



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of LEROY R. BROOKS

Born February 21, 1933

Started modeling in 1942

AMA #4435



Written & Submitted by LRB (07/2003); Transcribed & Edited by SS (07/2003), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

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## Career:

- As a youth flew mostly Control Line models and simple gliders
  - Since 1967: Has competed in monthly and annual events 1970: Helped organize the San Diego Staffel and then helped organize the Stadium Air Force six years later
  - Bought Hillcrest Hobby Craft in San Diego in 1976 and ran it until 1986
  - 1979: Helped reactivate the San Diego Aeroneers and it became a Society of Antique Modelers club
  - While competing with the San Diego Aeroneers was the high points winner in Old Timer events 11 times
  - 1978 – 1980: Taught elementary students how to build and fly models
  - In the last 10 years (as of July 2003) has logged over 10,000 volunteer hours at the San Diego Aerospace Museum
  - Became an AMA contest director in 1983 and an AMA leader member in 1984
  - 1983-1999: Was the contest director of the San Diego Aeroneers
  - Has served as various officers in numerous model clubs
  - 1995 – 1997, and 1999: Instructed an Air Force Junior ROTC group in flying Radio Control aircraft
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My long term interest in modeling began in 1942 when I was 9-years-old and World War II was less than a year old for the United States. The first models I assembled were of paper, the variety offered for a dime and a box top from a box of cereal. You mailed in the dime and box top and in return, the company would send two models.

My parents supported this activity because it would keep me busy while unable to play outside because of a long bout with most of the childhood illnesses. At that time, the health department would put a quarantine sign on your house for a given period of time depending on the illness. In our home, it seemed to be a theater for every couple of weeks some other ailment was playing.

Like most young people, I had a couple of best friends whom I hung around with and played. My two were Matt Ballard and Charles Columbus. We would go to Fisher's Hobby Shop in Louisville, Kentucky, to buy our supplies. The store was on Fourth Avenue, over the old Rialto Theater and all the way across town from where we lived. It was a 30- to 45-minute streetcar ride. We flew mostly Control Line or simple gliders. My first engine was a Forster 29 that took the earnings of a whole summer's lawn mowing to make the purchase. I also had a GHQ, but never did have much success in getting it to run well. The Forster 29 ran well and served as my mainstay power. During the war, balsa was in very short supply, so we made our Control Line

models from apple crates we would get from the local grocer. Because of the weight, I remember that they flew like bricks, but, being young, we thought they were great flyers.

Modeling came to a halt during high school. I went into the service in 1951 and did not get back into modeling until 1967 while stationed in San Diego, California. One day, on the way home from the base, I stopped at Hillcrest Hobby Craft at 3921 Fifth Avenue. The owner at the time, Russ Merrel, spoke of a model club called The San Diego Orbiteers. I went to their meeting, then out to the field where they flew and was, as they say, hooked. Russ and I became very good friends. He helped me with a Midwest Gollywok, a rubber-powered model. From then on, I built scale rubber-powered and glow-powered models with a later entry into Radio Control (RC).

During those years, I flew with some of the finest people that I have ever met. These people were the kind you can call good friends – Russ Merrel, Walt Mooney, Bob Peck, Bob Harrah and George Wagner, to name a few. I could fill up several pages with the names of people I have met who make the hobby what it is.

Walt Mooney got me started in building from plans by giving me plans that he had drafted, a 30-inch wingspan Pilatus Porter with a Cox Pee Wee .020 motor. At one of our monthly contests, I came in first place and Walt came in second. Walt said, with a smile on his face, “I’m not giving you any more of my plans. From now on you have to draw up your own.” I thought this was a great compliment coming from a person of Walt Mooney’s stature in modeling.

About 1970 I helped to organize the San Diego Scale Staffel with Bob Peck, Walt Mooney, Bob Petro, and Bill Hanna. The club still exists today. About 1976, I helped organize the Stadium Air Force, although only a small group continues to fly there today. In 1979, with the help of Don Boyle and George Wagner, we reactivated the San Diego Aeroneers, first formed in 1935. We applied to the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) for a charter and were granted number 41. After 22 years, the club is once again inactive because most of the members have passed away.

