

Mid County R/C Club History

By Bob Talley

The Mid County Radio Control Club of 2001 is the culmination of several previous clubs in this area. This is a story of people entering the R/C hobby and quitting, members flying and losing models, members entering R/C and quitting - even members living and dying. It is also a story of flying sites obtained and lost. All this happened over the period of time starting at about 1957 to today. Not only that, it is all tied up with the slow development of the reliable solid state radios we all take for granted today.

R/C flying in 1957 was completely different from what it is today. The models were basically very heavy "Free-Flight" models with an occasional radio signal being sent to attempt to make the rudder move either full left or full right. ALL transmitters were on the same frequency - 27.255 mc. This was "carrier wave" control. Remember that this was long before the days of transistors, or any of the multitudes of solid state electronics devices which we take for granted today. The receivers had a glass vacuum tube in them and required extensive protection from the vibration of the engine. Foam rubber was not available yet. Usually the receiver was usually hung horizontally under the wing, suspended by four rubber bands, one on each corner. When the transmitter was turned on no signal was sent to the model until the button on the side of the Tx. was pushed. This signal activated a very small current change the vacuum tube which in turn activated a large, heavy relay, which closed a set of contacts which in turn activated a device called an "escapement". This escapement was powered by a wound-up rubber band stretched from the radio compartment back to the tail of the model. It had to be re-wound after EVERY flight. When the radio relay activated the escapement, the rubber band turned the escapement wheel which then rotated a torque tube which then moved the model's rudder either FULL left or FULL right. There were NO other controls available to the model. To top all that off, most escapements were a sequential device. In other words, if you had got left rudder the last time, you would get right rudder the next time, like it or not. The radios of the day required a 1.5 volt battery to power the filament of the vacuum tube and a 67.5 volt "B" battery to power the "plate" of the vacuum tube. The escapement required a separate 3 volts power supply also. All the necessary wiring had to be done and each joint firmly soldered by the model builder. No connectors and nothing pre-fab here. The familiar Nickel Cadmium batteries we all take for granted had not been invented - and neither had the alkaline batteries. We all used the old-fashioned non-rechargeable carbon-zinc batteries - I don't think these are even being made today. The average weight of this radio equipment was well over one pound. Not only that, before almost every flight these radios had to be re-tuned and the relay re-adjusted with a sensitive voltmeter- a process that usually took 30 minutes or more - if you were very lucky. Since all models were using the same frequency, only one model at a time could be flown - or tuned on the ground. Needless to say, if you got one or two flights a month, you were an "expert" - even if you had crashed. As I said, fly-aways were pretty common. When someone was flying and his model didn't respond to a signal, he would yell as loud as he could - "I AIN'T GOT IT!" Then the fun began. Everybody else would jump up, turn their transmitters on push

their Tx. button. Suddenly someone would yell - "I'VE GOT IT!" Unfortunately, so would several other people who also yelled - "NO - I'VE GOT IT!" Usually nobody "got it" and the model would fly off, never to be seen again. (I still have two models that have been missing since then.) But sometimes they would go into a spiral dive, ending in a crash and severe damage to the expensive receiver - and everything else.

To say that R/C flying in those days was "exciting" was an understatement. The models were basically underpowered, heavy free-flight models. All models were hand launched. Any landing within walking distance was the sure mark of an expert. Since the models couldn't take off too well and landings were usually semi-controlled crashes, a "perfect" flying field had tall grasses usually about knee high. This also helped to cushion some of the "I AIN'T GOT IT! crashes. There were no trainer boxes - everybody was on the same level - we all learned to fly by "trial and error" - better known as "crash and re-build and crash and re-build and crash and etc."

