

Earl Cagle Jr. Interview

By Richard Burney

Earl Cagle Jr., through his company Point 39 Productions, has produced videos since 1991 chronicling LDRS, Balls, and several large projects. Though he is mainly known for his video production efforts, Earl's interest in model rocketry and space exploration goes back to childhood. Earl has also been involved with several Apollo 11 commemorative launches at the Kennedy Space Center.

Where were you born and raised?

I was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1962. My parents were from the north Georgia area and they moved to Atlanta around 1960. We lived there until 1970, at which time we moved to Augusta, Georgia. We have been in the Augusta area pretty much ever since.

What did your parents do for a living while you were growing up?

My father was in procurement for Georgia Tech and then at the Medical College of Georgia when we moved to Augusta. My mother was your typical housewife. She worked a little bit outside the home during the 60s, but not very much.

Since you were born right at the start of the 1960s, what memories do you have of the landings on the moon and America's space program in general back then?

As far back as I can remember, my attention was always captured by whatever was in the air—airplanes, birds, anything that flew. My dad would sometimes take us kids to the Georgia Tech college football games. My attention was always on the blimps and the airplanes pulling the banners behind them. I can remember on more than one occasion my dad would give me an elbow and say, "Hey, don't you want to watch the game?" I was more interested in what was flying over the stadium than what was going on in the stadium! But my dad had worked for Lockheed in the late 1950's building B-47 SAC bombers, so he understood and encouraged my interest in technical and mechanical things because he was basically the same himself.

The event that really nailed down my rocketry and space interests was the first lunar landing. I can remember some of the Gemini missions and the early Apollo missions, but my most vivid recollection is when those first faint, high contrast, black-and-white images came on the TV as Neil Armstrong came down the ladder.

The events of that evening just mesmerized me so. From that point forward, my interest in things that flew primarily centered on rockets and space flight and in particular the Saturn V.

When did you first get into model rocketry?

The interest started shortly after we moved to Augusta. In 1970, a friend in the third grade and I sent off for a Centuri model rocket catalog out of the back of an issue of Boy's Life magazine; I still have that catalog packed away somewhere. We were so interested in rockets, the Saturn V in particular. Sure enough, there was the 1/100th scale model of the Saturn V in the Centuri catalog. Back in those days of model rocketry a three-and-a-half foot tall, four-and-a-half inch in diameter model rocket was about the biggest thing you could get. But it was \$19 and in 1970 \$19 might as well been \$1,900, so the idea of getting a Saturn V was out of the question. From that point forward, I wanted to get a model rocket kit of some type. My friend and his dad did and they started shortly thereafter in late '71/early '72.

My dad, though he was a mechanically minded kind of guy, wasn't keen on me getting into model rockets at nine. I guess he maybe didn't feel that I was quite old enough and maybe he was right. My friend and his dad were building and flying rockets, however. They were building and flying rockets and were also making some home movies of their rocket flights. I would see those flights and even though I wasn't building or flying any model rockets, I had an interest in model rocketry pretty much from that point forward.

In the early spring of 1976 we were relocating in the Augusta area. I was packing things in my bedroom and I came across some of those Centuri catalogs from the '71-'73 time frame and got re-interested in getting a model rocket set. I was several years older, so I thought that whatever issue my dad had in the past wouldn't be the

