



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of CHARLES L. TRACY

September 30, 1916 – March 5, 2008  
Modeler starting in 1926      AMA #645



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Transcribed & Edited by SS (03/2003), Updated by JS (05/2008), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

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## Career:

- Attained the highest full-scale pilot license and flew 4,000 hours – military and civilian combined
- Served as a consultant to the Cleveland School Board Supplementary Education Center Air and Space Department
- 1936: Started writing about aviation; started at The Cleveland Press in August 1939
- 1936: Won a place on the U.S. International Wakefield team in the U.S. finals; placed 11<sup>th</sup> in the world finals flying his own design
- Had 200 articles published in numerous modeling magazines
- 1945-1971: Directed The Press's aviation-youth activities
- Led campaigns to have numerous flying sites built in Cleveland
- Helped organize the Great Lakes Indoor Air Meet, which grew large after 17 years with some meets having more than 500 contestants
- Formed the St. Edward Aerospace Society to help sponsor contests with impressive prizes
- Organized and directed more than 25 air meets during his 41 years at The Press
- Started an evening model building class at Wilbur Wright Junior High School to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of flight; the program continued for 15 years

## Honors:

- 1992: Model Aviation Hall of Fame

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*The following information comes from Charles' résumé dated January 27, 1978.*

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## **Charles L. Tracy** **Aviator, Journalist, Aviation Consultant**

### **Aviation Experience**

Pilot since 1936; attained highest pilot license, that of air transport pilot rating; flew total of 4,000 hours, civilian and military; qualified in 25 types of aircraft ranging from four-engine transports, P-51 Mustangs to Piper Cubs; had preliminary training for jet pilot.

Flew professionally from Cleveland Hopkins Airport for five years, 1946 to 1951, in heavy military aircraft; learned to fly a plane before driving a car; first flight was aboard an American Eagle bi-plane in November 1931.

Flew Boeing 747 simulator, DC-8 and Stretched DC-8 simulators.

First solo flight was in Toledo on November 10, 1937 in Rearwin Sportster with LeBlond engine; entered Army Air Corps as an aviation cadet on December 14, 1941 after a year of trying.

Awarded wings and lieutenant's commission in reserve on active duty on June 23, 1942; assigned to basic flying instructor school then to basic flying school as an instructor in BT-13 aircraft for one year at Chico, California in 1942.

Assigned to India in the China-Burma-India Theater, air transport command, in June 1943 as pilot of transport planes. Flew 1,500 hours, one-third at night and monsoon weather as plane commander and operations officer. Also worked as chief flight operations officer.

Assigned back in U.S. as flying instructor in largest twin-engine plane, Curtiss C-46 Commando transport at Saint Joseph, Missouri in 1945.

First pilot to land officially on Burke Lakefront Airport in 1946.

Flew as Air Reserve pilot at Cleveland Airport in 1946; flew Douglas A-26 Invader bombers in Air National Guard (Ohio) at Cleveland Airport from 1947 to 1951; as flight commander, led squadron of 13 aircraft in formations, flight displays, and tactical training missions.

Assigned to active duty full-time for Korean War in 1951 with 112<sup>th</sup> Light Bomb Squadron, Ohio National Guard; duties were captain, pilot, flight commander, ground training officer; named wing training officer for 2,000-man wing. Trained as night photoreconnaissance pilot.

Received Air Force Senior Pilot rating upon qualifying in 1951, during 4,000 hours of flying attained instrument, instructor, multi-engine, single engine, and air transport pilot ratings.

### **Military Experience**

Two active duty tours plus a reserve and National Guard service totaled 12 years full-time Air Force service; honorable discharge with rank of captain, senior pilot two years overseas in India; five years service in World War II, two years service in Korean War.

Flight commander of four planes and crews in 112<sup>th</sup> squadron, Ohio National Guard.

Chief of the press branch of the Tactical Air Command Headquarters at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia in 1951.

### **Airport Management Experience**

Flight operations for one and a half years, responsible for continuous operation of an air transport command base in Assam, India (Lalmihar Hat, Assam River Valley); in charge of fleet of 35 cargo planes under pressures of World War II; managed dispatching, fueling, routing, crewing, loading and maintenance, often under severe weather handicaps, day and night; base won top efficiency ratings regularly among 20 such bases in the CBI theater (1943 to 1945).

Served as assistant wing operations officer for the 117<sup>th</sup> Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, Lawson Air Force Base, Georgia, from 1950 to 1951. Issues orders for operational training flights by three Air National Guard Squadrons put on active duty for the Korean War. Responsible for training 2,000 men in the wing in changing their mission from fighter-bomber and day light bomber to day and night photoreconnaissance.

