

30 Years of Flying at the Field (Part III) – Gerry Markgraf

A true crisis erupted for the club in 1995 when we were notified that the City of Long Beach planned to take over our field and the entire North end of the park to create a large Sports Complex. The project was planned in conjunction with the planned removal of the Long Beach Naval Hospital and the creation of a Shopping Center in that area. The Sports Complex and the Shopping Center were intended to generate much needed revenue for the city and it appeared all but certain that we would lose our beloved field. Our club leadership was told that we would be moved to a new (undetermined) location, but we were not to protest the new development in any way or our new field would not be forthcoming. For over a year, the club faced eviction; sometimes we were told we were only a few weeks away. Maintenance and watering on the field ceased and the gophers took over the field. At one time I remember comparing the surface of our field to the backside of the Moon. It was a depressing time. A ray of hope appeared in the spring of 1996 as various local groups began to get word of the project and organize opposition. 5th District Councilman Les Robbins was determined that the Sports Complex would be built, but local groups and the Sierra Club were just as determined that park land would not be destroyed to build the Sports Complex. On March 31, 1996 a Save the Park picnic was held in the park. EDSF members felt that it was important to show our support for the park, so we participated by bringing lots of airplanes for a "Show and Tell" at the picnic. The eventual result was the park was saved to the great relief of us all. Councilman Robbins honored us with a visit to our club meeting and declared that we would probably be able to use the field indefinitely. He doubted that any other attempt to change the park would ever meet with success.

This is the final of a three part article. Anyone who has missed parts I and II, check the EDSF website on the club History page. Each released segment of Gerry's article will be appended to the previous segment and posted on the website. A collection of club photos from the past are also available for viewing on the website. – Tom Shinsato



Gerry Markgraf



Bob Peters and ??



Joe Richert and Mark Child look on doubtfully as Gerry Markgraf prepares his electrified Klingberg wing for its first flight.



A contest takes lots of volunteers. Anyone know these guys names?



Mark child on the winch.



Mark Child launches a polyhedral sailplane. We flew from the south end of the field when the Santa Ana winds blew.



Launching at dusk.

Unfortunately, our fellow fliers at Mile Square were soon faced with a similar problem and the outcome was not as good. The city of Fountain Valley determined that 2 golf courses in Mile Square Park were insufficient and a 3rd one was required. This was land given to the city by the government as park land, but ignoring the protests of modelers and other organizations who had used the land for decades, the city created yet another urban desert (golf course) for the sole enjoyment of those able to afford the city's green fees. The fliers who had enjoyed Mile Square as a world class RC model site were forced out with no alternatives and many chose to join us at El Dorado. This created a bit more crowding than we were used to, but we made many new friends and the end result has been good for all



Nick Nickopolis (Vice Pres) was a frequent flyer with his Leisure Amptique.

Park flyers (or schoolyard fliers) started innocently enough. In the late '90s and early years of the new millennium, Hobby Lobby and others began to import some very lightweight slow flyers patterned loosely in pre-1914 designs. The intention was to create a very lightweight, slow flying airplane that would be suitable for flying in a small, confined area. Other companies followed suit, including an upstart company from Taiwan called GWS (Grand Wing Servo) who produced a simple lightweight knockoff of the ubiquitous "Ugly Stick" design. The Lightstick's IPS motor, coupled with the appearance of lighter and more powerful batteries (NiMh, Li-Ion, and finally Li-Po) as well as lighter radio components produced a revolution in new electric designs intended to fly quietly in parks and other small places. ARFs and kits of all types followed. Brushless motors had been around for awhile, but generally they were very powerful and expensive. Modelers of smaller aircraft resisted going to brushless because of the high cost relative to brushed setups. The creation of the "outrunner" type motor produced a smaller lighter type of brushless motor that didn't require a gearbox. CD ROM motors became available in kits for less than \$10.00 and were popular just long enough to demonstrate how simple these motors really were. Within a very short time, a brushless motor and controller could be had for the equivalent or less than a comparable brushed motor/controller. Radio components (Receivers, servos, and transmitters) became available individually instead of in sets and were far lighter, cheaper and more reliable than had previously been imagined. All of this new technology has sparked a great interest in electric RC flying that can be evidenced on any good Thursday or weekend at the field when upwards of 30 cars can be lined up in the parking area.

