

# Propwash

The Newsletter of the Mercer County Radio Control Society  
September 2007

## It Was 1916 All Over Again

Those who fly Sunday mornings have noticed a steady regression in the era of flight at Warren Kruse Field. Where the Sunday sky was once filled with modern pattern craft, WW II fighters, and an occasional jet, these craft have been to a large extent supplanted by models from an earlier era.



Greg Lucidi's Fokker D VIII only had one wing, but it took four guys to attach it.



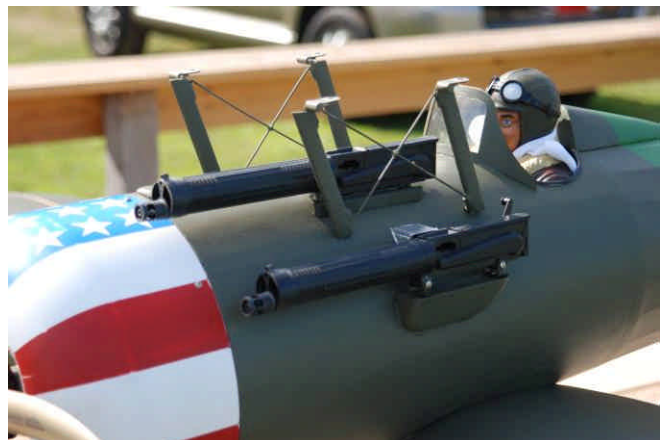
John Tanzer's Albatross was perhaps outgunned and outsized, but certainly not outclassed.

Sunday, July 22<sup>nd</sup> was the first annual designated Dawn Patrol Day, a day for everyone with a WW I model to show his stuff. To round out the era, modelers with

old-timers, models harkening back to the days when free-flight models were first fitted with radios, were invited to bring their aircraft as well. As a result, the grounds and sky were filled with a couple dozen models including WWI fighters and observation planes and slow-flying old-timers. Given the typical speeds of the old-timers and the scale speeds of the military models, one might have expected a relatively relaxed event. Of course, one must realize that these scale models are not fitted with scale power plants and when fighters come together, whether they be full scale or quarter scale, they are going to mix it up.



Augie Lucidi's Nieuport 28 exhibited some of the more interesting artwork--



And a good eye for detail.

Which isn't to suggest anything unsafe or too exciting is going to happen. The owners of these craft are excited by the idea of dog fighting, but the mere utterance of the dreaded "C" word brings an instant chill to their otherwise exuberant attitudes. So in fact the most real excitement comes from noting that Keith Zimmerly is



**Frank Figurelli's Eindecker was one of the brightest spots in the sky.**



**Anglo-Germanic labels help the linguistically challenged separate the "svitchen" from the "gassen."**



**Herb Wasserbach readies his PT-17 for a training mission.**

in his usual position (on your tail) and that the five-plane rule has been temporarily waived.



**Bob Levanduski's Fokker Dr. 1 projected a rather menacing appearance.**



**The German markings on Nobu Iwasawa's captured Nieuport 11 seemed to invite trouble.**



**The color scheme of Bill Zentmayer's D VIII might cause one to grab for the fly swatter.**

Having seen the WW I movies, the day isn't complete without a few beers at the Officer's Club after sunset. Since we're not allowed to have beer at the field (or even to stay there after sunset), adjustments were made.





**Armand Graziani's Nieuport 11 sported Italian markings.**



**The sky just wouldn't look right without Keith Zimmerly on someone's tail.**



**Bruce Evertsen and Mike Garze worked the grill to feed the hungry airmen (and their families).**

Instead of beer, we had hamburgers and hotdogs, prepared by the Chefs du Jour, Bruce Evertsen and Mike Garze. And the lack of beer? Well, no one was complaining.

The number of WW I models in the club continues to grow as more are built. Participants of this event are

looking forward to Sunday, September 16<sup>th</sup>, which is the second day at the Warbirds event. Noting that fewer airplanes fly on Sunday, the Dawn Patrol is planning to be their in force, opening the possibility of seeing a swarm of over a dozen WW I models in the sky at one time. Who says Sunday has to be less exciting than Saturday.



