

Paul K. Guillow, Inc.

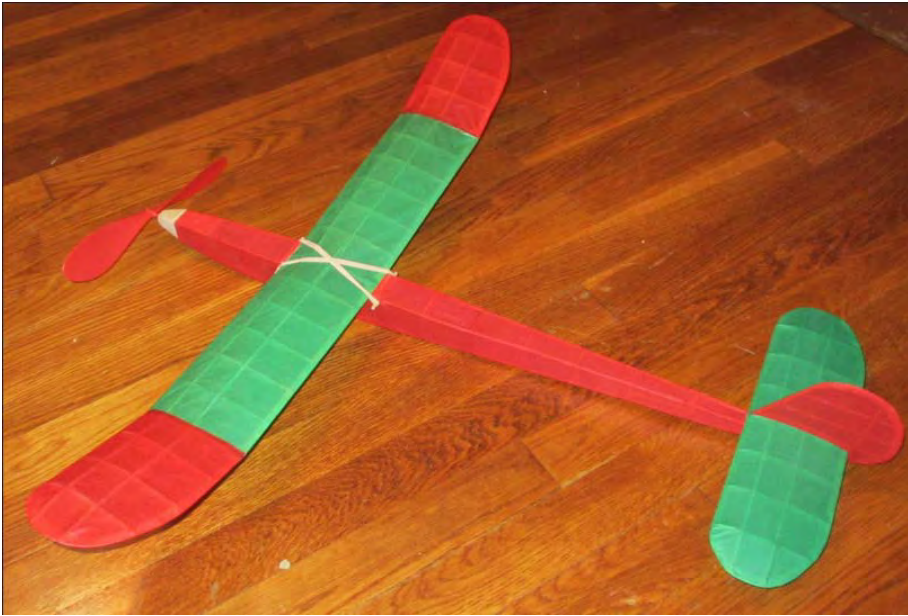
Model Aviation

Don DeLoach



Submitted photos

Thank you to everyone who has helped us celebrate Guillow's 90th anniversary by uploading a photo and a short story. We've enjoyed reading them and are excited to share! Click each photo to see a larger version and read what the owner had to say about the model.









A name synonymous with stick-and-tissue model aircraft for generations, the Paul K. Guillow company in Wakefield, Massachusetts, is celebrating 90 years in business in 2016. The company was originally founded by Paul Guillow (rhymes with willow) in 1926 as NuCraft Toys. Born in 1893, Paul Guillow was a World War I naval veteran who brought home from Europe an abiding love for the burgeoning technology of aviation. Paul founded his aviation-themed toy business at the perfect time: one year before Charles Lindbergh ignited a worldwide craze following his 1927 transatlantic solo flight. Paul seized on this event by introducing his successful card game, The Lindy Flying Game.

NuCraft's first model airplane product was a line of small balsa static models of combat aircraft flown in the war. Another shift followed when Paul recognized a high demand for flying models, and expanded the line to Free Flight (FF) rubber-powered scale and glider kits. In 1933, Paul moved the expanding company from his barn into the present headquarters on Salem Street in Wakefield, a hamlet approximately 12 miles outside of Boston.

In the 1940s, Paul—by then an expert on model aircraft—wrote several books, including Tom's Book of Flying Models and Flying Models: How to Build Them. Paul died in 1951, but the company continued to thrive under the leadership of his widow, Gertrude. For 35 years Guillow's was family-owned and operated, until it was finally transferred to an Employee Stock Ownership Plan, with annual revenues between \$3 and \$5 million as of 2010.



*The board game, **Crash The New Airplane Game**, was released by NuCraft Toys in 1928. NuCraft Toys ended in 1933 when the company name was changed to Paul K. Guillow, Inc.*



Paul Guillow was a naval veteran of World War I who brought home from Europe an abiding love for the burgeoning technology of aviation. Photo courtesy of Guillow's.



Tom's Book of Flying Models and Flying Models: How to Build Them were written by Paul Guillow. These copies are part of the National Model Aviation Museum's collection. Photo by Jennifer Alderman.

Most Guillow's kits are old-fashioned balsa and tissue, just as they were 80 years ago. Plastic propellers, vacuumed-formed spinners, and molded canopies were upgrades in the 1960s, but since then, little has changed. Most kits are scale models in the 16- to 35-inch wingspan range and most are designed for FF.