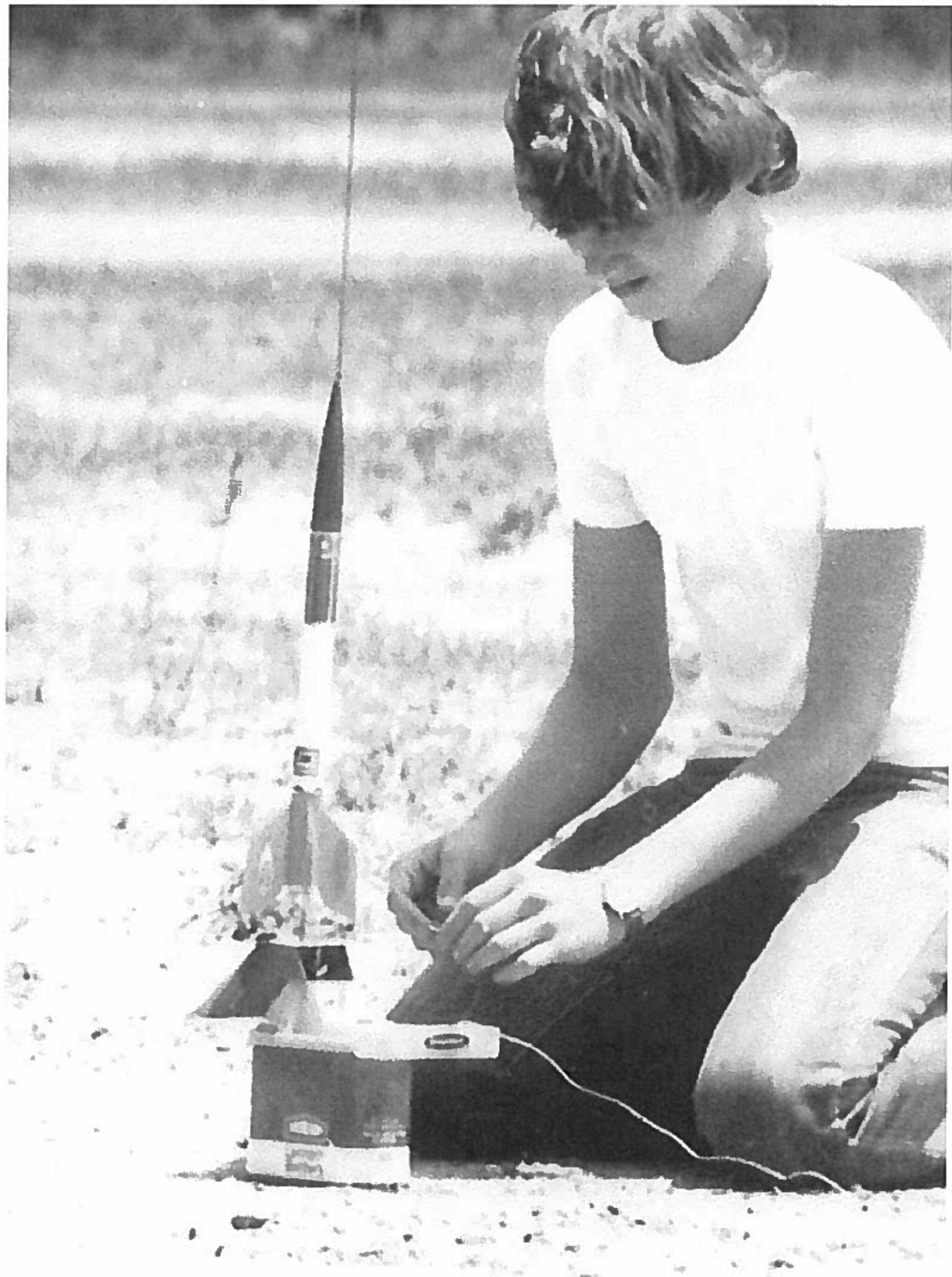
same. So I put in a request for a new Centuri catalog after we had moved. Looking through that catalog, I saw that they had a starter kit that was available here in town at a local store. The next day, I had my dad drive me down to that store and I bought the Screaming Eagle. I still have that rocket. I eagerly built everything and the next day, we went to the ball field of my junior high school and I launched the Screaming Eagle twice that day: the first time on an A8-3 and the second time on a B4-6. That began my official entry into the model rocketry hobby.

What was your most memorable rocket or project you built during this time?

I started to get into some D motor flights in the latter 70s and I wanted to fly some electronic payloads of some type. I had a set of walkie-talkies and I thought, "Wouldn't it be neat to hear what it sounds like onboard the rocket when it's flying?" I took one of the walkie-talkies out of the case, stripped it down to just the bare electronics, made a payload section for it, and built a custom rocket for it to fly with Estes D12 motors. I would take that rocket out and put the transmitting walkie-talkie inside the payload section, turn it on, and the other walkie-talkie was set in "receive" mode with a cassette recorder right by it covered by a box so that so that the only sound the cassette recorder was picking up was the sound transmitted from the rocket. I flew that a handful of times and you could hear the transmitted sound from onboard the rocket during its flight. I still have some of those cassette tapes.

Did you lose interest in model rocketry at any point?