**"I like the little red one. Can we take it home? Please!"**



**A few old-timers flew as well.**

## **Civil Air Patrol at Field September 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>**

Our club and the Washington's Crossing club are working with the New Jersey Civil Air Patrol to introduce about a dozen cadets to the sport of radio controlled flight. The event will take place at Warren Kruse Field starting the evening of Friday, September 7<sup>th</sup> and continuing through early afternoon of Sunday, September 9<sup>th</sup>. During that time, the cadets will be given both ground and flight instruction with the goal of being approved for solo flight by the time they leave on Sunday.

Weather permitting, there will be a stargazing party Friday night starting at about dusk. CAP Captain Ulric

Gordon-Lewis, Commander of the New Jersey Bay-shore Composite Squadron, has arranged for a group of amateur astronomers to bring their large telescopes and put on a show including a variety of constellations and other celestial bodies. Club members and their friends and families are invited to attend.

Members are also invited to attend and assist with the event. CAP students will occupy up to three flight stations on Saturday and Sunday morning, but there will be some opportunity for members to fly as well. The Washington's Crossing club has invited us to be guests at their field that weekend, in the event that our own field does not provide adequate opportunities for flight.

For details about the event or if you would like to participate, contact David Vale at (609) 430-9635 or Keith Zimmerly at (609) 587-5347.

## Warbirds and Electrics Planned for September

September is air-show month for the MCRCS. It begins with our annual Warbirds Over Jersey show the weekend of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> and finishes with our annual Electric Fly on Saturday the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The Warbirds show is a regional event that is widely publicized and, we hope, will be heavily attended. Scale military aircraft of all sizes are welcomed at this event, which provides us with an opportunity to show off our building skills and see those of others. Setup day for the Warbirds show is the 14<sup>th</sup> and all event teams will be needed to handle the crowd of pilots and spectators over the weekend.

The Electric Fly, the following Saturday, is a lower-key event. Food will be served all three days, however, prepared by our semi-professional chefs and staff. Volunteers for kitchen duty are always expected; it is a special treat when they actually materialize.

## Bombs Over Jersey October 7<sup>th</sup>

Sunday, October 7<sup>th</sup> has been designated Cub and Bomb Drop day for the MCRCS. (October 14<sup>th</sup> is the rain date.) Regarding the Cub part, just bring your Piper Cub. (Every hangar has one, right?) For the bomb drop, pick your favorite (or most expendable) airplane and re-fit it as a bomber. Events will begin at 10:00 AM and continue until everyone is done. See the September 2006 issue of *Propwash* (available on line) for a better idea of what constitutes a bomber.

The official rules have been developed by Carl Gubkin and are spelled out below. A parachute-drop contest will be held on the same day. Prizes will be awarded for accuracy and other notable achievements.

### Bomb Drop Rules:

- You get to make up to three bomb runs (drops).
- One bomb drop per flight or between landings.
- You are awarded points for most accurate drop to center marker.
- Distance is measured from where bomb comes to rest.
- Best two scores out of three count. Highest total wins.
- Any type of bomb is okay - Use your creativity as long as it's safe!
- An explicit bomb run must be made; drops on the takeoff or landing run do not count.
- Points are awarded for successful drops as illustrated in the photo below; the bomb must separate from the plane.
- No Helicopters or Kamikaze type flights!



**Carl Gubkin illustrates the point system: Five points for a bulls-eye, one point for hitting the field.**

### Parachute Drop Rules:

- You get to make up to three parachute drops.
- One parachute drop per flight or between landings.
- You are awarded points for most accurate drop to center marker.
- Distance is measured from where parachute first touches the ground.
- Best two scores out of three count. Highest total wins.



