26 did not look like a survivable idea to me and I was glad that I never had to do it in combat. I think that the battle of Midway was the sole occasion where the B-26 was used to launch Navy torpedoes. The only pilot that came back was teaching the school.

By late 1943 it was time to go to combat. I picked up a brand new B-26 B-20 at Hunter Air Base in Georgia, flew it to West Palm Beach, Florida, and launched off on the southern route across the South Atlantic. When I was flying over the Amazon River in Brazil, my first son was born. I got the news four months later. Ascension Island in the middle of the Atlantic was only a speck of rock. With the Global Positioning System (GPS) today you could find it in your sleep. Back then it was dead reckoning and a low frequency beacon for your ADF to pick up. Almost everybody did. We left one of our flight of four on the rock following take-off the next morning. I still have a photo of the smoking hole in the ground. The ADF was going crazy in the thunderstorms when we hit Liberia on the African coast. Slipping under the weather we managed to eyeball Roberts Field.

Christmas of 1943 was spent in Casablanca while the depot there did an inspection on our B-26s. I never did find Rick’s plane. Not to mention Bogey’s girlfriend. Then it was through Algiers to Sardinia where I finally arrived at my operation destination by New Years of 1944. The 444th Squadron of the 320th Bomb Group Medium was to be my home for most of the next year.

My first combat mission over Italy came on January 3. On my fifth mission my squadron commander and operations officer were both shot down. I suddenly became the high flight time guy in the squadron. A second lieutenant when I arrived, I was a captain four months later flying group lead (my bombardier was a “dead eye Dick”). Promotions came fast on a combat tour. Describing a combat tour could take a book by itself. Suffice it to say that after 65 missions they decided I could go home if I really wanted to. I turned down an offer for promotion to major and a job as group operations officer. I had a kid almost a year old that I had never seen. The ride from Casablanca to Miami was in the back end of a cargo C-54.

Back in the States in late 1944 I had visions of assignment to a base in California. The closest I got was Yuma, Arizona. Not too bad as with my early fighter experience, I ended up

commander of the fighter and tow group. This was a training base for B-17 and B-24 flexible gunners. We used the stripped version of the Martin B-26 to tow targets and P-39 and P-63 fighters to fly passes at the bombers. Later, I checked my guys out in the RP-63 Pinball machine. This was the armored (supposedly) fighter that flew as an actual target while the gunners fired frangible bullets at you. I never got shot down in one, but several of my pilots did when the gunners nailed the radiators. We had an emergency strip on the range just for this reason.

While at Yuma I checked out first pilot in the B-17 and B-24 (as well as anything else I could find). Years later one of my young pilots in my F-100 Squadron was looking through my logbook and asked what a YB-40 was. Seems I had flown one at Yuma. I couldn't tell him. I had to look it up. Turned out there was a gunship version of the B-17 and YB-40 was the designation. I don't remember it flying any differently than any other B-17. My tour at Yuma was also distinguished by my first airplane crash. The P-39 Aircobra flies like a rock without the engine running. I dead stuck one on the lava beds between Yuma and Phoenix one morning. The gear up crash wasn't too bad, but the 23-mile hike out to the highway without a drop of water is not something I would want to repeat too often. The desert is pretty dry.

The war with Germany ended in the spring of 1945. We didn't need any more B-17 or B-24 crews so they closed Yuma Air Force Base (AFB). I went to the 47th Bomb Group in Lake Charles as an instructor on A-26s. I had started a scale model of the Martin B-26 from a Cleveland kit when at Yuma. I finished it at Lake Charles and I still have the plexi-glass molded parts from this model. The wartime plexi-glass molded easier than the stuff you get today. I wish I knew why. I also still have samples of the olive drab paint I used for the model. The paint came from the base paint shop, same as used on the AAF planes. Years later I went back to Lake Charles to fly models of the F-82 and F-100 at the AMA Nationals. We flew from the same runways we used for the A-26 Invaders in 1945.

