

Team Pittsburgh

The History Of Pittsburgh Space Command



By Art Nestor, NAR# 29623

Part 3

I hope you have been enjoying reading the history of the Pittsburgh Space Command. I have enjoyed writing it. While I am trying to record events as accurately as possible perhaps you may remember something differently. Or you may have some special memories you 'd like to share. We'll try to print any corrections or reminisces in future articles but you have to send them to Dick Freed or me. During the period of time covered in part 3, Team Pittsburgh (one of our best sources to history) was published a little erratically. Some information may be lost forever. A special thanks goes to John Pace and Rod Schafer for their assistance.

In our early years, the club held Saturday indoor meetings during the winter in place of a launch. We held numerous meetings in the basement of the Lawrenceville branch of the Carnegie Library. At our December 1987 meeting we adopted our current dues system, which has remained unchanged to this day. As time progressed, members expressed a desire to launch all year. By early 1990, we attempted to have both a monthly indoor section meeting and a monthly launch. Attendance at the indoor meetings fell and it was decided to have the monthly meetings during a club launch as we do today.

The treasurer most often handles the new memberships in PSC. You pay your dues and you're in. It doesn't get any simpler than that. But by year 5, as Section Advisor, I was having a harder time keeping abreast of who was a new member and who wasn't.

Club year 3 (1988-89) members include #34 Mac Purvis, #35 Robert Stott, #36 Dan Johnson, #37 Phil Sussman, #38 Justin DeAngelis, #39 John DeAngelis. Year 4 (1989-90) members: #40 Bob Trettel, #41 Paul Buechler, #42 John Pace, #43 Chuck Eslep, #44 Nicky Yu, #45 Justin Puhl, #46 Carl Lindy, #47 Kevin Wilson, #48 Matt Lindy, Year 5 members: #49 Isabelo Sibolboro, #50 Patrick McCrory, #51 Jeremy Bernauer, And that's it. I gave up trying to keep track.

After numerous attempts by club members to win the coveted 1959 Model Missile motor prize in Mort's 600mph club contest, it was finally won by Drew Gray at a club launch on May 15, 1988. Drew's winning entry nicknamed "Warp 9" was a scratch built design flown with an E50 motor. Mort's computer estimated a speed of 700mph. Drew wrote an article complete with plans that appeared in issue #17 of Team Pittsburgh. Mort's contest was one of the main topics of interest to the club in those days. It was one of several successful ideas he came up with to generate enthusiasm in the club.

Orville Carlisle, 71, died on August 1, 1988 in Norfolk, Nebraska of a heart attack. He ran Carlisle's Correct Shoes for 42 years. We fondly remember him for other reasons though. Mr. Carlisle and G. Harry Stine are considered to be the fathers of model rocketry.

Rod Schafer made one of the classiest contributions to PSC in August 1988, with the creation of a club flag. This first flag was comprised of our red, silver and black club colors with an SR-71 Blackbird silhouette. Rod took the initiative to obtain the material and pole and then coaxed his cousin (Linda Kowalski) into sewing it. Flags are a real eye catcher on any launch field and PSC's is no exception. I was so impressed that I asked Rod if I could take it to NARAM 31 held in Manassas, Va the following year. This was the first NARAM that PSC had a presence. I brought home a souvenir patch for Rod, which he had promptly sewn, on the flag. In addition, this first flag also flew at NARAMs 35, 37, 38 and 40.

The first Brookville Bash was held on September 11, 1988. Drew Gray immediately became one of the gang when he joined PSC. But it took a good effort on his part to attend each launch as he lived about 100 miles away. When the club was invited to fly at his home field we were happy to oblige. But it quickly turned from a simple monthly launch into an annual summer picnic event courtesy of Drew's parents, Don and Pat. Their gracious-

ness was shown in many ways, from the use of their home to their work in preparing a meal to their friendly conversation. Here the atmosphere led to imaginative ideas like our signature St. Louis arch trick and Drew's rocket powered garbage trucks.

NARAM 31(1989) was also historically significant for the fact that here is where Rich Freed first encountered PSC. A mutual friend of ours, Bob Cannon, introduced Rich to me on the launch field. Bob wore many hats at Estes Industries including Educational Director and Editor of Model Rocket News and Estes Educator News. Both Rich and I dealt with Bob but on different projects, Rich with the former and I with the latter. Ironic that Rich and I lived a mere 120 miles apart but it took a man 1800 or so miles away to get us together. Though it wouldn't be for a couple of years before we began flying together on a regular basis. Both Bob and Rich have made significant contributions to our hobby. I don't think I could do justice here trying to list them all. Let me add here though that Rich is the best editor of Team Pittsburgh we've ever had.