- Any type of parachute is okay - Use your creativity as long as it's safe!
- An explicit drop run must be made; drops on the takeoff or landing run do not count.
- Parachute must fully deploy before hitting the ground!
- Points are awarded in the same manner as for the bomb drop.

## Off the Bench and In the Air

Seth Hunter has been working on his Pfalz D. IIIa for some time. When featured in the September 2006 issue of Propwash, Seth had between 700 and 800 hours into the model and still had the wings and wheels to go. Although he had hoped to finish it in time for this year's building contest, he didn't make that schedule. In fact, there were those who questioned that a model of this detail and complexity would ever fly.

Seth put those doubts to rest on Sunday, August 12<sup>th</sup>, when he guided the model through its successful maiden flight. While the flight was flawless, Seth is reported to be considering a few minor modifications including adjustments to the CG and a larger fuel tank.



**Seth Hunter, here with his Pfalz D.IIIa, demonstrated that museum-quality models can indeed fly.**

## For Sale

Brand new **Quique Somenzini 102" Yak 54**, complete and ready to fly with DA100 engine, JR receiver, all servos, and smoke system. \$3,500.

Also, **112" Carden 40% CAP**, complete and ready to fly with DA150 engine, JR receiver, all servos, and smoke system. Four years old, but gorgeous. \$3,500

Contact Marty Boston at (215) 757-9750.

## Profiting from the Hobby

By C. David Vale

Have you ever wanted to own your own business, be your own boss? Ever wanted to make a living from your hobby? To get a better idea what that might be like, I interviewed two members of our club who make a living from a business in the hobby. Larry Katona owns Precision Cut Kits, a local business whose primary operation is producing kits from plans drawn by the hobby's best designers. Marty Boston owns Action Hobby, one of the largest retail hobby shops in the area. Here are their stories.



**Larry Katona (back row, center) poses with some of the PCK staff.**

Larry Katona has been in the RC hobby for just shy of half a century, flying his first plane in 1958. But the hobby didn't take center stage in his life until sometime later. Larry eked out a living as a guitar-playing musician in his early career, later pursuing his interest in car racing by opening a speed shop with his brother. Fitting in a few years in the construction trade and working as a public servant for Hopewell Township, he didn't turn RC into a hobby until a chance encounter at Bill Zentmayer's hobby shop in 1992. There he met the late Doug McMillan, who was just starting a kit cutting business. A discussion on how to set up a band saw led to their joining forces at All-American Kit Cutters.

Although they became and remained good friends until Doug's death last year, they found their goals and personalities incompatible as business partners; Larry left to form Precision Cut Kits after eighteen months. Now, 14 years later, PCK ships between 500 and 600 kits a year, about two for every business day, and provides opportunities for six individuals who work on the kits as independent contractors. Although Larry didn't

quote a dollar figure, that number suggests a business that grosses about a quarter million dollars a year.

What is the kit cutting business? Precision Cut Kits translates model airplane plans developed by several different designers into a box of custom cut balsa, hardwood, and plywood. All of the individuals who work on a kit are subcontractors. One of them reads the plans and, using a couple of graphic computer programs, digitizes the drawings and lays out the parts on sheet stock. (This usually takes a whole day's effort.) The results are fed into a laser cutter, which cuts the parts. Then someone else assembles the cut parts and adds stock sheets and strips to complete the kit. Another person makes a box, makes labels for the box, and packages the materials. Then someone else weighs and ships the box. Although Larry is primarily responsible for relationship management with designers, contractors, and customers, he still finds he steps in to assist with the process wherever he is needed.

What was it like starting a business? Initially, according to Larry, he had to earn the respect of collaborators, suppliers, and customers. When he first went to trade shows, he found he shared a table at the cocktail hour with the business associate he'd gone to the show with; no one sought him out for conversation. More recently, in a similar situation, he found himself surrounded by over a dozen individuals wanting to talk about his kits, their plans, or some new idea. "It's not an ego thing," he says, "but it's a pretty good feeling to be in 'the circle.'" Coming from obscurity in the early days, it feels good to walk through the show halls and be recognized."