During my college years. It wasn't so much that I lost interest, but just didn't have as much time to devote to it as I wanted. I graduated from high school in 1980 and in early '81 started at Augusta State University. I was still interested in model rocketry and was still building and flying



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some, but I wasn't as active simply because I didn't have the time and I was paying for my education, so money was pretty tight. But in the fall of '82, one thing that I did do, which was a real splurge for me at the time, I thought, "Well, I always wanted the Centuri 1/100th scale Saturn V and I really like scale models," so I wanted to get one for my birthday. During that summer, when I was working for my grandfather in northern Georgia as I had in previous summers, I ordered the kit for my 20th birthday and had it sent to my parents' house. When I got back at the end of the summer, that Saturn V was waiting for me. I decided I was going to take my time building this kit and I was going to make this as nice of a scale kit as I could make it. It took me a year to complete. It sat on a shelf for six years before it finally flew. Its most memorable flight was at the Kennedy Space Center for the 20th anniversary of Apollo 11.

Where did you go to high school and college?

I went to high school in Augusta at Butler High School and graduated from there in 1980. I didn't decide on college until a number of months after I had been out of high school. I enrolled at Augusta State University in their business school and began during the winter quarter of 1981. I wound up graduating magna cum laude and graduated with honors in 1984.

What did you end up doing professionally?

Immediately after college, I began working locally in a procurement department as a buyer for a local chemical manufacturer in Augusta and was there for seven months. In the spring of 1985, I interviewed with the DuPont Company across the river in South Carolina. At that time, they were a prime contractor to the Department of Energy. The Savannah River plant was a defense nuclear facility where they made plutonium, radium, and tritium for our nation's nuclear stockpile. I was hired on as a procurement officer and did that for four years. I did some contract related stuff for seven years after that. During 1989, Westinghouse took over the plant, and I have been their employee ever since. Having started Point 39 Productions about six years earlier, I had an opportunity in early 1997 to switch over into the video production group at the site and have been there ever since.

During your post college years, when did things really start picking up for you

That March, John and I made a trip down to the Kennedy Space Center to photograph and document the actual launch tower from Apollo 11 which, had been cut up into sections and stored in a storage yard on the KSC property.

in model rocketry? How did your first NARAM go?

In the mid to late 1980s, I was still maintaining my NAR membership and was still interested in rockets and model rocketry. In early 1988, I remember seeing in American Space Modeler magazine that NARAM 30 was going to be in Huntsville, Alabama, that August. I had always wanted to go to a NARAM as a kid, but they were always so far away. I thought it would be neat to meet the people I had read about in American Space Modeler or The Model Rocketeer, as it was previously known.

I took a flight over to Huntsville early that week of NARAM and got there that evening and took a cab to the host hotel. When I got to the hotel, I had originally requested that I share a room with somebody because I thought that would be the best way to get to know someone by sharing a room for the week. As luck would have it, there was another guy from Georgia by the name of John Cato who was looking for a roommate, too. That next morning I went down to John's room and we shared rooms and a ride to the field for the rest of that NARAM week. We came to find out that both John and I shared a common interest in the Apollo program and the Saturn V and he had built a 1/100th scale Saturn V like I had. We got to know each other pretty well that week.

I enjoyed the week there and got to meet a lot of people I'd read about in the NAR's magazines. I got to meet Vern Estes in person and that was fun. I came back from NARAM 30 kind of rekindled in model rocketry to some degree, but didn't actually fly anything until early the next year.

How did you and John Cato end up flying together?

In early January of 1989, John got in touch with me about a field he found a few miles from his house. John was in the process of building a 1/100th scale Apollo Saturn V launch pad. He wanted to do a Challenger remembrance launch on January 28th.

That first launch we did together was on January 28th from that field. Though it was a Saturn V and not a space shuttle, John flew his Saturn V model off his scale launch

pad and tower, which was pretty impressive. This was the first launch that either John or I had done in three or four years. We have continued doing that commemorative launch on January 28th—we haven't missed one since 1989. At 11:38 in the morning, we have a commemorative flight to remember the Challenger crew, but in the last couple of years, it has expanded to also remember the Columbia crew and the Apollo 1 crew.

How did you and John get involved with the Apollo 11 20th anniversary celebration at the Kennedy Space Center?

I knew that the 20th anniversary of Apollo 11 was coming up that summer in 1989, and I got to thinking about my Saturn V, which I had completed nearly six years earlier, but had never flown.