Guillow's is proud to use plantation-grown balsa imported directly from Ecuador, and the company is quick to note that the harvesting process is kind to the rain forest. It is also proud to state that all of its products (except for a small foam helicopter toy) are made in Wakefield. By the mid-1990s, Guillow's was gobbling up its competition, acquiring Tiger, Inc. in Los Angeles and Comet of Chicago. Tiger was a leader in promotional flying toys imprinted with company names and graphics; Comet was a direct competitor in balsa kits and gliders.

Guillow's is still on Salem Street in Wakefield. The factory complex has gradually expanded, but today continues to use many of its original Depression-era tools. The recent upgrade of a laser cutter has brought Guillow's kits into the 21st century. Now the balsa parts are accurate and true-fitting, making the kits easier to build.



The author's Guillow's PC-6 Porter, which was reviewed in the October 2013 issue of Model Aviation.



Simple balsa models such as this Jetfire gave many children their first model airplane experience.



In 1933, Paul Guillow moved his expanding company from his barn into its present headquarters on Salem Street in Wakefield MA, a hamlet roughly 12 miles outside of Boston. Photo courtesy of Guillow's.

As every model builder knows, balsa airplane models are fragile. For some they are too fragile—thus, they fail to deliver on expectations. This infamous 1959 letter by disgruntled customer Robert Higgins still hangs in Guillow's Wakefield office:

"I have bought one of your fifty cent planes, and it broke as soon as it left the ground. If you don't make your rotten fifty cent plane better, my friends & I won't buy your planes anymore. I think you have the lousiest planes from the lousiest wood (please take this as an insult): drop dead."

Maybe poor Robert was ham-handed, or didn't have a good mentor, or both. Now, in 2016, Guillow's has 69 stick-and-tissue kits in its catalog and several dozen slide-together flying toys. Many of the designs are unchanged from 50-plus years ago, save for laser-cutting upgrades and other small tweaks.

A few surprises have been revealed in the 2016 catalog, including some new designs capable of contest-winning performance, and some static models (even jets) that offer jaw-dropping realism.

Speaking with an experienced Guillow's builder

*Mitch Schoonejanes,
of Seattle, has been an enthusiastic builder
and flier of Guillow's kits since the middle 1960s.*

Don DeLoach: *When did you get into model building?*

Mitch Schoonejanes: When I was about 10 years old. I'm now 59, so that's almost 50 years!

DD: *What drew you to Guillow's?*

MS: My dad was an airline pilot, so I was always fascinated by airplanes. I built plastic airplane

models before age 10, but always yearned for a flying model. Then I saw my first Guillow's kit in the local drugstore. It read, "Flying Model Kit." I was mesmerized!

DD: *What was your first Guillow's kit?*

MS: An S.E.5a, from the 100 series 18-inch World War I fighters. The 100 series is now discontinued, but the models can be found on eBay. I bought mine in about 1966 for \$1 at the drugstore.

In 2015, I realized a dream when I flew that S.E.5 successfully in the Western Flying Aces (WESTFAC V) competition in Arizona. As a kid I had always dreamed about flying my S.E.5 against the Germans and their Fokkers. Of course, as a kid, I didn't have the skills to make the S.E.5 fly very well.

DD: *What's the best-flying Guillow's model you've built?*

MS: The 500 series 16 1/2-inch wingspan kits build light and fly well for lots of pilots, but they aren't particularly scale in shape. I prefer the 400 series, which are all 1/16 scale. I've built them all at least once.

My Focke-Wulf 190 did 28 seconds at the recent WESTFAC V. It is now retired and proudly hangs in a hobby shop near my home in Seattle. Lately I've been building from the 1000 series, lightened up, with half the wing ribs. Guillow's bills these large kits as "Multipurpose." Designed in the 1960s, these models were really for the small Cox glow engines of the time. My 1000 series Hellcat did 24 and 27 seconds at WESTFAC V. I was very happy with that!

DD: *How many Guillow's kits have you built throughout the decades?*

MS: Over the years, probably at least 25, and maybe as many as 50. I've built many of them over and over again.

DD: *You build on a ship in the middle of the North Pacific Ocean? Tell us how.*

MS: I wanted to be a pilot but had bad vision, so I joined the Merchant Marine. I pilot 700-foot ocean vessels carrying freight of all kinds from Seattle to Alaska. There is no trucking to Alaska, so the people rely on ocean freight for their groceries and other products.

Our shipping voyages are 9 to 12 days, and I get 8 hours off for every 4 hours I work, so I have free time to build models!

I build directly on a steel desk, holding down the parts with magnets. I've built six Guillow's planes on the ship over the last few years. It's an awesome way to pass the time on the ship.