



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of FRANK NOLL



Written by AMA staff (1988), transcribed and reformatted by JS (09/2014)

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*The following was printed in the September 2014 issue of Model Aviation magazine, written by Jay Smith*

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## **I Am the AMA Frank Noll, Industry Professional**

JS: How did you get involved with model aviation?

Frank Noll: My father was into aeromodeling since he was a child, building gliders and rubber band-powered models. He later went on to work for the civil service, building wind tunnel models for the Air Force. By watching him as a child, I was able to learn how to build and fly and owe him greatly for getting me into this hobby.

JS: How has model aviation impacted your life and/or career?

FN: Modeling has afforded me the ability to meet many influential people and travel to places that I probably wouldn't have been able to go. It has also led me to my current position with Hobbico in Champaign, Illinois.

JS: What disciplines of modeling do you currently participate in?

FN: I recently retired from Giant Scale competition aerobatics, which was my primary interest most of my life. I now enjoy other aspects of the hobby such as flying my jets, helicopters, park flyers, and indoor planes.

JS: What are your other hobbies?

FN: I'm an avid golfer! When I'm not traveling or working on household duties, you can usually find me on a golf course.

JS: Who (or what) has influenced you most?

FN: There are a couple of guys who I looked up to when I was younger and was getting serious in the hobby. One was Don Lowe, who was a good friend of my father's, and the other was Ivan Kristensen. While younger, I would watch these guys fly and dream about being as good as they were. To this day, they're both great, close friends.

JS: What advice would you give someone looking to turn his or her hobby into a career?

FN: Most importantly, you'll need to have the passion to do it. Most people think that it's a dream

job to be in the hobby, and regarding certain aspects, it's true. But, it is a business and with it comes the normal business decisions that affect you as well as others.

Decide what you're looking for with your decision, and keep in mind it's not always what you're interested in that may lead to good business decisions. What you may find exciting may not always be "mainstream."

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*The following was printed in the September 2014 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the Born to Fly column, written by Jim Graham.*

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### **Frank Noll: 50 years in RC**

If you have been to any major RC event or trade show in the US I'm betting that, at some point, you have seen Frank Noll. I learned who Frank was in the earliest period of my RC career and now I'm proud to call him a friend. Frank is an ambassador in aeromodeling and the team captain for Futaba, Thunder Tiger, and FlightPower. Frank is celebrating 50 years in the hobby this year. I thought that was a great reason to find out about his RC origins and how he took his love of flying and turned it into his livelihood.

**Jim Graham:** *Frank, how did you get into RC?*

**Frank Noll:** My father was a wind-tunnel model builder for the government and was an avid modeler from his childhood. He was an excellent builder of scale RC planes, but built the airplanes that no one else would ever build. He was a great builder, but a terrible pilot. As a child, I remember watching him crash plane after plane on test flights. I always wondered how he could crash all of those planes and still have the desire to keep building them. That is what inspired me to become a good pilot.

I started flying with a Mule brand transmitter - the old escapement style. We had a button that controlled the plane based on how many times you clicked it. One click of the button made it turn left, two clicks would make it turn right, and three would control the throttle. These were partiality rudder-only aircraft.

You could click it once to hold full left and it would spiral down. Then you would click twice to neutralize the rudder and it would do a loop. Hopefully, you had enough altitude!

Back then, if you had a new plane to maiden, the whole club would come out to watch and support you. The success rate back then was pretty low, and if you were able to fly a circuit around the field with minimal damage, you were considered an ace.

**JG:** *What types of airplanes did you start with?*

**FN:** They were basically Old-Timer-style planes, which were mainly converted FF aircraft. Anything my dad built I would get a chance to fly if it survived his flight! I wasn't proficient enough for building at that point. Like a lot of people who have begun in our hobby, we flew

everything from CL to FF, as well as Hand-Launched Gliders.

**JG:** *When did you start building?*

**FN:** My dad always built his own plane and after a while I started building. Spending a lot of time in the shop with him, I was able to learn a lot. My first attempt at building on my own was a CL Goldberg Stunt Man 23 with a .049 [engine]. I thought I really had something!

**JG:** *Did you fly when you were in high school?*

**FN:** Around the age of 16, girls diverted my attention, and I took a break. I picked RC back up after getting married in my early 20s. When I got back in, Byron Originals had come out with its first Pitts, a Christen Eagle, and some other models. That was my first adventure in big airplanes.

My father had always leaned toward larger models, so that's what really piqued my interest in getting into big planes.

**JG:** *Are you a full-scale pilot?*

**FN:** Yes. My father attempted to get his full-scale license but didn't progress past soloing and getting his student license. I was able to get my pilot's license at [age] 16. My dad and I spent a good deal of time flying full-scale aircraft then because it was a chance for him to get some stick time.

My father was a tail gunner on a B-17 during World War II. Throughout the years, he told many war stories about those days. My favorite quote from him was, "I never knew where I was going, but always knew where I'd been."

**JG:** *How did you shift gears from doing shows to becoming the Team Futaba captain?*

**FN:** When Steve Helms was running Team Futaba in California, I became a consultant and sponsored pilot. He brought me onto the team before Futaba fell under the Hobbico umbrella. When the former team captain, Mike Stokes, left, I stepped into the position as team manager. For me, it was a natural transition because I was close friends with both gentlemen.

[Today], I do some flight testing and flying videos with some of our aircraft, as well as aiding in some marketing for Hobbico.

**JG:** *What would be your current favorite thing to fly, if you had to throw something in the truck?*

**FN:** I don't compete anymore, but I still enjoy big aerobatic airplanes for fun. I've recently finished my second big jet. There are a lot of things to think about when I fly jets, which keeps me sharp and focused.

**JG:** *What would you say to someone new to the hobby or someone who wants to work in the industry?*

**FN:** Our hobby was started by creative people designing and building their own planes, etc. Unfortunately, it's becoming a lost art. If anybody is getting into the hobby now, I would recommend getting a kit aircraft of some type, and taking the time to build it from the ground up. If you have children, this is the perfect thing to do as a family, and the rewards are great.

Currently, there is a movement between the AMA and EAA that is targeting this. Understanding how an airplane flies is critical to being a part of our hobby, and can easily transition into a possible full-scale career.

My son, Jason, learned through this process and has turned it into a career. Now my grandson, Taylor, is starting in the hobby. Ours isn't a rare story, and it has happened many, many times in the RC hobby.

**Sources:**

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[www.hobbico.com](http://www.hobbico.com)

Futaba  
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Thunder Tiger  
[info@thundertiger.com](mailto:info@thundertiger.com)  
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Flight Power Batteries  
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