Next was Valdosta, Georgia to experiment with blacked-out A-26s for low-level night missions. They picked us for that one based on tests of night vision. I can't remember if I ate a lot of carrots in those days. V-J Day came along in the late summer of 1945 and training for Japan combat ceased. I was then assigned to the Air Force Center at Pincastle AAB in Florida as a test officer in the A-26 Squadron. We put on fire power shows for visiting Congressmen when we were not busy with tests. Fun to unload everything the A-26 could carry in one low-level pass at a realistic target.

I still have photos of downtown Orlando taken through the TV camera mounted in the nose of my A-26. This was a reconnaissance test project using the TV equipment developed for the first TV guided bombs that were used in Burma and later in Korea. The results were a long way from the satellite images of today, but it was an interesting test with commercial TV still on the horizon. I was also assigned the test project for reconnaissance with this equipment mounted in a Stinson L-5. My pre-war light aircraft time got me picked for a number of projects of this type throughout my career (I didn't exactly volunteer for them).

My college years had been interrupted by World War II and now I had a chance to finish while still on active duty. I became a full-time student at the University of Maryland majoring in physics. Post-war model gas engines were becoming available and Control Line was the “in thing.” I picked up a Bantam 19 ignition engine and built several models. A scale model of the Navion was the most ambitious project and it flew fine. College Park Maryland had space close to the factory where the Ercoup aircraft were built. Years later I came back to this same site with some Radio Control (RC) buddies. The site is in use to this day.

After college I went back to the same A-26 test squadron I had left. By now it was at the Proving Ground at Eglin Field, Florida. The work was the same. I had always been interested in photography and a chance came to attend the Aerial Photo Officer School at Denver, Colorado. Off to school in the late summer of 1947. My second son was born in the Fitzsimmons General Hospital, Denver while I was in school. They were using RF-5s at the photo school or whatever they called the recon version of the B-25. This was my first chance to fly B-25s. Nice plane, but pretty tame after the B-26 and A-26.

The Army Air Force became the United States Air Force (USAF) while I was in Denver. Later assignment as a photo officer at McChord AFB, Washington was a little boring, so I went when the USAF asked me to attend the Radiological Safety course at the U.S. Navy Damage Control Training Center, Treasure Island, California. I don't usually tell everyone that I am actually a graduate of a Navy school! As a result of the Bikini tests, the Navy was worried about the effects of radiation on Navy crews. The USAF concern at this time was with the potential for radiation problems if a bomb-carrying plane crashed on take-off. I was designated an Air Force Radiological officer as a result of this school and further courses at the Air University at Maxwell AFB.

I next applied for the aeronautical engineering course at the Air Institute of Technology, Wright Patterson AFB, and was accepted. A week before leaving, the Korean War started and my orders were changed to Korea in A-26s. Another week later these orders were canceled for a higher priority assignment to the special weapons project at Sandia Base, New Mexico – special weapons meaning atomic bombs! My training in atomic weapons and radiation had caught up with me.

The next couple of years were spent working with the 509th Atomic Test Group at the numerous tests of A-bombs north of Las Vegas. I got my first experience in jets with the T-33s we flew to pick up radiation samples from the clouds formed after detonation of the bombs. Flying through radioactive atomic clouds at 46,000 feet, un-pressurized, while being force-fed 100% oxygen and wearing a lead protective vest was interesting to say the least. The radiation samples were picked up in special wing tanks. The radioactive filters were shipped to Los Alamos for analysis after we landed. We were decontaminated after landing, but the T-33s are to this day, sitting in the desert cooling off (and not from the sun). When not flying T-33s, I put time in B-25s, C-47s and C-45s out of Kirtland AFB, New Mexico.

Work with the tests was interrupted by my assignment on temporary duty to England for six months alert duty for atomic missions with a Strategic Air Command B-29 group. This was my first look at Northern Europe, England, France and Germany (mostly flying C-47s).

On return I was transferred as special weapons officer to the B-36 wing at Fairchild AFB, Spokane, Washington. My appointment as a regular USAF officer came through and a promotion to major soon followed. I was not there long before secret orders sent me on temporary duty to the test division of the Los Alamos Laboratories near Santa Fe, New Mexico. I was to work with Joint Task Force 152 on Project Ivey, the test of the first hydrogen bomb. The job was again radiation sampling. This time we flew from Kwajelin Island as Eniwetok was the site for the detonation. F-84G aircraft of the SAC's 27th Fighter Wing were used to collect the samples. Watching the detonation from the Joint Task Force command B-29 was most impressive – especially as the bomb was expected to go only two megatons rather than the actual 12. We were a bit closer than we should have been for one that size.

