

Pilot Profile: Leo Pachucki

by Russell Knetzger

Independent thinking and self-design have been hallmarks of Leo Pachucki's activities in model aviation, reflecting also his work in carpentry and construction. Leo turned age 90 last month, and remains one of the more active pilots at the Milwaukee County R/C Flying Field, on Oakwood Road in Franklin. He is enjoying it more than ever due to his cataract eye surgery this past year.

Although Leo can trace his first model airplane activity to his boyhood years at Morgandale Elementary School on S. 13th. & Oklahoma Avenue, he did not begin in radio control until the mid-1980s. He has flown only at the County field. His boyhood acquaintance, Art Schmidt, who also turned 90 this year, was his instructor on an Andrews H-Ray kit. But true to his interest in self-design, Leo's finished version caused Art to say "That's not an H-Ray!" But he agreed it flew just as well, or better.

Leo and Art met during their elementary years at Forest Home Social Center, in a model airplane class. That would be in the 1920s, about the time Charles Lindbergh flew the Atlantic Ocean solo. Aviation was an international rage, and children were encouraged to build model airplanes.

A decade and a half later, near World War II's end, Leo would make his own crossing of the North Atlantic as an American soldier on troop ship. Trained in jungle warfare, and expecting a South Pacific assignment, his group was instead rushed to the Baltic Sea. The object was to land at Bremen, Germany and march south to "shake hands with the Russian Army as far east as possible," to forestall Russian occupation of excessive territory in Germany and Poland. Once there, Leo helped guard German war prisoners.

The North Atlantic crossing was during such heavy seas, that the soldiers were forbidden on deck. When Leo did take a peek out a door, he saw waves so high the view out was simply a green wall of water. When the ship's propeller was lifted out of the water, Leo's group could feel and hear the odd vibration of the propeller free-wheeling without water resistance.

After the war Leo returned to Milwaukee Vocational School to learn architectural drafting. Before the war he studied there in auto mechanics and electric motors. But his work as a construction laborer, rising to roofer and then carpenter, changed his focus to residential building. He built both his present and his first home, and homes for others.



Leo Pachucki and his scratch-built 7 ft. wing span PT-3 by Consolidated, powered by a Fox. 76 cubic inch engine.

The architectural drafting explains why Leo prefers to build his planes "from scratch," relying on his own drawn plans. Leo is known for his work with under-cambered airfoil wings. This willingness to try his own ideas stems from Leo's advancement after boyhood model airplane classes to "Junior Birdman" free flight competitions, including at the Milwaukee Auditorium in 1935, where he earned a 2nd Place. Classmate Art Schmidt preferred staying with the Comet kit "Dipper."

After his stint as a home contractor, Leo placed high on a civil service entrance exam, and in 1949 became a carpenter for the **Milwaukee Public Schools**. That was the era of converting class rooms from cast iron seats screwed to the wooden floor, to movable desks on tile surfaces. In the early 1950s he led a crew of near a dozen men converting the Brown Street Elementary School at N. 20th & Brown St. The Principal then was Mr. Curtiss, who immediately recognized Leo from when Curtiss was principal at Morgandale. It was Curtiss, out of his own pocket, who had bought Leo his first bundle of model airplane construction material, when both were at Morgandale.

Leo and his wife Lone live at S. 23rd & W. Edgerton Ave. Together they reared three children: Douglas, now a Racine Co. judge; Patricia, who raises horses near Stevens Point; and Beverly, a registered nurse.

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