PSC NAR sanctioned competition remained alive and well under the direction of our committee of Drew Gray, Mike Hardobey and Rod Schafer. We handed out 1st through 4th place ribbons. Eventually though, as Mike and Drew left the club, Rod became the motivator to continue it. Our long running Reach for the Sky event began in 1989. Club members also began traveling to nearby regional meets.

Probably everyone in the club knows that Rod Schafer maintains our launch equipment and makes sure it is set up at each launch. But does anyone know how long he has been doing it? Here's the answer in Rod's own words: "I got the 6 position (launch rack) from Tom Blazanin himself at the Lawrenceville (Carnegie) Library in the winter months of early 1990. I personally helped Tom pull it out of the trunk of his car and load it into my '78 Ford F-150 pickup. I reconditioned it by giving it a new paint job of the color red (originally Tripoli blue) and stuck on new pad numbers under each blast deflector plate. From the picture I have of it, it looks like it made its' new debut in the spring of 1990 at the Seneca Valley High School launch site." Whew, that's dedication!

Bill Kust finally decided (around June 1990) that he had had enough of rocketry and was getting out completely. He had called me the year before and asked if I would be interested in purchasing any or all of his collection.

I had been to his home before and knew it was substantial. I went down and bought numerous plastic model kits. Unfortunately, a large part of his rocket kits were either opened or in various states of construction. I'm not talking one or two, but dozens of kits! What few catalogs or magazines he had left weren't for sale. So I declined most of his collection. Later (in spring 1990) he called me again and said he would donate everything to the club if I would come and pick it up. I did and his collection (including parts and construction supplies) was dispersed at the next club launch. It was a generous gift that is still kindly remembered. Bill needed room in his home for his new hobby of model railroading. However, Bill had a change of heart, and rejoined PSC. The club granted him a complimentary 1991 membership. Don't ask me what he flew! (I think he had saved some finished models). He stayed with us until 1992, then quit again and gave away any remaining rockets at Brookville Bash V! Bill's moving on was somewhat significant because of his roots dating back to the early days of Pittsburgh's first Nar Section.



Pittsburgh Space Command 1990

PSC had one great launch site in Z Field. It was fairly large, wide open and just a short distance from the interstate. Trees were not a problem. A nearby parking lot was available for cars. But we knew it wasn't going to last forever. The field was part of a larger piece of property that was under development as a landfill. A large shallow pit was dug a short distance from where we usually set up the launch equipment. The neighbors were still complaining about us (completely unjustified, honestly). The field was finally posted "off limits". But that didn't make the loss any easier. Our final launch at Z field probably occurred on November 18, 1990. It was a favorite field to both Tripoli and PSC for nearly five years. I believe PSC would not have blossomed so well without this fertile launch ground. Kinda brings a tear to the eye!

In place of a December '90 club meeting or launch, members attended a Christmas Party on Dec 08, at Jimmie G's restaurant in Aspinwall. It was quite a nice affair in a private dining room with our own waitress. Linda Binstock provided plants and table favors. We had great conversation and the club seemed to bond even closer. The evening concluded with a grab bag drawing.

John Pace found us a temporary launch site at a nearby farm owned by the Shemelas . We now moved from a very large open field, to a long narrow tree infested one. The Shemela farm, located about 1mile north of Mars High School just off Three Degree Road was a winter launch site. Parking was not good but we did have a lot of fun there. Our first launch at Shemelas was probably on January 13, 1991.

John Pace adds: "Shemela's farm belonged to the parents of a friend of mine that knew I had a deep interest in model rocketry and that the club was in desperate need of a flying field. Ron talked to his parents and then I had the opportunity to meet with them to explain the dilemma we were in. They agreed to let us use their farm for as long as we liked. I always saw the farm as a place to fly until something better came along. We never flew any competitive events at the farm but did fly engines up to and including "G" motors."

By April 1991, our backup site at Seneca Valley High School now became our primary site. We had used this field on occasions when Z field had turned somewhat swampy from heavy rains. But Seneca's only advantage was that it was level and well maintained with parking.

Rockets were restricted to D motors if you wanted a good chance of getting them back. If you read our history closely, you'll find that almost every meeting place we've had has some historical PSC significance. I like to think that the Seneca launch site's claim to fame was that it was the starting point for my All American Alpha Project.

Model Rocket News was Estes Industries main venue of communications with its' customers. Early issues are highly sought after. It had been one of my goals to write articles for MRN. By 1990 I had several small ones published. But it was hard though to come up with new interesting ideas. I started thinking about ideas that would generate articles on a regular basis. Two ideas that worked well were my Estes of Yesteryear series and the All American Alpha Project.