As a result of the radiation exposure I received on various aboveground nuclear tests, the Defense Nuclear Agency still keeps track of me. So far I can only blame my shortage of hair on excess radiation (just kidding!).

While in Albuquerque, I had picked up a kit for the Berkeley Aerotrol RC set. I built the transmitter and receiver, which worked OK, but before I could make plans for a model plane, I was assigned to the SAC's Seventh Air Division in North Africa as special weapons officer. We were installing nuclear bomb storage facilities in Morocco for use by B-47 and B-36 aircraft. This was top secret stuff at the time, but the facilities are long gone now and I assume that it is all declassified at this date. My kids were old enough for Control Line flying by then, but I never did get past testing that first RC radio in anything but a boat. Probably just as well. Range was pretty short. My full-scale flying at this time was mostly wheeling C-47s around Europe and Africa on various missions. I was ready to get in fighters and when SAC asked for field grade officers to volunteer for combat crew upgrading in jets, I jumped at the chance. Leaving Morocco, I was assigned to the 31st Fighter Wing, SAC at Turner AFB, Georgia, but went through jet schools at Selma, Alabama, Del Rio, Texas, and Luke AFB, Arizona first. It was in Phoenix, Arizona, while practicing bombing and gunnery in the straight wing F-84Gs that I finally had time to get serious about RC models.

I picked up a gas tube Deltron radio in a local hobby shop, which was one of the lightest sets available at the time. Single-channel, on-off carrier type that you tuned every time you used it. I picked a Berkeley kit for the Brigadier cabin Free Flight model as the first for the radio. This way I could fly it as a Free Flight model before installing the radio. All went well and the model flew fine using a ½-A Fireball engine with clapper throttle in addition to the rudder control. Everyone taught themselves to fly then as the most experienced guy around was the one who got the model up and down the most times in any one day. Models like the Live Wire Trainer came next with bigger engines (.15). With the help of my boys, we even came up with rudder only scale models that flew (all Berkeley kits).

By the time I got to my permanent base with the 31st Fighter Wing in mid-1955, RC modeling was in my blood. I flew F-84Fs for the first year (the original lead sled). I also managed to graduate from the USAF Command and Staff College during that year. When the Strategic Air Command decided to drop all fighter units, the Wing transferred to the Tactical Air Command and picked up new F-100 Super Sabres. I was a squadron commander by this time and I still keep in touch with F-100 pilots who were in the squadron and flying models on the weekends. The models were mostly escapement controlled, but reeds started to become popular in the late 1950s. Scale models were a little tricky on single channel, but that didn't stop anyone from trying.

One of my favorites was the PT-19 put out by Sterling. I built one in the officers' quarters in the evenings at George AFB. During the day I was busy training my Fighter Weapons Team for competition at the first all Super Sonic Fighter Weapons meet. The team members and aircraft were from my squadron with the wing commander (later Lt. Gen. Gordy Graham) as team captain. Bombing and gunnery practice all day in F-100s is maybe "more fun than a human should be allowed to have" (to quote Rush Limbaugh). We won the meet hands down beating out the McDonnell Douglas F-101s and the other F-100 teams. The following summer (1958) our team represented the Tactical Air Command in the World Class "William Tell" (now Gunsmoke) weapons meet at Nellis AFB in Las Vegas. Again we were the winning tactical unit team. The trophies are now gathering dust on a shelf in the garage. My wife thinks the trophies from model meets are prettier. Although I was flying RC models when I was flying the F-100, it never occurred to me that we would soon have the technology to fly a model of a jet. The idea was just too far out and I didn't bother to take the kind of photos of the F-100 that would have been invaluable to a modeler later. I did take a few, however. One of the airborne shots I took of our team aircraft is on the cover of the book "Colors and Markings of the F-100 Super Sabre" by David Menard. I used this color scheme on the model of the F-100 that I built years later.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was over and it was time to downsize the USAF again. The 31st fighter wing was deactivated in late 1958 and in spite of my best efforts to get out to George AFB to fly F-104s, I was pulled up to Headquarters, Tactical Air Command to work for General Momyer in the plans directorate. This involved such stuff as flying T-33s as the general's pilot, writing the operational concepts for the F-111 and the AWACS and other mundane tasks. When I wasn't busy, I talked the base commander into letting the local club use a strip near the firing in butts to fly RC models. This was an active part of Langley AFB, but the local club was small and we were not flying the fast bombs of today. A Smog Hog on Bramco 8-channel reeds was my first model at Langley. The local club had many NASA members, including John Worth of the NASA model shop. I remember serving as treasurer and vice president of the club when John was president. John was, of course, flying galloping ghost RC gear at the time. An Astro Hog was my next with the K&B 45 engine. A far cry from the power used in the same model now. A promotion to Lieutenant Colonel was followed by a transfer to Headquarters Pacific Air forces in Hawaii in 1961. I shipped a scale model of the P-63 from the Berkeley kit and an Orion pattern plane with my household goods.