Would he do it again? "Absolutely! RC is a tough business to get into, though. The hobby-shop business, for example, is especially tough. You set up this expensive shop so people can come and look at your stuff. Then they go and order from Tower. But the kit cutting business is a bit better. Of course I got into the kit cutting business at the right time. When Doug and I were breaking into the business, there were only one or two others in it. Now there are a lot more."

The best part of the business? "I'd have to say it's the people and being recognized as one of them, that feeling that you're really in the middle of the hobby. I suppose not having to punch a time clock is good too, but that works both ways. I generally find I work at least ten hours a day and although I've got fourteen airplanes, seven of them charged and ready to fly, I haven't actually flown one in over two years."

Does he enjoy the hobby more or less as a result of the business? "I'm pretty sure I enjoy it more, but maybe

different aspects of it. Like I said, I haven't flown in over two years."

All the kits produced by Precision Cut Kits are now laser cut. Larry was initially cautious getting into laser cutting. But then he found a laser cutting subcontractor who did work of a quality that Larry was comfortable with and he can't imagine hand cutting kits anymore. Recently PCK acquired the designs, copyrights, and manufacturing rights of Bob Ankne's "Pro Craft Models," which Larry markets as Pro-Line Aerobatic Aircraft. He also acquired exclusive marketing rights to the late Dan Palmer's line of plans.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to make a business out of the hobby? "I think of a phrase from my racing days: When the green flag drops, the BS stops. You've got to believe in your business and you've got to give your customers a good product. My initial plan was to develop the Cadillac of kits, a kit that would never cause someone to question whether they'd gotten their money's worth. I've developed good relationships with the plan designers and that comes, in part, from the feedback they get from the people who buy our kits. Nobody gives you respect; you have to earn it. In 14 years I believe I've earned respect. That's a good feeling."



**Marty Boston's shop, Action Hobby, at its current location in Langhorne, PA.**

Compared to Larry, Marty Boston is a relative newcomer to the hobby. Marty soloed in 1983, flying a Goldberg Gentle Lady. Characterizing himself as a fun flyer, Marty has flown a variety of models, some of the more exciting ones including a 102" Quique Somenzini Yak 54 and a 112" Carden 40% CAP. (Both are for sale; see the For Sale section in this issue.)

Marty began his work career as an electrician specializing in electrical maintenance. His early business experience included owning an electrical contracting business and an industrial maintenance firm. But in

2002, he opened his first hobby shop, bearing its current name, Action Hobby. It was a "brick and mortar" operation devoted to RC airplanes and occupying 850 square feet in Fairless Hills. From the very beginning, Marty was full time in the business. He financed the start-up and the inevitable initial lean years by cashing out part of his 401(k) plan and selling his shore home, which he had the good fortune to sell near the top of the market. "I didn't take a salary the first year," he says.

Action hobby is now in its third progressively larger store in Langhorne, occupying 2,750 feet of retail store space. Although RC airplanes still constitute 50% of the business, Action Hobby has expanded into cars, trains, rockets, kites, and beads. Yes, beads: According to Marty, RC pays the bills and the rest of the stuff pays for expansion, like the new car race track currently under construction in the back of the store. The bills? Those are things like rent, heat, electricity, salaries, benefits, taxes, and (of course) merchandise. Action Hobby has nine employees, three of them full time with benefits. "You have to hire employees who know what they're talking about and who provide a continuity to the business," says Marty. "For permanent people, this means a livable wage and benefits."

Action Hobby also has a web site. "We do the web site more as a courtesy than a business venture," says Marty. "Probably 95% of our sales come from customers in the store. The web site could be bigger if we worked at it, but there are some conflicts when you run both a brick-and-mortar store and an electronic storefront. It's very difficult to compete with the likes of Tower Hobbies and Hobby-Lobby. And when we do, we find we're competing with ourselves because people expect to see the same price in our store as they see on our web site. The economic models of the two are different and it's difficult to synchronize them."