That March, John and I made a trip down to the Kennedy Space Center to photograph and document the actual launch tower from Apollo 11 which, had been cut up into sections and stored in a storage yard on the KSC property. We took hundreds of photographs on that first trip.

We thought we could ask the KSC people about the possibility of using John's launch pad and tower and my Centuri Saturn V and putting on a launch recreation on July 16th, if they were going to have any ceremonies for the 20th anniversary. So we put a proposal together and during that trip to the KSC we went by the Public Affairs office and dropped off our proposal.

A few weeks later, we were told that we had been given the approval to do our commemorative launch. As it turned out, they were not only having celebrations for the 20th anniversary of Apollo 11, they were going to have an open house that day and they were expecting well over 50,000 people to be in attendance.

From early April through mid July, we worked our butts off trying to get everything ready. We were going to use my Saturn V which had never flown: I had to modify it to take a five engine cluster and did two test flights in June to make sure it would fly okay, come up with flight procedures for the launch, simulate the nine second build-up of the real Saturn V under the launch pad, and make it as realistic as



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we could. It took us four months of solid work. We made another trip down to Kennedy to talk with the safety folks and presented our project to them. We assembled a ground crew comprised of our friends. I was in charge of the vehicle and John was in charge of the launcher.

We headed down to Cocoa Beach on Friday, July 14th. We spent the next day doing some tour stuff and started preparing everything that afternoon and evening. On Sunday morning, we drove out to the launch complex and picked up our press credentials. We got out to Launch Complex 39 just as the sun was rising. It was exactly the same kind of weather as it was 20 years ago that day; it was hot and clear.

We got as much done as we could by 9:00 a.m. and then broke from our preparation and went across the street to the Vehicle Assembly Building (VAB) to see the ceremony with the Apollo 11 crew. This was the first time I had seen Neil Armstrong, or any of the rest of the crew, in person. It was a big thrill to see them all together; they don't get together as a crew very often anymore. The ceremony finished up at 10:00 a.m. and our launch was scheduled for 11:00 a.m., so we scurried back across the street and made our final preparations to the vehicle and pad. The countdown clock had been running since we had got there that morning and it was counting down to reach "0" at 11:00, so there was no way we could stop anything for a delay.

That last hour was a blur. The press folks were beginning to descend upon us. Cameramen wanted to do interviews with us. People were gathering up in the press stands behind us to watch because this was going to be NASA's official 20th anniversary launch recreation. We wanted it to go perfect; we wanted it to be as good as we could make it. We were tickled to death to be there. It couldn't be as exciting as a real Saturn V launch, but we wanted to try to bring back some of that excitement. About 15 minutes to 11:00, George Diller, who was one of the voices of shuttle launch control, introduced us to the crowd. At three minutes before 11:00, the audio replay of Jack King from 20 years ago began. We got into our positions. John manned the controls for the device in the flame trenches, which would simulate the build-up of the real F-1 engines of the Saturn V. At T-0, I would flip the launch switch for the Saturn V itself. With all that was going on, and that we were doing this for NASA, we were very nervous.

It got down to the last minute. Then 30 seconds. Then 15 seconds... "Guidance is internal"... 12, 11, 10, 9... "Ignition

I had purchased a video camera during the spring of '89 and throughout the year I had videotaped our launches.

sequence start"... at that point, John threw the switch for the device in the flame trench, which started spewing flame and smoke at both ends... 3, 2, 1... "Liftoff!" I threw the launch switch for the Saturn V. There was this "pfffffft!" and a fizz and pop and then nothing for two or three seconds. We were like, "Oh no! We had a misfire!" Then slowly there was a "phssssshhhhh" and just when Jack King said, "Liftoff of Apollo 11," my Saturn V came off the pad, rose and arced over the crowd, popped its chutes, and landed between us and the press stand. We were totally unprepared for this, but as the rocket went up, the crowd just cheered like crazy; you would have thought it was 20 years ago and that these people were watching the Apollo 11 go up. John and I basically did the same kind of launch for the 25th anniversary in 1994 and the 30th anniversary in 1999. But it was basically a big thrill to be able, after all those years, to "re-create" the excitement of an Apollo launch at KSC where it actually happened and to try to bring back some of that history. While there were a great many political motivations behind the Apollo program, it's technical achievements have always been so impressive to me and I doubt seriously that I'll ever live to see mankind undertake anything quite like it again. But talk about pressure for a demo launch: there's nothing quite like your demo 'customer' being none other than NASA to put the pressure on to do it RIGHT!