I became a charter member of the RC Hawaii Club on Oahu. We first flew RC at the old Haleiva airstrip on the north shore of the island. This was the strip where they launched the P-36 and P-

40 aircraft during the Pearl Harbor attack. Later I talked the Navy into letting us use the area past the active runway at Barbers Point NAS to fly RC models on weekends. This was a lot closer for most of us. I would practice GCIs and touch and goes in T-33s at NAS during the week and then fly RC models there on the weekend. I picked up an Orbit 10-channel reed set and later a 12-channel superhet reed set. Very expensive compared to the radios of today.

I used a Taurus for contest work, which flew nicely on reeds. I was not able to attend any of the PACAF regional contests as job pressure did interfere a bit with recreation. I spent the first year in Hawaii working with the Navy as the Air Force liaison officer in CINCPACs command center. The eagles for full colonel came before that year was up and the rest of my four-year tour was spent as the director of operations plans for the Pacific Air Forces. A lot of that time was spent in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Australia and Vietnam. Trips to Australia involved the planning for the first and I believe only SEATO air exercise ever held. This included the first deployment of F-105s to Korat, Thailand. Shades of things to come.

I built my first twin RC model, which also flew on reeds. Proportional radios showed up in Hawaii in 1964, but I was finding less time for model flying. The Vietnam War was heating up and the red phone in my bedroom was going off too often. I wrote the Rolling Thunder operations plan for the air strikes against North Vietnam, but politicians in Washington kept us from carrying it out. It was a frustrating time for Air Force planners. I was still getting flying time in T-33s out at Hickman AFB. We actually used the runways of the adjacent Honolulu International Airport. Gabby Gabreski and I flew a lot together (chasing whales up and down the Molokai channel). Colonel Gabreski was also working at PACAF Headquarters. Hawaii was a memorable assignment in spite of the hectic work schedule. My boys both graduated from high school there and my oldest stayed to graduate from the University of Hawaii. Both boys built and flew RC models, but they also discovered girls. We spent more time surfing and scuba diving in the last year than flying models. By July of 1965 my four-year tour was up and I was transferred to Air Force Headquarters at the Pentagon.

As chief of the Air Force Armament Division in the Directorate of Development, Headquarters USAF, I was even busier than in Hawaii. I picked up the responsibility for development of all non-nuclear USAF munitions including smart bombs (laser and electro optical), the bomblet-type munitions, the Maverick missile and the big 30 MM gun for the A-10. All of these were through R&D and tested in the three years I spent at the Pentagon. My models and radios that I shipped from Hawaii stayed in storage in the basement of the highrise apartments where I lived.

Toward the end of my three years in the Pentagon, Colonel (later Major General) Don Smith, brother of Radio Control Modeler magazine columnist Jerry Smith, talked me into joining the RC club flying out at Andrews AFB. My oldest boy was working at the Department of Commerce in D.C. and living in the same apartment complex with us. The age of proportional radio had displaced reed sets in the last couple of years, so we both built proportional sets from Heathkit. The radios worked fine and we were started in the type of RC flying that continues to this day. Taking RC planes down in the apartment elevator every time to go fly was a pain, but it worked OK. Not long after I started flying at Andrews AFB, I was transferred to Headquarters

Tactical Air Command at Langley AFB. I was back in planning again, but this time as chief of war plans and later of the Long Range Planning and Concepts Division.

