

Caught in the Searchlight: Jack Bernard



In this feature in Flypaper, each month, we highlight a club member on a rotating basis. While we see each other at the field or at meetings, we may not know a lot about the other members, their personal background and their history in RC flying. Searchlight should help us get to know one another better.



Jack Bernard, in his role as Field Director for the past two years, is certainly one of the hardest working members of the club and spends many hours devoted to maintaining the field and the mowing equipment and managing his crew of volunteer mowers and trimmers. As an example, October 15th, **Chuck Smith** and **Jack Cutrone** were scheduled to mow but couldn't get the tractor started, despite jumping it. After their efforts were unsuccessful, they called Jack, who though not scheduled, came out to the field and spent over an hour tracing down that electrical power was going to the solenoid and starter, diagnosed it as a stuck brush or bad spot on the commutator, and after manipulating those, was able to start the tractor, allowing the mowing to be completed. That kind of generosity of spirit and with his time should be a model for all club members.

Jack came as an early Christmas present to his parents when he was born on December 16, 1939. Jack's family hails from Libertyville and were founders of Bernard Chevrolet. After graduation from high school Jack joined the U.S. Air Force. He worked as a rocket engine mechanic and was involved in equipment tests for the Titan, Atlas and Thor missiles. Jack also was in research and development of rocket fuels. The missiles could be fueled with either solid or liquid fuel. The liquid fuel would allow for throttle control of thrust but not so with solid fuels which, once ignited, just keep burning with no way to throttle back the thrust. For a time, Jack worked on a gelatin fuel in an effort to find a middle ground.

He says he worked with many exotic fuels, some that would burn simply by contact with oxygen in the air. A simple leak could be disastrous.

From 1958 to 1963, Jack was stationed at Edwards AFB, formerly Muroc Field. The site was chosen by the Air Force because it was an enormous dry lake bed, had clear weather and allowed for extremely long runways. It was at Muroc that Chuck Yeager broke the sound barrier on October 14, 1947, flying the X-1 at Mach 1.07 at an altitude of 45,000 ft. Yeager was gone by the time Jack arrived, but he returned to Edwards in 1962 as the first commandant of the USAF Aerospace Research Pilot School, which produced astronauts for NASA and the USAF. Jack recalls watching some of Yeager's flights in the X-15. The X-15 was carried aloft by a B52 and would be dropped from its belly. Jack says that the X-15 would drop about 1000 feet and once its rocket ignited, "he would be gone." Yeager flew a circle route from Edwards to Lake Tahoe and back. Yeager had four chase planes, two at Lake Tahoe and the other two would attempt to follow Yeager but he would be back at Edwards before the chase planes arrived.



After his discharge, Jack returned to the Midwest and went from the space age to horse and buggy days when he began working for his uncle who had a horse farm near Lake Geneva. Jack would take his uncle's show Shetland and Hackney ponies to state and county fairs to take part in horse shows. Jack later worked in a series of jobs and got his start in mechanical maintenance at Wisconsin Tool and Stamping. He finished his career at Rexan, a manufacturer of packaging for medical equipment, retiring in 2004.

Jack allowed the author to share that he has prostate cancer, first diagnosed in 1996. He says that it was in remission for many years but it has returned and spread to five new lymph nodes. He gets it checked every three months but it is becoming aggressive. Jack's attitude remains positive and he intends to fight it.

Jack first started flying in 2006. His first radio control plane was a two-stroke high wing trainer which he still has. **Bernie Fullett** from Saddlebrook Flyers in Grayslake helped him learn to fly. Jack is still a member of Saddlebrook Flyers but does not go there much because it has a smaller field. Jack's love of RC flying leads him to go to local RC clubs whenever he travels. Jack has more planes than he can count, but only 3 are currently flyable. He has a half dozen ARF's and two kits which he has not yet put together. Jack's favorites are his WWI and WWII warbirds. He has four P51 Mustangs, but only one is currently flyable. He also has a small corsair kit from Guillow which was intended as a control line plane but which he wants to convert to RC. Jack says that he bought it mainly to get patterns to make a bigger one. He prefers building his planes and thinks it is too easy just to buy an ARF version. When interviewed, he said that his favorite plane is a P51, and he has one in a 40 size ARF from Hanger 9 with a two stroke. Since the interview, the Mustang suffered the separation of a fuel line in flight and the plane nose-dived in. His winter project is putting some of his planes together.

He says that his best RC experience has been flying his Mustangs because he likes the realism of scale flight. When asked about his worst flying experiences he says it was "all of his crashes." But perhaps the worst, he continued, was when the wing separated from one of his Nextstars a few weeks ago as he was getting it ready to let some scouts buddy box it. The wing came floating down but the fuse nose-dived into the trees and came apart.



Opening Day, April, 2016 – Jack never missed a club activity



April, 2014



Jack readying his Pteradactyl to fly, Oct. 2014



With his Ornithopter, indoor fly, Feb. 2016



Club Event May, 2015



Doing what he loved – fixing something



Giving blood for the club (tree trimming)

You will be missed!