When did you get into high power rocketry?

Right after we had finished the Apollo 11 commemorative flight, John and I were thinking, "What can we do to top that?" Around this time of the late 80s, high power rocketry was beginning to come out more and more. I was aware of it and so was John, but neither one of us had seen a rocket fly on anything larger than an F motor.

On Labor Day weekend of 1989, we were going to get together at John's for a Labor Day weekend launch, just to fly some black powder stuff. I got down to John's that Friday night and he told me that he had gotten a call from Tom Binford and Paul Gennrich. They were from a Tripoli group (Tripoli Coastal Georgia) near Savannah, Georgia, and they were having a high power launch at Fort Stewart. The invitation was made for both of us to attend. I thought it

sounded interesting, so the next morning we headed to Fort Stewart. The launch was being held on what was normally a tank artillery range. We met Paul, Prefect for the group, and Tom, along with about 10 Tripoli folks who were there for this launch.

They were flying some H and I motors. These were the first high power flights that we had ever seen; motors 2 inches in diameter, some of them 8 to 10 inches long. AeroTech motors with the multi-port Medusa nozzles, J125s, K900s and similar motors, and we were just flabbergasted at what we saw. Tom flew an Aerotech K900 that just blew us all away!

I had purchased a video camera during the spring of '89 and throughout the year I had videotaped our launches. During that Saturday, I videotaped a bunch of the launches so that we could watch them later. All my videotaping at that point had been strictly just to document an event. No thought of doing video production or anything like that.

We went out and did some flying of our own at our local field the next day. I had brought my first G motor with me to fly that weekend down at John's. I had planned on this G motor to be a big deal, but after having seen these high power flights the day before, this G motor was anticlimactic at that point. But we knew then that high power was something we really wanted to get into.

When did you become a "confirmed" Tripoli member?

Late in December of '89, we invited Tom and Paul over to our field to fly high power with us. We spent that whole Saturday flying. I had joined Tripoli in October. Earlier in the year, I had built a North Coast Phantom 4000, which would hold up to H engines if you would push it a little bit. I bought an H70 motor from Tom, put it in that Phantom 4000, and sent it up. Since Paul was a Prefect and witnessed my flight, I became a confirmed Tripoli member that day.

When did you attend your first LDRS?

In 1991, there was going to be a pretty good group of us going out to LDRS X, which was the first Black Rock LDRS. It was myself, Tom Binford, John Cato, Ken Prtichett, and a couple of other Georgia guys. The big thing to me about this LDRS being at Black Rock was all this big open



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space. I had never been a big altitude freak, but I thought that this was the place to go for sheer, all-out altitude. I also did a minimum diameter, K250 powered rocket as well. I wanted to see how high I could put a "model rocket." I also brought out my Fisher Price Pixel Vision camera that I had previously flown, and sent that up in a K500 powered rocket. I think I flew a J125 on my EZI-65.

My big flight for LDRS X was this minimum diameter, all fiberglass rocket with an L750. Few people would realize it because they mainly only know me from carrying camera gear around at LDRS, but I have flown rockets to 19,000 feet. This was the second highest flight of this LDRS. The only person to beat me was a student from the University of Central Florida who flew an L750-to-L750 two stager to about 21,000 feet. The 19,000 feet I got from my flight was the highest flight ever done recorded by a single L750. The K250 rocket I flew went to about 12,500 feet, but it sheared off the front end of it at Max Q. If it hadn't torn the front end off, I think it would have come close to my L750 flight.

How did the idea of making a marketable LDRS X videotape come about?

I shot about five or six hours worth of personal video at LDRS X just documenting our Georgia flights and everyone else's flights. That fall of 1991, I started wondering what more I could do to enjoy the high power rocketry hobby. I had been to my first LDRS, flew to three-and-a-half miles, and flown video cameras on K500 motors; I needed more of a challenge in the hobby.

Someone just a couple of months before had asked if I had ever thought of making any video productions. I had written a couple of articles for The Tripolitan at that point, some launch articles and some other things. By the fall of 1991, I started thinking that video production would be certainly something different and would still be dealing with high power rocketry. It would be an area where I hadn't had any formal training, but I've liked writing and that's telling a story and video production is kind of like telling a story. I thought that would be interesting to do.