I picked up one of the first kits out for the Proctor Neuport 11 to be my first building project at Langley AFB. I put most of it together during my lunch breaks. It flew fine with a Ross .60 twin cylinder engine. The Vietnam War was still on and TAC Headquarters was a busy place. I joined the same RC club I had been in during the late 1950s. They were now flying at a site off base. Both RC flying and USAF activity had increased to where it was no longer feasible to fly from the main base.

Trips in C-130s through Africa, the Middle East and Alaska interfered a bit with model building as did work with a Senate committee on the close air support mission. I was back at the Pentagon closing work on the Vance Packard Commission on Close Air Support the day before I retired to inactive duty (the USAF retained the close air support mission). My 30 years commissioned service was up on July 1, 1971, and Charlotte and I left the same day for the new home we had built in Florida. Naturally some of the RC models came with us. Notably the Neuport, an Aeromaster and a VK triplane I had started.

After setting up the new home, bringing the boat down from Virginia through the Intracoastal Waterway and wringing out the ocean fishing grounds, it was time to join the local RC club. There was considerable interest in scale in the clubs in South Florida at this time and I attended many local scale contests, always with interesting company. The Tangerine Scale Contest in Orlando was probably the best known at the time.

A few months after arriving in Florida I became involved in a commercial RC show enterprise in West Palm Beach. This was a tourist attraction called "MetroDrama" started by David Stern who wrote the "Francis the Talking Mule" movies. The action revolved around a rotating stage with four segments devoted to different types of RC models, airplanes, racecars, boats and rockets. We flew the planes from a 30-foot high tower and had to land in one direction and take off in the opposite direction regardless of the wind (the spectators were at one end of the runway). MetroDrama did not prove popular enough to keep going and it folded the following year. It did give me a feel for show business with models and was the catalyst that got me involved for the next 20 years as the manager of AMA's Florida Air Show Team. A version of Snoopy's Doghouse I built for the team back in 1972 is still flying today after thousands of flights.

As an USAF Colonel on inactive duty, I finally found time to design and build my own scale models, something I had not tried before. My first was a .40 size version of the F-2E. The model did well in local contests and the plans were published in Scale RC Modeler magazine. It was the first of six versions of the same plane I have produced over the years. I decided that if scale twins were that much fun, I would build a P-38 next. Royal had a kit for the plan available but most I had seen fly were overweight and hard to fly well. The answer was bigger! The 94-inch span model I came up with turned out better than I expected and I flew it for almost a dozen years before it wore out.

Dave Platt had moved to Florida about the same time I did. We met through the scale contest circuit. When the 1977 Nats was scheduled for March AFB in California, I decided that might be a good time to try my first Nationals competition. Dave went with me on the cross-country trip. His Precision Scale Dauntless SBD and my sport scale P-38 fit nicely in my Chevy Suburban. The P-38 was the largest model at the Nats, although not the heaviest. This was years before giant scale became a separate class of competition. The P-38 picked up a trophy; I had a good time and I decided that competition at the Nats was a lot of fun.

While staying in the Visiting Officers Quarters at March AFB, I met Colonel Bob Thacker for the first time. Somehow our paths had never crossed during our USAF careers, but we have been friends ever since. I also met Bill Northrop of Model Builder magazine. Bill talked me into doing an article with plans for the P-38. The plans were published in Model Builder magazine the following year (at that time my plans were done in pencil on KMART shelf paper). This association also resulted in plans for my later P-40 and P-43 models being published in the same magazine.

On the way home from the Nats, Dave and I stopped at the Lackland AFB Museum and took a bunch of photos of the only existing F-82E aircraft. I have made good use of these photos since.

In 1979 I designed and built Vroom Hilda, the Flying Witch, for our Florida Air Show Team. An article and plans were published by RC Modeler magazine the following year, beginning a long association with the magazine. After this article, Dick Tichenor contacted me when we were at the Toledo Show with a proposal to write on scale with an article every three months. A different scale columnist would cover each of the other months. Claude McCullough had been writing the "Scale Views" column for a number of years and needed an extended vacation. Every three months did not sound too bad, so I said sure, I'll give it a try. As it turned out, we started with two of us rather than three with John DeVries doing the alternate month. When John dropped out after a couple of years, the column became an every other month thing, which is about all I can handle.