Served as consultant to administrators of Cuyahoga County Airport and as consultant to Cleveland School Board Supplementary Education Center Air and Space Department. Also served as consultant to the SST Exhibit Museum at Kissimee, Florida from 1972 to the present (1978).

### **Journalistic Experience: 1936 to 1977**

Aviation writer since 1936; on staff on the Cleveland Press since August 28, 1939; major byline stories include: first news of Mercury space capsule being built in Cleveland to carry an American astronaut into space, published before the initial seven astronauts were selected; covered the first manned landing on the moon for The Press from Cape Canaveral and Houston Space Center.

Personal account to cover Cleveland airports, airlines, general aviation, air races, air shows, NASA research centers in 1945 as reporter-writer, aviation expert; covered all airport expansions and development in the Cleveland area from 1945 to 1978.

During 41 years in journalistic career, material written was published by Scripps-Howard newspaper chain, 17 nationwide; United Press International; Newspaper Enterprise Association; national magazines: Air Transport World, Air Progress, Flying, Private Pilot, Plane and Pilot, Pilot, Airport World, Professional Pilot, Model Airplane News, Air Trails, Model Aircraft, Aviation Age, Wing Scout Manual and radio and television stations. More than 200 magazine articles published. Wrote several articles and served as aviation consultant for Highlights for Children, a national publication.

Began newspaper career in January 1936 as an aviation writer, reporter for Scripps-Howard Toledo News-Bee. Wrote daily aviation column: Flying with Tracy, a series on learning to fly from 1936 to 1938.

When Toledo News-Bee was closed, started weekly newspaper as owner-editor-publisher in Bellevue, Ohio (1938 to 1939).

Gained extensive experience in promotion departments of Toledo and Cleveland papers; financial and business news department of The Press; general assignment and rewrite at The Press; covered Cleveland World Port for four years, served as military writer for five years.

Specialized on aviation by writing two columns a week for The Press for the last 32 years.

### **Journalism Awards**

A series of news articles in The Press explaining the importance of the U.S. SST to the nation, won three national awards for newspaper writing. The series won the 1971 writing contest sponsored by Trans World Airlines; the same series also won the award for best news story from newspapers of more than 200,000 circulation and the James Strebig Memorial Trophy for being the best aviation story in any media during 1970, both from the annual competition sponsored by the Aviation Writers' Association.

Best aviation news story in Ohio in 1975 was the story written aboard the Concorde while it flew at 1,385 mph from Paris to Dakar; the same story was judged runner-up in the Cleveland Newspaper Guild awards for best feature story in 1975.

Received national recognition from Aviation/Space Writers' Association in 1975 for series of articles on the Cleveland National Air Show.

Selected as one of six American journalists to fly on the inaugural flight of British Airways Concorde SST from New York to London on November 30, 1977.

### **Civic Involvement**

Directed The Press' aviation-youth activities from 1945 to 1971, providing educational events, competitions for flying model planes, scholarships, air tours to aviation museums in Dayton and Washington, D.C., for high school youth. Led campaigns to have the city of Cleveland provide model flying fields at key points on the east and west sides of town, both still in use, built at the cost of \$100,000, unique to Cleveland.

Hundreds of young men from the program are leading aviation engineers, pilots, technical executives, and designers today.

Provided youth air programs for City Recreation Division centers. Promoted large competitions with incentive prizes. Arranged flying of models in Cleveland Public Auditorium.

### **Education**

Graduated from Bellevue High School, Bellevue, Ohio, in 1934. Attended DeSales College in Toledo, 1936 to 1938; Cleveland College, 1939; Enlisted in Air Corps as cadet for pilot training at West Coast Training Center in December 1941; Graduated in June 1942, entered instructors' school in July 1942; was designated an Air Corps flying instructor in August 1942.

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*The following information on Charles was submitted by his son Daniel in March 1989 as part of a Model Aviation Hall of Fame application for his father. Charles was inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 1992. The AMA History Project also has Daniel's biography.*

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## **Presentation of Charles L. Tracy to the Academy of Model Aeronautics Hall of Fame**

Charles Tracy, retired aviation editor of The Cleveland Press, devoted a lifetime to producing the most complete model airplane building and flying program in the United States. It was a glorious mixture of models and real airplanes. Developed over 35 years of exciting activity, it made Cleveland the model air capital of the world, creating hundreds of champions and thousands of competitive flyers. Constantly striving to attract beginners and provide events for the inexperienced as well as the experts, Tracy involved city and suburban school systems, recreation departments, mayors, playgrounds, parks, airports, hobby shops, radio and television stations, local and national aviation heroes and celebrities, business and industry organizations, industrial leaders, aviation magazine editors and publishers, air museums, military organizations, airlines, aircraft firms and manufacturers, colleges and universities, NACA and NASA engineers and practically everyone with any influence in the aviation world including the first seven astronauts.

