



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of ROBERT L. (BOB) UNDERWOOD



Born October 16, 1931  
AMA #690

Written & Submitted by RU (03/1997); Transcribed by NR (09/2000); Edited by SS (2002), Updated by JS (10/2008), Reformatted by JS (01/2010), Updated (10/2010), updated by RU (10/30/2013)

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## Honors:

- 1974: AMA Distinguished Service Award – Leadership in St. Louis area
  - 1980: Missouri Park Board Award – For funds gathered for their scholarship program
  - 1985: AMA Meritorious Service Award – Executive Council membership
  - 1997: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
  - 1998: FAI Paul Tissandier Diploma – For “Service to Aeromodelling and Air Sports”
  - 1988: NAA Certificate of Congratulations
  - 2002: AMA Fellowship Award
  - 2009: District Service Award
  - 2009: President’s Award
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*The following was written in March of 1997 by Bob Underwood.*

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Bob Underwood was born October 16, 1931 in Plymouth, Indiana. By age three, the family was located in St. Louis, Missouri. Vague memories exist of having attended a model meet in Forest Park in St. Louis, where a most unsuccessful attempt was made at flying a rubber-powered model. This was probably a Plymouth meet.

During the years following, many models were built. These ranged from an O&R powered scratch built Free Flight (that perhaps attained a spectacular 20 feet of altitude) to Control Line sport and acrobatic models. Many Thermic 50s were part of that time, including one that landed in the middle of Notre Dame Stadium while visiting relatives in South Bend, Indiana. Another model remained aloft for some six hours before it landed in the Mississippi River and was retrieved by a tugboat captain.

Bob’s modeling activity continued through the years up to high school and then seemingly ended. Photography, school, and track consumed his time. It was not until returning from Army service in 1956 that the lack of peeling Ambroid from his fingers once again struck.

Between then and 1966, he went through building a Sterling American Scout electric powered RC cargo ship, a scratch built Mississippi River tugboat and an unfinished submarine while living with his wife, Rae, in an apartment. Upon buying a house, HO gauge railroading became the order of the day. Dismayed at the time required to clean the brass track, that interest disappeared and suddenly aeromodeling was back!

With a Falcon 56, Citizenship 6 channel reed set, he was on the way. There was, however, a slight detour to put the Falcon aside, because it was too “hot” to use to teach himself to fly and a White Cloud served in that capacity. At first, the trips to the field were short in duration due to the necessity to repair things. However, to Rae’s surprise, by the end of the summer, Bob returned home, not because the model needed repair, but because it was time for dinner!

The rest of the 1960s were consumed learning more and ultimately becoming involved with the local St. Louis modeling groups. He became president of the Signal Chasers Radio Control Club and chair of the Greater St. Louis (GSLMA) Modeling Association. His eight years as chair of the GSLMA did much to prepare Bob for AMA administration activities.

Composed of some 15 clubs at one point, the association encompassed Free Flight, Control Line, and Radio Control. All the many activities, such as a June AAA contest, mall shows, community programs and a yearly air show to benefit a scholarship program, involved participation by all three disciplines.

In 1970, John Worth asked Bob to attend the Nationals (Nats) at Glenview and work with the AMA Cub (Delta Dart) program. Accompanied by his father, he did so and by 1975; found himself, his wife, and two daughters all “working the Nats”, not only by running the Delta Dart programs, but with many other tasks.

Having moved in the competition arena from flying Radio Control Pattern to Scale, he finished fourth in FAI F4C in 1975 and found himself the alternate for the team headed to Sweden in 1976. Due to the fact that Bob Wischer was the reigning World Champion from 1974, the AMA decided to send Wischer to defend his championship and move Underwood to the third team position. While he finished toward the middle of the pack that year, the team was able to finish in the top three. Subsequent trips to the World Championships resulted in an individual second place in England, 1978; a fifth in Canada, 1980; and a third in 1984 in France. After beginning his career as AMA technical director, Bob felt it necessary to refrain from further attempts to make the team in an event which involved two scores, both of which were subjective.

During this entire period, from the late 1960s to 1985, when Bob joined the staff of AMA as technical director, the administrative and competition tasks escalated. Clearly, modeling had become an important part of not only Bob's life, but his wife and daughters as well. The following represents the various activities in which he participated during that time.

### **Local St. Louis Area Administrative**

- President, Signal Chasers Radio Control Club - five years
- Chair, Greater St. Louis Modeling Association - eight years
- Contest Director for yearly AAA, multi-disciplined contests, and numerous fun flies, mall shows, demonstrations, etc.
- Appeared twice on local TV shows concerned with modeling

- Spearheaded a Cub Scout pilot program of 18 outdoor camps using the Delta Darts
- Ran newcomer classes for his club
- With Travis McGinnis, developed a script and program for the local PBS TV station (Unfortunately, it did not reach fruition due to lack of funds)
- Created a yearly model airshow to procure funds for the Missouri Park Board Scholarship Fund
- Conducted model building programs for fifth grade classes in two different school districts, 1970 to present

### **AMA District Administrative**

- Served on the Radio Control Contest Board
- Scale Contest Board, District VI
- Elected to the Executive Council in 1983, District VI
- Served as an AVP under four different District VI Vice Presidents

### **National and International Administrative**

- Contest Director for five FAI World Championships – Scale RC Aerobatics and RC Helicopter
- Hospitality Chairman for two FAI World Championships – RC Aerobatics and Scale
- Chairman and Member, Scholarship Committee - 35 years
- Coordinator and Member, Frequency Committee - 15 years
- Chairman and Member, Safety Committee – 25 years
- 10 years as AMA technical director on AMA staff
- Created Education Committee. 1995, and served as staff Education Director and continues to serve on the committee
- CIAM delegate for Scale – F4B/F4C
- Served as AMA Executive Director on interim basis – 1993 - 1994
- Radio Control Scale Event Director, Nats – 7 years
- 1981-1985 Nats Scale Category Manager - 5 years
- Founded National Association of Scale Aeromodelers (NASA) in 1977 and served as president multiple occasions for a total of nine years
- Scale team manager, Netherlands 1984
- Served as FAI/CIAM Technical Secretary for 6 years
- Served as FAI Jury member for 5 World Championships, as well as various United States Team Selection Programs
- Served as Contest Director for 2 FAI Control Line Team Selection Programs
- Member, Bylaws Committee – 2012 to present
- Member, Hall of Fame Selection Committee, 10 years
- Numerous ad-hoc Executive Council committees 1972 to present

### **Competition**

- Scores of various place wins at local and regional Pattern and Scale contests in the Midwest
- Nats wins from 1972 through 2009 in RC Scale and RC Aerobatics
- FAI World Championships; second individual in 1978 and third in 1984
- Scale Masters Louisville, KY; first and second places, as well as other places from the event inception until 2002
- Top Gun; tenth 1996, as well as other awards

### **Published Material**

- Model Aviation - Various columns and plans
- Model Builder magazine - Scale column, “One to One”
- Model Airplane News magazine - Scale column, “Scale Techniques”
- Radio Control Scale Modeler – Article
- Plans and article for “Thingamabob” – a trainer that can be flown Control Line, Radio Control, electric, glow, trike gear, tail dragger or tethered Radio Control with a five minute conversion time

*-Bob Underwood*

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