

## **The Woodchopper Story**

*By Charlie Bruce*

In the early days of control-line flying, before Precision Aerobatics, when Stunt frequently involved stunts performed not only by the model but by the pilot as well, Stunt and Combat were mixed together. As soon as we found out you could do a loop and fly inverted, someone put crepe paper streamers on models and Combat was born. Though in the early days it was called "Streamer Cutting". It began with two pilots, each flying a model towing a streamer; one flew level while the other made passes at his streamer. After a cut they switched places. One of the stunts of the pre-pattern days involved one pilot flying two models and attempting to cut his own streamers. Glider pickup, balloon busting and touch-and-go landing were some of the other maneuvers classed as stunts. Most of these antics were done with slow flying converted free flight models (goats), but it was quickly discovered that a faster model had an advantage. The developments came too rapidly to document as new models appeared at the flying fields every week. This rapid development led to the design presented here, the Woodchopper. Early stunter and early combat ship, it was both at a time before the events separated. Because it was designed, kitted and flown in 1948-49, it is legal under PAMPA Old Time Stunt rules.

As World War II came to an end, American servicemen came home to restart their interrupted lives. Two such were W. H. "Jack" Glenn and Thomas C. "Tom" Andersen. They met while attending Oklahoma State University, then Oklahoma A & M, at Stillwater, Oklahoma, and jointly produced the Woodchopper, one of the earliest profiles, if not the first of its design to be kitted and flown in stunt and combat contests. These two modelers followed similar paths to Stillwater.

Tom Andersen was born May 14th, 1926 in Cedar Falls, Iowa. The family relocated to Stillwater in 1930, where Tom's father became head of the English Department at the University. Graduated high school in 1944, Tom enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He was an Electricians Mate Second-class on the USS Collingsworth ship in the South Pacific. He was honorably discharged in early 1946 and immediately enrolled at Oklahoma A&M in engineering switching later to the business school. He graduated in 1950. I never met Tom Andersen but through his good friend, Keith K. McClure and his widow Doris, I have discovered a modeler we would all liked to have known. Now in his 80s, K. K. McClure, Tom's flying buddy 1940s writes: " We -Tom Andersen, Tom Diehl, Hubert R Williams, Bobby Andersen and I used to fly control line combat every weekend on the football practice field. We'd each throw in four bits (50 cents) winner take all! Tom A. always won with his deadly K&B 29 powered choppers and his lightning fast reflexes. I always figured I would eventually beat him' I never did! He even beat me at a meet in Coffeyville, Kansas with my own air-plane, but we sure did have fun. Those were truly the "Good Old Days."

Glenn was born Dec. 8, 1924 in Marshall, Missouri, where he grew up. He joined the Air s in 1942 and trained as an aerial gunner at Ft. Myers, Florida. Because of his skill he held back for several months after graduation as an instructor. Jack told me this probably saved his life, as over 90% of his graduating classmates were killed in action in Europe. Jack was finally assigned to the 308<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, General Claire L. Chennault's Flying Tigers, stationed in China. This was to the P-40 fighter outfit but the heavy bombardment group flying B-24 Liberators.

Note: For the story of the 308th Bomb Group in China, see Carroll V. Giln's book, "Chennault's Forgotten Warriors"-LOC cat.# 95-67619. Jack returned from China in 1945 with 50 missions completed, seven battle stars, theater ribbons, Air Medal and DFC, as well as decorations by the Chinese government. Jack never talked much about his combat experiences. He said he had lost too many good friends to recall those days. Once again a civilian, Jack enrolled in petroleum engineering at Oklahoma A&M, graduating in May 1950.

Jack and Tom met in college in early 1948, and formed a partnership, which included a hobby shop called Stillwater Model Supplies. Tom's successful Woodchopper design was engineered by Jack and produced in prefabricated kit form by their company, Southwest Model Aircraft (SMA). The kits were cut out and assembled in Tom's father's barn by Tom, Jack, Jack's wife Nancy, and other modeler / students of the University. One of these students was K. K. McClure who still has the original jigsaw used to cut out the Stillwater kits. In 1995 when I took the kits I had obtained through the Model Engine Collectors Association to show Jack and Nancy, Nancy's first words were: "Oh my goodness, I must have stapled hundreds of those boxes together years ago!"