Whatever might be needed to stage a meet or a meeting, he went for. Usually Tracy's determination and the power of The Press prevailed. His efforts built three Control Line airfields, one a \$100,000 beauty with eight curved runways still going at the city's international airport. As Free Flight sites diminished, he always managed to get just one more for the contest at hand. This included renting small airports.

His driving belief: Model airplanes are good for kids of all ages. Let's do everything possible to provide whatever is needed to get the absolutely best results from the ingenuity, invention, and workmanship put into each plane.

He found a way to rent the city's largest arena, Public Auditorium, ceiling 90-feet high, for the biggest, most exciting indoor flying program ever staged anywhere. When size and scope of the Great Lakes Indoor Air Meet grew very fast over 17 years and created crowded skies, Tracy went to renting the Armory across the street just for tests flying during the meet. For weeks before the contest, he arranged for numerous schools to open gyms for testing models, publishing schedules and locations in The Press in his three-times-a-week model aviation column. All this made winter as much fun as summer for modelers. Some indoor meets had more than 500 entrants, 1,500 to 2,500 planes; all flown on a strict time schedule to prevent fast ones from hitting slow ones. At each meet, lunch for all flyers and officials was on the sponsors – Coca-Cola, Kenny King restaurants, City Recreation and The Press. Six age divisions gave the youngest flyers chances to win trophies. A "man in the ceiling" retrieved planes that hung up on lights. Carl Goldberg was so impressed with the whole thing that he followed Tracy's suggestion and created the Ranger 21, a sheet-wood pre-fab, which Tracy's followers made into an easily built indoor flying gem. Tracy used his column plus all model magazines to spread the word about his events, how to make planes for them, and what was being accomplished.

He hired tree trimmers with climbing equipment for outdoor meets to rescue planes so contestants would not take chances. AMA rules and membership always were required. Every new event was tried in the Junior National Air Races, which grew to huge proportions requiring two flying sites – Control Line and Free Flight – and two days to operate.

Results from such intensive efforts began paying off in the AMA Nationals and Plymouth Internationals where Clevelanders shone brightly. In 1961, 17 years after Tracy began in Cleveland, results of the 30<sup>th</sup> National Model Airplane Championships at Willow Grove Naval

Air Station in Pennsylvania, produced these spectacular results: More winners came from The Cleveland Press circulation-area than from any entire state in the Union! There were 48 prizewinners from The Press area. They constituted 10.3% of the 491 total winners finishing first through fifth. Because of them Ohio was by far the strongest state with 61 winners, 15.5% of all winners! New Jersey was second with 38, New York and California tied at third with 37. Clevelanders drove 800 miles to the Nationals, but they outnumbered entrants from all other cities, including Philadelphia, only 20 miles away from the flying site! Larry Miller, Clevelander, was senior age champion, scoring more points than anybody does. His club won the team championship. Tracy's paper printed a page one blurb for his column when he revealed these facts. This was just the midpoint of his Press career.

When total junior age entrants in air meets surpassed seniors, Tracy sought ways to inspire seniors. He originated the All-Scholastic Aircraft Show for high schoolers only in several age groups. Set in the gym of the largest boys' school, St. Edward High in Lakewood, run by Holy Cross Brothers, it was for flying scale models of all types – indoor, outdoor Free Flight, Control Line, and Radio Controlled (RC). The indoor planes were flown for duration and judged for appearance. Others were judged for workmanship with bonus points for those flown in contests. Awards for winners were the big attraction. Tracy organized trips by twin-engine business planes to the Air Force Museum in Dayton, to the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., alternating year by year for 11 years. He promoted the planes, as many as needed to carry 25 winners, usually five or six. He also obtained a donation of all the fuel they needed from an oil company. Even the pilots enjoyed the trips. Dr. Paul Garber, curator of the museum, met the planes with a borrowed Air Force bus and gave the group a highly educational guided tour of the museum. Other awards were helicopter and plane rides and aviation books autographed by heroes like Jimmy Doolittle, Cook Cleland, etc.