I met Dick Kidd and Dick Tichenor in person at the first ScaleMasters contest in California in 1980. I flew my third version of the F-82E in the contest and did a demonstration of the new P-40 model on Saturday. Saturday night was the end of the contest for me. It was 10 days in the hospital with a collapsed lung and 30 days more recuperation before the doctors would let me drive home to Florida. Good thing my wife was with me on that trip. The models stayed in the back of the Suburban the whole time.

My next trip to the ScaleMasters at Mile Square in California in 1983 turned out a little better. Bill McCallie, Bob Walter and I had a great time, the P-43 came in third and we managed to see interesting aircraft at the Chino and Pima Air Museums on the way. I was not able to see the Martin B-26 under restoration there – a disappointment as that was to be one of my next model projects. I think that I have qualified for every ScaleMasters contest since, except the year I had a heart problem (while out flying models, of course!). I have not been able to attend all the finals, but still go when I can.

No doubt as a result of my personal flying experience I have had a major interest in models of military aircraft. I was an early subscriber to the idea that larger models were easier to fly. My P-40 was the first of the 1/5-scale World War II models to fly in major competition. It flew in the first giant scale competition at the 1980 Ohio Nats and won giant scale the following year at the 1981 Texas Nats. The 1/5 scale P-43 was the first gas ignition model to win giant scale at the Nats. This time at the world's largest (to that date) scale contest – the East Coast AMA Nats at Westover AFB in 1983. My ducted fan model of the F-100D was the first of my plans published in RC Modeler magazine. All of these plus my model of the Martin B-26 were of aircraft that I had flown in the full-scale version. However, my last two are of planes I did not fly. The P-35 had been phased out in favor of the P-36 and P-43 by the time I got into fighters. I was into jets by the time the P/F-82 came on board and it was not around for many years. The models mentioned above were original designs. The model of the P-35 was the first model covered entirely in real aluminum to fly in a major competition event. I have also enjoyed building and flying lots of scale models from Top Flite, Sterling, Goldberg, Royal, Byron and other kits. Truth is that I fly more sport models on weekends than I do scale models. Saves wear and tear on the big ones.

Over the years I have belonged to numerous RC clubs in different states of the union (three at present). I wrote the newsletter for one of these clubs for 18 years. My 2374 AMA number is an original. I did not request a lower number when I became a contest director and leader member many years ago. I am a charter member of the National Association of Scale Aeromodelers, NASA (the scale organization started at the AMA Nats in 1977), but I am not a member of any other special interest group.

I don't remember the year, but it had to be before 1984. Dick Kidd and I were at the Toledo Show and we were both trying to convince ourselves that we had no interest in computers. This stuff was a little too far out. Boy, was I wrong! My past experience with computers was with the rooms full of IBM computer that held the CINCPAC war plans when I was in Hawaii. You had to feed that system with punch cards and wait all night for it to spit out a new variation of the plan. Mind boggling to think that whole system could fit in a small corner of my current hard drive. Anyway, I did get involved in computers and would not touch a typewriter or a drawing board now. The F-100D was the last model that I actually drew the old-fashioned way by pen and ink. I started with an IBM PC Jr. and just purchased my sixth new version (600 mhz Pentium III). Anyone reading RC Modeler magazine over the past few years knows the progress we have made in using computers and CAD to help us produce more accurate models in less time. I currently send all photos and text for publication in RC Modeler magazine on CD ROM disks. Before long I expect that most new plans and three views will be produced via CAD systems. The new computer literate generation coming along will make sure of that.

I don't know if we have passed from the aviation age to the computer age and are headed for the information age, but whatever RC modeling will go on forever. It gets into your blood and is just too darn much fun. As of this date, I am scheduled to fly in the Top Gun Competition at Wellington, Florida. I will be the oldest (80-years-old) modeler to fly at the competition as well as the only World War II combat pilot flying there. Should be fun!

(signed) Arthur H. Johnson
April 2000

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