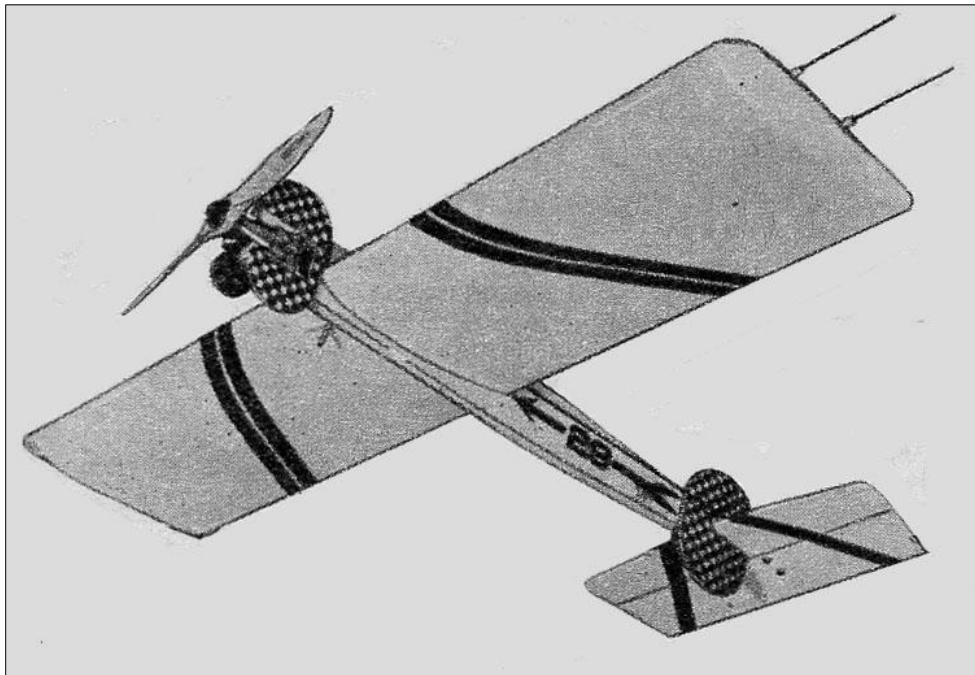
The SMA kits were advertised in Air Trails magazine, July and September 1949, at the very low price of two dollars postpaid! Jack said they sold over 1000 kits at around five cents profit each. He remained interested in model airplanes during the 40 years I knew him. He was not a competition modeler but continued to fly control line and radio control models for fun. Jack died in 1995 after retirement from the Foxboro Co. in Houston, Texas, having spent many years as an industrial instrumentation sales and technical representative.

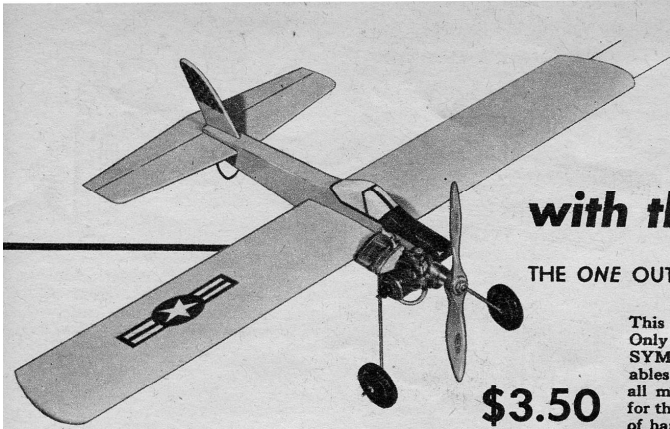
Jack and Tom separated at graduation. Jack went to Texas to work in industrial instrumentation. After a short stint with TG&Y in Oklahoma City, Tom went to Schenectady, New York to work for General Electric. Tom formed a partnership with Bill Miche and, as AM-CRAFT, they re-kitted the Woodchopper. It had the same planform but different wing structure and motor mount. In addition to the Woodchopper, AMCRAFT produced several other U-Control kit designs such as the Jetster, Jupiter and Venus.

When Tom was transferred to San Francisco, CA as a General Electric District Sales Manager in 1955, AMCRAFT apparently disappeared. With his increased responsibility in business and family, he dropped out of modeling but retained his interest in full-scale airplanes. Tom went on to found his own electronics company which evolved into Pacific Stereo, a nationwide chain with over 100 stores. He had come a long way from the hobby shop in Stillwater, Oklahoma, but that's what got him started. After selling Pacific Stereo, Tom continued business ventures in electronics until his death in 1990.

I have original kits for both the SMA and AMCRAFT versions of the Woodchopper, so plans for both are available from me. Since this model was designed during the time when hand launch or take-off dollies were allowed, the original plans show no landing gear. To comply with PAMPA ROG rules I've added a one-wheel landing gear. The models are easy to build and run to fly. I have one with a Fox 15 and one with a K & B Glow Torp 29. The Fox 15 has plenty of power to do the entire old-time pattern in a light model.

I would like to express my profound thanks to Jack's widow Nancy, Tom's widow Doris, Bartlesville modeler Keith K. McClure, Tandy Walker of Texas and PAMPA's De Hill for their help in providing information and pictures which made this article possible.





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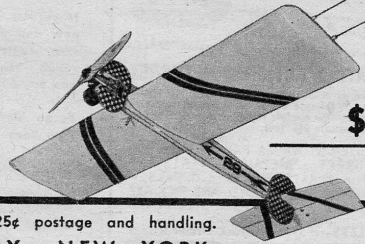
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