Is Action Hobby making anyone rich? "Not yet, but it could for the right kind of person. To really make money in this business you have to go overseas. What this means is that you have to contract directly with the Chinese manufacturers for models, engines, motors, and electronics. The manufacturers are eager to work directly with the hobby shops, but it can be nerve wracking. Almost all of them want cash up front. You've got to be confident of whom you're dealing with and this means you have to travel to China."

Is Marty the right kind of person? "I'm dealing directly overseas on a few items and may be expanding into motors and speed controls. I'd like to have a line of about half a dozen ARF models as well. But dealing direct takes a lot of work and constant attention to de-

tail. I'm not sure I want to get that far removed from the hobby part of the business. I started this business because I liked the hobby, but I've only flown three times so far this year."

And the expansions closer to home also take time. "The RC race track going up in back should generate some significant revenue on its own and, according to industry statistics, should result in a 25% increase in car and car-parts sales."

Knowing what he knows now, would he do it again? "No. There's a tremendous amount of work that goes into starting and running a business, and frankly, that's not really my thing. A lot of money too. The business is now, after five years, self supporting, profitable, and poised for growth. But it took a significant investment to get here. For example, right now I have \$300,000 invested in my inventory. I'm very happy with the business, with where it is and where it's going. But had I known when I started what it would take, would I have done it? No, no way."

Best aspects? "The people, my customers, are absolutely the best part. I love working with the people and helping them with their projects. Sure, maybe one out of a hundred guys is a jerk, but you shrug that off and enjoy the rest." The worst? "The profit margins. Especially on RC, the margins are really tight. That makes it difficult."

Marty's advice for someone wanting to enter the business? "The fact that it's a hobby business doesn't mean it's a hobby. If you're going to get into it, make a commitment and be serious about it. And you'd better have some experience in retail, know the hobby really well, and have \$200-300 thousand to invest. You can make a living from the hobby, but be aware that there are some tough competitors out there."

Where would he like to go with the business? "I'd like to expand to the point I could get away from the paperwork and do the parts I like best. I'd like more time to generate enthusiasm for the hobby, more time to go to shows and club meetings and demonstrate new products. But first I need to expand enough that I can off-load more of the back office work that takes so much of my time now. This is a great business with great potential for growth and a pretty exciting future. I guess I'm just impatient to get there."

**Precision Cut Kits'** phone number is (609) 538-1388 and its web site is [www.precisioncutkits.com](http://www.precisioncutkits.com). **Action Hobby** is located at 1236 E. Lincoln Hwy in Langhorne, PA. Its phone number is (215) 757-9750 and its web site is [www.actionhobby.net](http://www.actionhobby.net).

## Upcoming Events

### September

- 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting at WWL
- 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> CAP training camp at WK Field
- 14<sup>th</sup> Setup day for Warbirds
- 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> Warbirds Over Jersey
- 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting at WWL
- 22<sup>nd</sup> Electric Fly

### October

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting at WWL
- 7<sup>th</sup> Cub & Bomb Drop Day
- 17<sup>th</sup> **No Meeting**
- 30<sup>th</sup> Student Days end

### November

- 7<sup>th</sup> Election Meeting at WWL
- 11<sup>th</sup> Turkey Fly
- 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting at WWL

### **Club Information**

The Mercer County Radio Control Society is a New Jersey-based AMA Chartered club. Its field is in Assunpink Wildlife Management Area off Exit 11 of Hwy 195. It meets at the West Windsor Branch of the Mercer County Public Library on the first and third Wednesday of each month at 8:00 PM. The club publishes this newsletter for members six times a year in odd-numbered months and operates a web site at [www.mcrcs.com](http://www.mcrcs.com). This newsletter is available, in color, on the web site.

### **Officers**

President: Keith Zimmerly  
VP, Membership: Bob Levanduski  
VP, Events: Armand Graziani  
Secretary: James Feszchak  
Treasurer: Bruce Evertsen

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