Throughout late '91 and into early '92, I started gathering up the equipment I thought I would need to edit together a decent production of LDRS X. The problem being I had not shot that footage with the original intention of making a video production out of it. It was not the absolute best quality footage to use, but I thought I could scratch out enough to make a decent production. I knew I wanted to have some

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music in it, some titles, and some decent production values. Something people would be interested in seeing and buying and something I could be proud of. Something that would tell the story of LDRS X. I spent about three weeks editing this thing together, which at the time seemed like an atrocious amount of time, not knowing that down the road, in four or five years, I would be spending three or four months editing a video production. By the spring of '92, I released the LDRS video, not knowing if it would be accepted.

When did the name "Point 39 Productions" come into use? What was the "Point 39" a reference to?

The first flight John and I had together was that Challenger commemoration launch in January 1989. The launch complex model John had built of the Apollo launch tower and bay and Saturn V were all done in 1/100th scale. Since everything was based on Launch Complex 39, but in 1/100th scale, we eventually dubbed our flying field "Launch Complex .39"; we moved the decimal place over by two. We would be like, "Hey let's run up to '.39' and fly some rockets," or, "We're going to have a launch at '.39';" and so on.

When I was trying to come up with my first ad for Bruce Kelly for HPR magazine, I had to come up with a name for the business. I had done two years of videotaping at our ".39" field and at one point ".39 Productions" popped in my head and it had a ring to it. But instead of writing it out as ".39", I decided to write it out as "Point 39." I came up with the Point 39 Productions name with the thought that I would go back and change it to something else down the road, but the name stuck.

How did the next LDRS go?

In the early summer of 1992, I bought a brand new video camera, a Canon L1, for \$2000 and started shooting footage with it. I went to LDRS XI, which was also at Black Rock. This was the LDRS, which had the 850-pound Down Right Ignorant, which was built by Dennis Lamothe, Chuck Sackett, and others. This was the first time the Kansas guys flew their full scale Patriot. Some really big rockets flew there at LDRS and I got some really good footage. Since I had shot footage specifically for use in a

production, the LDRS XI production was much better than the LDRS X production.

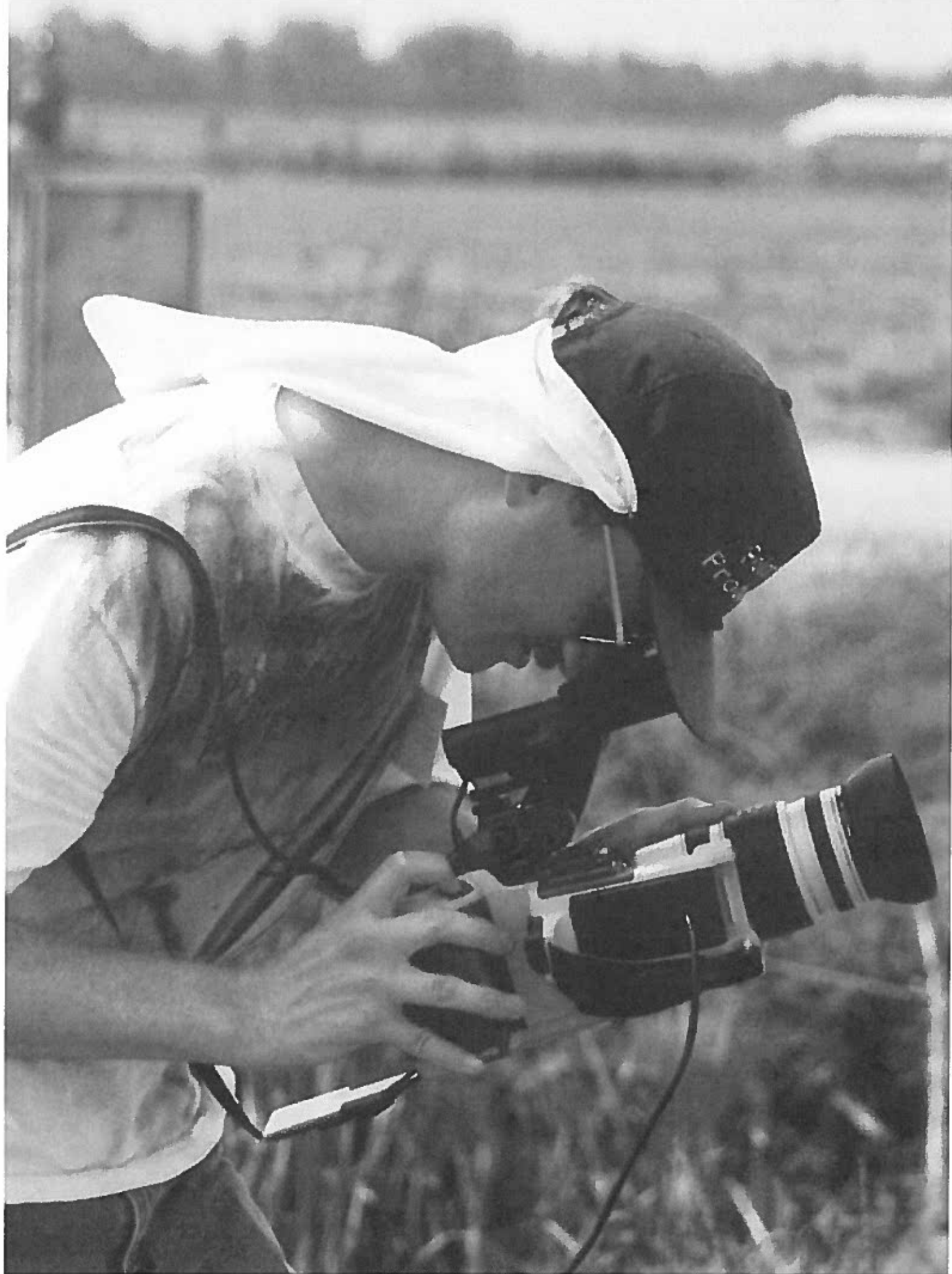
How did this affect your own rocket flying? Have you been able to do any more flying?