From 1967 to the present, I have competed in monthly and annual events, as well as fun-flies. During the time with the San Diego Aeroneers, I was high points winner in different Old-Timer events 11 times, flying in ½-A Texaco, A Texaco, Texaco, antique, A/B gas, and class C gas.

In 1982, 17 clubs in the San Diego area formed the San Diego Association of Model Clubs, AMA charter number 32.

In 1976, after having been retired from the service for about a year, I became the owner of Hillcrest Hobby Craft at 3921 Fifth Avenue in San Diego, California. I bought the shop from my good friend, Russ Merrel, when he became ill. I do believe that it was some of the most rewarding times, seeing young people come in and show their most recent project. You could see the pride by the look on their faces. I always had words of encouragement for them and over time, their work was something to be proud.

I was the ace RC service center for over five years and helped Paul and Tom Runge at the West Coast trade shows when I could. We closed the shop in 1986 when the property owners tore down the block to build a shopping mall. I still look back, even today, to the wonderful times I had with fellow modelers and friends.

In 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1999, at the request of the Director of Military Science at the Scripps Ranch High School, Major Thomas Standifer, I instructed the Air Force Junior ROTC students in building, flying and soloing RC aircraft. This required one day each week after school at the Scripps Ranch High School classrooms and each Saturday at the Miramar RC Flyers field for the entire school year. Each cadet who soloed was awarded AMA wings at the ROTC yearend formal dinner and authorized to wear the wings on their uniforms.

In addition to the building and flight instruction given to the Scripps Ranch High School students, in 1977 I delivered lectures and flight demonstrations at the San Diego State College School of Engineering on the design and building of rubber-powered aircraft. During 1978 through 1980, I instructed elementary students in building and flying model aircraft under the auspices of the San Diego Unified School District.

Since my retirement 10 years ago, I have been a volunteer at the San Diego Aerospace Museum with over 10,000 volunteer hours logged to date (July 2003). My volunteer work has been in the model shop and, since 2001 with the passing of Ray Crowell; I have been in charge of the shop. During my time in the model shop, I helped in the completion of the History of Model Aviation, building display cases and building six models for display. I also was the leader of the team charged with building a full-scale model of the lunar lander. The present project we are building is a 40% scale model of the Spirit of Saint Louis under the auspices of the Aerospace Museum for display in a restaurant being built adjacent to Lindbergh Field in San Diego.

In 1983, AMA conferred membership in the grade of contest director and in 1984 leader member. I was the contest director for the San Diego Aeroneers from 1983 to 1999 and the San Diego County Association of Model Clubs Warbird Fly-In conducted at the Weed Wackers in Lakeside, California, in 2002.

I have served as a club officer or functionary in the following clubs:

**President**

San Diego Orbiteers – 1972

San Diego Aeroneers – 1982, 1983, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1990

San Diego County Association of Model Clubs – 1998, 1999

Fightertown RC Flyers – 1999

**Vice President**

San Diego Orbiteers – 1971

Fightertown RC Flyers – 1998

San Diego Aeroneers – 1988, 1994, 1997

San Diego County Association of Model Clubs – 1998

**Treasurer**

San Diego Aeroneers – 1991, 1992, 1993

Alpine RC Club – 1988, 1989

**Secretary**

San Diego Aeroneers – 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989

**Chairperson**

San Diego County Association Arbitration Board – 1994

**Safety Officer**

San Diego Aeroneers – 1990

**Field Marshal**

Alpine RC Club – 1988, 1989

Miramar RC Flyers – 2001, 2002

**Newsletter Editor**

Alpine RC Club – 1988, 1989

San Diego Aeroneers – 1997, 1998, 1999

**Instructor**

Fightertown RC Flyers – 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998

**Intro Pilot**

Miramar RC Flyers – 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002

I was designated a leader member of the AMA in 1984 and have held this designation continuously for 19 years (as of July 2003).

I was qualified as contest director in 1983 and have held this designation for 20 years (as of July 2003).

I am currently (July 2003) a member of both Miramar RC Flyers and the Weed Wackers and am an active participant in both clubs.

*(signed) Leroy R. Brooks  
July 2003*

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