The Alpha Project was simple. Take one Estes Alpha model rocket and fly it in all 50 states. Readers of MRN would apply to fly the model in their home state and then submit a report with photos for use in MRN. I coordinated the project and edited the reports into articles. Generally, it worked well. Not only did it generate articles for me but also a bit of notoriety. Estes Industries got behind the project in a big way courtesy of Bob Cannon. The first launch was flown at Seneca Valley High School on July 04, 1991. PSC members were invited to the first launch and a picnic afterwards at my house. The last flight occurred at Estes Industries on Nov. 05, 1992 by Vern Estes. The model is currently on loan for display at The New Mexico Museum of Space History.

Possibly the biggest PSC news of 1991 was our participation at two local air shows. John Pace was instrumental in arranging PSC's participation in these events. John Pace: "My reason for wanting to be apart of the air shows was to generate more local interest in model rocketry, to obtain new members and hopefully have someone at the air show visit our booth that had access to a large field for flying rockets. I remember obtaining the name of the contact person for the (Butler) air show from an employee who worked for me at NAPCO. I called the person in charge, told her who I represented and our interest in being part of their show. She was very interested in PSC conducting a demonstration and even offered us booth space in the hangar. The support we received from PSC members was terrific, much better than what we able to generate for the Sci-Tech Festival at the Carnegie Science Center (2002). " Thanks John.

The Butler County Air Show was held first on July 20 -21. We had a demo launch each day. I (Art) gave the launch commentary to the crowd with local TV personality and airplane buff, Don Riggs. Don worked for channel 11 and handled numerous on-air duties. But I remember him most for hosting Tarzan and Jungle Jim movies on Saturdays. Hey, it was the sixties! Rockets were flown using D, E, F, and G motors, all were real crowd pleasers but especially the Smokey Sam motors. Both days we flew right after opening ceremonies, which left all day to check out the air show when not manning the booth. A very good turnout of PSC members spread out the workload. Murphy's Law did not prevail and all flights went as planned.

The Beaver County Air Show was held August 10th and 11th at the Beaver County Airport. Again John handled the details. Attendance at this show was much greater and approximately 300 Estes catalogs were handed out to visitors. I again provided commentary with Don Riggs under sunny blue skies. However, our Saturday demo proved quite interesting.

Between recovery problems and our duel with a WW II fighter jet, I got pretty antsy on the speaker's platform. We had a fully loaded launch rack near the airstrip awaiting our introduction. We were in the right place at the right time. But along came this WW II fighter jet looking for a parking spot. Making a turn, the jet's exhaust turned directly on the rack playing havoc with our rocket's launch lugs and igniter hookups. The rockets were in danger of being literally blown away! As the demo began, Mort's Aerobee and John's Onyx drifted out of the designated recovery area making them unretrievable. The parachute shroud line on my Optima tangled on the fins and caused a hard landing about 25 yards from the crowd. Then Mort, ever the club protector, sought revenge on the WW II jet with his scratch built 110 camera rocket. A parachute separation allowed the rocket body to fall onto the jet's wing. Jet 1, Mort 1, A tie! With a rocket or two yet to fly we aborted the demo. John Pace adds his perspective from the field: "I can still remember the hush in the crowd and the director calling me over to his tent to tell me this better not happen tomorrow. But day two was a perfect success. I remember walking off the airstrip after the (2nd) launch demo, and looking at the director who gave me a little smile and a thumbs up."

PSC was still hurting for a good launch field. We continued to search everywhere we could. This determined search was almost permanently solved when Mort made contact with an R/C club in Butler that had gone to a great expense to acquire their own field. Mort found out about the field and club through R/C flyer John Vogel. John works at Hobby Express in Mars. The field was mowed on a regular basis and had a pavilion for activities. Mort inquired as to whether we could fly there also. We received permission to hold our September 1991 launch at the Butler Aircraft Modeler's field north of Butler, Pa. It was a get acquainted meet, PSC members with the launch field and the R/C aircraft flyers with rocketry. Man, it was a hot day! I believe we were fairly pleased with the field but the R/C club was divided about sharing the field with rocketry. We flew there again in October but in February 1992, the R/C club voted by a narrow margin not to allow us to join them. While the search continued, the Seneca Valley and Shemela farm launch sites had to do. But as luck would have it, better fields were about to come to us! Part 4.

On a personal note, 1986 to 1992 was an extremely active and satisfying time for me in model rocketry. Besides organizing PSC with all its' related activities, I attended my second NARAM, had my Astrocams photos published in the Estes catalogs 1989, '90, and '91, and in an Estes video, and spent considerable time writing for Model Rocket News and working the Estes Build-Up Program .

1990-91	1990-1991	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
President	Mort Binstock	Mort Binstock	Mort Binstock	Mort Binstock
Vice President	Paul Buechler	John Pace	John Pace	John Pace
Section Advisor	Art Nestor	Art Nestor	Art Nestor	Art Nestor
Treasurer	Dick Hart	Dick Hart	Dick Hart	Dick Hart

Club Officers

The End