I flew some rockets at LDRS XI, but I was working a little more on video stuff. By the time I went to LDRS XII in Kansas, I think I took a rocket with me, but didn't get the chance to fly it. The video stuff was really beginning to take over. Things continued to grow each year and I was spending three, four, or even five months editing, writing the narrative, coming up with the concepts for the opening, and so on. Just like building a rocket where you want your latest rocket to be better than the last one you built, it became a never-ending quest to make each video better and it really took over my spare time. I was involved in rocketry more so than ever, but I wasn't building or flying as much. I had no intention at the beginning of Point 39 Productions that it was going to grow as it did.

How did the video Monster Rockets, which chronicled "Project 463" and "Stratospheric Dreams," come about?

Chuck Sackett and Mike Ward began working on those two projects in 1994. Both had worked with Dennis LaMothe on Down Right Ignorant. They knew who I was at that point and Point 39 Productions was becoming pretty well-known in the rocketry field. They wanted to know if I wanted to be their official chronicler for these two projects. In the spring of '95, I went down to Florida to cover both projects, which were being worked on in Chuck's machine shop. We did a complete walk down of both vehicles and spent a whole day there covering all the details of both projects. Once they got out to Black Rock for the actual launch in August of '95, I spent a lot of time with those two projects. Both rockets flew at the Balls part of LDRS XIV.

Chuck's Project 463 was 1,200 pounds and stood over 40 feet tall, and Mike's Stratospheric Dreams was powered by an S motor with 200 pounds of propellant. I thought that both of these deserved a production all their own. To this day, I'm astounded at the effort Chuck and Mike put into those two projects. They were just monumental.



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During the last several LDRSs, you had to cut your attendance short. What happened?

Over the last 20 years my mom has been my direct responsibility. About seven years ago she had stomach cancer. She has since been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, has bad arthritis in her knees, and requires a lot of care. During the past few years the ability for one person to provide that care around the clock while I'm gone five or six days at an LDRS, or anywhere, is very difficult. I was up in New York for LDRS XXIII for just one day and the very next day she was hospitalized for blood clots in both legs, so I had to return home immediately. When I was in Amarillo, Texas, in 2002, she took a sudden turn for the worse and that was on the morning of the first day. LDRS this year, I didn't even try to go; this was the first LDRS I had missed in 14 years. It was a hard decision to make, but family comes first.