Gradually, radios evolved, transistors were invented, "reed" systems came about and finally, by the late 1960's we had proportional control. It was heavy, unreliable and VERY expensive - nobody except the very rich could afford it. The very first commercially available proportional set was a 4 channel set and cost \$650 - and it was extremely unreliable. Gradually, quality improved and prices came down and now R/C flying has become the great and easy-to-learn hobby it is today. The models themselves have progressed from slow free-flights to the fast, maneuverable models we all enjoy. This meant we all had to have smooth take-off and landing sites, rather than the deep grass we all looked for back then. Thus flying sites of a different type were needed. This began the eternal search for a good flying site. School yards were sometimes used, but even this required that some group had to approach the governing body to obtain permission to use the site. Of course these governing groups always asked for proof of liability to protect themselves from lawsuits. Thus, the organized R/C model club came to south Jefferson County.

Flying Fields and Organization

In 1957, all the R/C flying in South Jefferson County was primarily at Parker's Airport. This site is still there, but it is now a cow pasture. It is located on the east side of Hwy. 69, just north of the big borrow pit. It was good to be able to fly there because, in case of the frequent flyaway, you could always go over to the hanger and ask "Pappy" Parker to help you find your model. He would drag out his old Aeronca Champion and fly you over to the area where it seemed to have gone down until you spotted it. Then he landed, you gave him a buck or two and you went slogging thru the rice fields to retrieve your model. The modelers of the time, as near as I can remember, were, ADD EVANS (deceased) NEIL DELAFIELD (deceased) BASIL HARTMAN, HENRY MIGUEZ, RAY GREENE, and myself. We never did form an organized club, but we did meet together at each other's homes at least once a month to show off our new models and our newest radio gadgets. Flying at this field went on until about 1960, when Parker's airport was closed. It was sometime in 1960 the club began to take on a more formal structure.

There was an organizational meeting in Buddy Tomlinson's garage/workshop sometime in 1960. The best we can remember is that the attendees were ADD EVANS, BUDDY TOMLINSON, BOB MOORE, DEL CROSS, RAY RHODES, HENRY MIGUEZ, BILL FOOTE, and myself. Again, there may have been more, but my 70 year old memory has a bad habit of forgetting things like that. The club was formed with no formal name or officers. We began to fly at various schoolyards in the area. We flew at Pease Elementary School, C.O. Wilson Jr. High and several others. Eventually one of the newer members whose family owned a rice farm out on Hwy. 73, volunteered the use of a portion of his field. This field was exactly two miles past the Taylor's Bayou Bridge. A new industry is now located on that site.

In 1962 a second formal meeting was held at ADD EVAN'S house. Attending were ADD EVANS, HENRY MIGUEZ, BUDDY TOMLINSON, DICK SCULLY, CAL SCULLY, BOB FOLLETTE, BUBBA DOIRON, GLEN DeCUIR, JOE PEACOCK, RAY RHODES, BOB MOORE and myself. Again I may have forgotten some people. The group was then organized as the "Port Arthur Radio Control Club", with the nickname of "The Oily Birds". This was in recognition of the Port Arthur city motto of the time - "The City That Oils The World". In a few years we became an AMA Chartered Club. Regular club meetings were held at the Groves State Bank building. In a few more years the club began to realize the need for a smooth runway. After much discussion on the optimum exact shape and orientation, it was decided that a circle would give the best options. Somehow we managed to get enough money together to pour a concrete circle about 65 feet in diameter. This still caused a bit of controversy and about a year later extensions were poured on two sides of the circle. Some of the members at the time were active contest competitors. CAL SCULLY and MAL TROSCLAIR were competing in what was then called Class III, which allowed any number of control functions. BOB MOORE and BUDDY BRAMMER became THE forces to beat in Class I, which allowed only rudder and throttle control. They designed a model specifically for this class, called the "Oily Bird" which won just about all the Class I contests in a tri-state area at the time. It became so famous that Model Airplane News heard about it and presented it as a feature construction article in their April 1968 issue, with BUDDY and BOB on the cover, holding the model. BUDDY still has a copy of this magazine. There was one other competition class called Class II. This class which allowed all controls except ailerons. BILL FELDSCHAU and I competed in this class. During this period, Cal Scully also had a construction article published in R/C Modeler magazine. It was for his contest winning "Mr. Ed" model. I had the privilege of writing the article, taking the picture and drawing up the plans for that article. It was about this time that the reed systems were beginning to be replaced by proportional systems similar to what we use today. They were heavy and sometimes unreliable, but they were a humongous improvement over the older reed systems.