Other activities of the St. Edward Aerospace Society, which Tracy formed, included gliding in a single-seat Schweitzer sailplane launched by winch. Speed was easily controlled in winding the tow cable so each boy's first ride was kept on the ground while he practiced "wings level." One quiet freshman, 15-years-old, had never been up in a plane. "We make him fly," said the sly Hungarian winch operator, former Luftwaffe pilot shot down seven times in World War II, after the kid did a nice job keeping the wings level. Winch speed was increased. The boy was airborne, alone way up there at 20 feet and doing well. Following orders, he glided back down to a smooth landing – soloed his first time up in the air, just like Wilbur and Orville!

Tracy's years as a model contest winner himself and as a veteran pilot in civilian and military planes provided much of the expertise and zest that fired his promotional genius and inspired his ambition to teach others the great sport of aviation. He not only talked to air-minded kids, he listened to them. He often said that most of the good ideas in his column came from modelers, especially his son Daniel. An outstanding example of modeler made good, Tracy owes an exciting professional career as a prize-winning journalist and military aviator to early efforts making and flying model airplanes. Admired by Press editor Louis B. Seltzer, one of the nation's 10 best, who hired him before and after World War II, Tracy had full support of the big paper.

More than 125 big air meets were organized and directed by Tracy during 41 years on The Press (1939 to 1981); most AMA-sanctioned. They were:

- Junior National Air Races – 17-year series from 1946; comparable to AMA Nats in size and quality; annually biggest meet in northern Ohio.
- Great Lakes Indoor Air Meet – 17 years from 1952; biggest indoor meet in U.S. events, age division, entrants, planes. AMA-sanctioned, made winter exciting.
- Armed Forces Day Air Show – 15 years from 1953; featured Navy carrier landing event to improve flyers' skills; offered 50 hours of flying lessons among prizes for the three top winners; early spring event to get action going.
- Flying Circus – 13 years from 1953; for junior flyers on city playgrounds; prizes for multitude of winners were cruise over Cleveland aboard an American Airlines lane, first in a Convair, last in a Boeing 727.
- National Plane and Space Model Show – 21 years from 1947 to 1968. Seven age classes, five types of static display models with bonus points for flying types that had flown, 101 trophies, perpetual awards; big civic event held in glamorous downtown department store auditorium with stage presentations and interviews with military heroes attending annually. Among those invited by Air Foundation were Chuck Yeager, Col. Phill Cochran (Flip Corkan), Navy speed ace Duke Windsor and usually the speed record holder each year. Aces among winners were selected by points earned in multiple events. Dr. Paul Garber was chief judge assisted by engineers from NACA, NASA, and FAA.

To celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of flight, Tracy asked school officials to start model plane building classes in eight schools with evening programs. Officials agreed if Tracy would teach at Wilbur Wright Junior High School and recruit other instructors whom they would pay. Tracy accepted, continuing 15 years with a unique program – boys had to bring fathers because it was after dark.

Tracy began his own competitive model flying in 1935, winning several northern Ohio meets conducted by the Toledo News-Bee in the nationwide Scripps-Howard Junior Aviator program. He won a place on the Toledo team sent to the 1935 Junior Air Races at the Cleveland Municipal Airport. He also flew in the 1935 Nationals in Saint Louis.

He won a place on the US. International Wakefield team in the United States finals of 1936, the first time he entered the event, flying a model of his own design. He placed 11<sup>th</sup> in the world finals, competing with flyers from 15 nations at the NAA National Championship meet in Detroit.

In the 1937 Nationals, he placed 13<sup>th</sup> with his nine-foot span, Brown Junior-powered seven-pound Free Flight gas model. He flew a new streamlined, taper-wing design of his own in the 1938 Nats. Plans for it were published in Frank Zaic's 1938 Yearbook.

At age 19, he accepted the News-Bee's offer of a position in 1936 to direct model plane activities and write about aviation. During the next three years, he originated and conducted Toledo's first series of indoor speed races for rubber-powered models and the first spectacular Free Flight gas model events.

The News-Bee assigned Tracy to learn to fly and described it in a daily column called “Flying with Tracy.” He soloed in November 1937. Adding excitement to model promotion, he flew a Waco bi-plane to nearby towns and landed in pastures to deliver Junior Aviator membership cards and pins. Then he used the bi-plane to follow his big gas model loaded with fuel in an endurance record attempt.

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*For the list of writing achievements that Daniel included with Charles’ Model Aviation Hall of Fame application, please see Charles’ file in the AMA’s History Project collection.*

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