How were you able to put out these last several videos?

The LDRS XXI (Amarillo) video came out largely due to volunteer input. Seventeen people sent in footage and that video turned out better than I could have ever imagined. The Gates brothers sent in 10 hours worth of footage just on their stuff alone. It took me a pretty good while to do that one; it wasn't finished until March of 2003. I was able to stay longer for [LDRS XXII (Argonia)], but I had volunteer input for that one as well. That was the last LDRS video I have issued. LDRS XXIII in New York I had some volunteer input, but I have not gotten enough from that one to do that video as of yet. That video and the Project Liberty video are the ones in progress right now; I have enough video coverage of Project Liberty and that video will eventually be done. But I really have to say that the response by Tripoli members after LDRS-21 when so many responded with volunteer footage was just so heart-warming. It really does show what a great group of people the high-power folks are and have always been. The LDRS-21 video simply would not have happened without support like that.

As you continue to produce these videos, in what ways have you improved your filming, video editing, and production?

I just try to cover as much as I can at each given event. I have added more cameras. Adding the "pad cam" as I call it, starting with LDRS XVIII, has been a nice touch that people like. On the post-production side, I've tried to introduce as much quality as I can into the production, especially with

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the introduction each year. I want an introduction which captures peoples' attention from the get go. But I have always tried to produce the videos from the standpoint of a builder and flyer (which I am) and tell the story from that perspective. That is what interests me: the video side of it is just a way to tell that story.

What event or project was your favorite to shoot?

Picking any one would be difficult, but as far as just overall number, size, and scope of projects, LDRS XIV/Balls 005 in 1995 up in Black Rock was probably the single biggest one when it came to big projects and all that happened at that launch. There was a lot that transpired over the course of those five days.

What future plans do you have for Point 39 Productions?

For the last several years I've been experimenting with the DVD technology and working with that a lot. LDRS XXI is out on DVD now and I am going back and working on the more recent ones and getting those authored into DVD. As time permits, I will get all the other productions onto DVD format, but it's going to take some time

Do you have any future rocket projects in mind?

My dream project would be to do a 1/10th scale Saturn V. It would be 37 feet tall and 3.3 feet in diameter on the first stage. I would probably want to make it a fully functional Saturn V with three working stages. I think that would be a lot of fun. But that would probably have to wait till I reach retirement! On a smaller scale, back when Estes reintroduced the Saturn V kit in the late 90s, I bought a dozen of them. I've thought of taking one or two of them and doing a full three-stage version; five engines in the first stage, five engines in the second stage and one engine in the third stage.

What do you like most about rocketry?

First and foremost, it would be the interaction with a lot of the wonderfully talented and intelligent people you get to meet and share ideas with—seeing their work, seeing their ideas, seeing how they think of things, seeing their craftsmanship, and seeing what they are doing. It's always a lot of fun. The other part is seeing some-

thing you have built, fussed over, designed, sketched out, sweated and toiled over, and to see that liftoff and head into the sky and perform the way you had designed it. But over all the 13 LDRS's and other launches I've attended and covered, it is really hard to describe just how impressive the people and their projects have been and just how much fun it has been to record and tell their stories for others to see. To see the effort and planning that they have put into their projects, to see them try out new ideas, and to learn (from the successes and failures) has just been a real honor and pleasure to be a part of all these years. I remember covering the 'OuR' Project Team (first amateur team to put a rocket into near-space—almost 20 miles up) in '96 at Black Rock as we all watched the transmitted on-board TV footage replay and seeing the black of space and the blue curvature of the earth below on the footage. We all just went wild! It was a real blast.

What do you like least about rocketry?

Obviously in more recent years, as far as the high power stuff goes, the regulations and the more difficult focus on the hobby as result of the high regulations. It is certainly not helping the hobby at all. Knowing the barriers to entry for new people coming into the hobby, that has been disappointing to see. I can only hope that over time that we can get more and more of that out of the way, but in the reality of the world we live in these days it may be difficult to repeal some of those things.

What recommendations can you give to someone starting out in the hobby?

Take your time, take it slowly, and don't try to jump into the biggest thing you can do right off the bat; that seems to be the temptation, especially in high power. A lot of times the journey is half the fun and the journey is where you learn the most. Pace yourself as you start off. Start with something you can have a good successful beginning with, learn from that, and build from there.