The layout of our flying field has changed and evolved over the years. Unfortunately, we have lost some of the flexibility that allowed us to chase the wind back in the early days. Until recently, electric fliers had always been constrained by the lack of a runway. Back in the '90s, a couple of our members mowed a runway in the grass on the top of the hill east of the field. For several years, the electric fliers flew from the top of the hill and it was a grand place to be. Our backs were generally to the sun so vision was perfect and the elevated position gave a much better perspective for flight. Alas, the approach for the sailplane landing area came down the crest of the hill and the occasional shadow and whistling sound of a large sailplane going over your head was not for the faint of heart. It made the sailplane fliers nervous too and by mutual consent, the flight line was joined back into one. Improvements to the field layout clearly designated the flight line and pit areas. I suspect that many of our electric fliers don't miss the job of packing themselves and their planes up to the top of the hill and I doubt they would be willing to go back. Still, every once in awhile, I go up there to test out a new plane and remember again how truly great it was. Today, through the courtesy of Bill Sorenson, Tom Shinsato and others, we have a very serviceable mown runway which has opened up flying for all manner of scale and sport aircraft that couldn't operate on the field before.

The proximity of our flying field to the Long Beach Airport and its approaches has always created a certain amount of friction between some of our fliers and those who fly the real aircraft. We have had periodic visits from the authorities over the years following reports of model aircraft in the path of aircraft approaching Long Beach. This writer can personally remember the local

Sheriff's helicopter landing to warn fliers to restrict their altitude. The Sheriff at that time was flying a Bell model 47 (remember MASH) which gives the reader a good idea of how long the problem has existed. EDSF members generally have respected the altitude limitations in the areas, but occasionally, especially when contests are held and competition is stiff, outside fliers have been known to "speck 'em out". Unfortunately, following a contest about a year ago, the local authorities were upset at the altitude infringements and let the club know in no uncertain terms that we faced closure if something wasn't done. Today, we operate under a strict 400 foot altitude restriction which is the same as other clubs in the proximity of airports (Apollo Field at Sepulveda Basin (near van Nuys Airport) is another example). All EDSF members are committed to this rule, not only because we face closure of the field if we do not, but because to club is committed to the safety of everyone on the field, above the field and in the surrounding area.

Just as technology has made it possible for us to fly lighter, cheaper and safer electrics, the technology of sailplane and soaring has created a new class of hand launch glider that is far more popular than the first generation of hand launch glider. This is the Discus Launch Glider, which is thrown by grabbing a hard point on the wing tip and swinging the glider around and up, much like a discus. As with any new technology, the improvements are already revolutionary and the cost of a competitive glider, while not as much as its unlimited cousins, is still pretty high. If you can master the swing technique and the scoring system, Discus Launch Gliders appear to be a very fun way to fly and compete without breaking the bank (or the altitude limit). DLG enthusiasts have organized several contests at the field and the contests are well attended and fun whether you are a participant or just watching. The DLG flying uses a section of the flying field that is little used, thereby retaining the club's claim on that section of the field, and is enjoyable for non-flying visitors at the park to watch and enjoy. The DLG pilots have made a great contribution to multi-use flying at the field, by using yellow frequency pins to inform other fliers when the frequency is in use. DLG fliers will relinquish the pin after a reasonable interval when asked by another flier and expect that they will get the same consideration in return.



John Claire was an active flyer for many years.

We seem to be enjoying a pretty nice time at the field these days. The grounds are kept in reasonable shape and the addition of a mown runway has greatly enhanced the usability of the field. Hopefully, other club members will continue to support Tom in helping to bring and use the mower so we can retain this important feature. The club has become recognized as an asset to Eldorado Park – indeed, we seem to be one of the largest and most consistent user groups in the park – particularly during the lean winter months. The addition of the long sought-after “Glider and Electric Field” sign was an important symbol of recognition from the city that we have “arrived”. The charging station is a truly outstanding feature and much appreciated. Alas, the need to rigidly enforce the “glass ceiling” of 400 feet has made it difficult for the unlimited sailplane fliers to compete. Hopefully, they will find ways to fly and compete with this limitation. The DLG seems to offer an attractive alternative although some (me included) probably will not have the physical prowess to make an adequate launch and be competitive. Hopefully, alternate techniques are being found so that all can continue to enjoy our field.

After 30 years of flying at the field, I still enjoy reflecting on our good fortune in being able to enjoy our hobby in such a beautiful spot. I've visited many other flying fields over the years and have never seen another site that offers the space and beauty of ours. I once brought an English friend to the field. He remarked that it was “pretty enough to build a castle on the hill. It certainly is that and hopefully, we will be able to enjoy this wonderful place for many more years without any castles or shopping malls or sports complexes or anything else intruding on our beautiful flying field.



Gerry has done a great job in writing this article, I'm sure everyone will agree. The old timers as well as the more recent members will think back and have a greater appreciation of our club, the people who started it and the officers and members who have kept the club active, progressing and improving through the years. The ever changing technology has constantly brought us new and exciting products. Where will it end? Our hobby itself covers a wide spectrum of interest to everyone involved, from non powered gliders, to electric motor driven planes, IC engines and even turbine jets. Planes can be designed and built by the more ambitious hobbyist, built from a kit, or picked from an endless selection of ARFs. How can anyone not find anything that will of interest to himself? Thank you, Gerry, great job!!