We held several contests on that field on Hwy. 73, but sometime in 1969 that field was lost to "progress". At the same time, we began to hold our meetings at ACE Hobby Shop in Port Arthur. A search for a new field was made while the members all flew at various schoolyards. Finally, someone who apparently knew the Hayes family reported that they had agreed to let us use some

property on the east side of 9th Ave. At that time, 9th Ave. started at a dirt road (which is now 60th St.) and went north only a few hundred yards to a dead end at a canal. We were allowed to fence the area to keep cows out and eventually we leveled the field enough to provide a smooth landing site. We even installed an outhouse - I remember digging all one Saturday morning under a hot July sun for this "convenience". Finally, we decided that we needed to have contests again to provide revenue. This made it necessary to put down a concrete strip. There was a lot of discussion about the cost of this and some members dropped out because of this cost. Since we did not have the finances available to pay for this, the club took out a loan from a local bank to do this. - BIG MISTAKE !

We eventually held several successful contests on that field. But one day in 1978 we were notified that we would have to vacate it because a golf course was going to be located there. The club was suddenly stuck for the balance of the loan. The members who had assured us that we would have no problem paying off that loan suddenly and conveniently "disappeared". Several of us paid all we could afford at the time, but the biggest portion of the balance was paid off by BILL FELDSCHAU out of his own pocket. This event caused the club to completely break up for many years. I have to put in a personal note here. Because of this event, I and several other members joined the Beaumont club and flew with them for a few years. At some time in 1980, I re-joined the now totally unorganized group to fly with them again.

This completely unorganized group flew for a time at a crop duster field located just over the Taylor's Bayou Bridge on Hwy. 73. Later we all started to fly at the newly constructed paved parking lot of Nederland High School on Spurlock Road. This was a very small area, but it was paved. After a series of near misses with the adjoining houses, we all shifted to flying on the playground of Ridgewood Elementary School. When this field became unusable because of the construction of a new water tower, we began flying on the paving of the old midway on Pleasure Island. In spite of the nearby power lines in front of us and the lake behind us, we had good flying there. One Sunday we were suddenly told that we could not fly there anymore. One of the flyers told me that he had noticed a large open field on the island, just about a mile west of the midway. It was covered with tall grass, but it looked like it would be big enough if the grass was cut. I went down there and made a successful flight, taking off and landing on a very small gravel roadway in that field. A few weeks later a group of the flyers went to the head of the Pleasure Island Commission and asked for permission to fly there. It was immediately granted. We then asked if it would be possible to have the P.I. commission cut the grass to use the area for taking off and landing. This was also granted. We flew there until some time in late 1991. The club slowly re-organized and we even held a Fun Fly there one time. During this period of time, I was fortunate to have two of my designs published in R/C Modeler Magazine. They were the "Flying Stop Sign" - which I still have, and the "Lil Honcho" - which Chuck Carter restored and now flies.

Another personal note here. In 1987, my first wife was diagnosed with cancer and I completely dropped out of the club and flying. I did not return to R/C flying until sometime in late 1991. During that time the club had been re-organized in its present form as the Mid County Radio Control Club.

During late 1992 the Pleasure Island field was suddenly lost to groups of picnickers and softball players. And so the search for a new field was begun again. Sometime in 1992, JERRY HOLMES approached the City Of Nederland and asked for permission to use the old city dump site as a flying field. BILL DAVIS and ARNOLD ROBINSON made several test flights here to check its value as a good flying field. I do not know the exact date the club was totally re-organized into its present form, but the first set of meeting minutes that have survived are from early 1994. I do know that there were other meetings before then.

And now you know: "**The Rest Of The Story.**"

Bob Talley