



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of LEO VARTANIAN

Born August 20, 1915  
Started modeling in the early 1930s  
AMA #41793



---

Written & Submitted by LV (2000); Transcribed & Edited by SS (09/2002), Reformatted by JS (02/2010, 07/2014)

---

## Career:

- As a boy joined the Airplane Model League of America
  - 1953: Placed second behind Maxwell Bassett at Lakehurst, New Jersey; won first at Elmira, New York
  - Charter member of the Chicago Aeronuts
  - 1935: Set indoor glider records in several classes
  - 1941: Wrote a construction article on the record-setting H.L. Glider for the September issue of Model Airplane News magazine
  - Served as a flight engineer in the U.S. Air Force during World War II
  - 1978: Wrote an article on an indoor Radio Controlled model for Model Aviation magazine
  - John Pond Plan Services carries many of his 1930s model airplane designs
- 

As a young boy living in Indiana, I used to read American Boy magazine, which contained articles on model airplane building written by Merrill Hamburg. The magazine also sold simple and straightforward model airplane kits. A Rise-off-Ground (ROG) model cost 35 cents. I joined the AMLA (Airplane Model League of America); I still have the pin.

My family moved to Chicago in 1932. The Chicago Sun Times newspaper ran a series on model airplane building. The newspaper reporter who authored these articles obtained the use of an armory building on West Madison Street for indoor model airplane flying on Saturdays, including a flying competition to be held at the armory once a month. As most model flying was held indoors in those days, Saturday model flying at the armory became a regular event for Chicago modelers.

I moved to Brooklyn, New York, where I lived from 1933 to 1935. In Canarsie, I met some active modelers and bought a Brown Junior #28. No one knew much about large models then and it took a few tries before I finally got it to fly. In 1935, I placed second behind Maxwell Bassett at Lakehurst, New Jersey, and won first place at Elmira, New York.

I moved back to Chicago later in 1935 and resumed indoor flying. A model supply store called Model Research Laboratory had been opened by Carl Goldberg who ran the shop with his mother's help. Carl held a meeting one Saturday at the armory on West Madison Street where he presented his idea of formally organizing a group of modelers into a club that adhered only to the highest standards in model airplane flying. In order to become a member of the Aeronuts, one

had to set a new flying record or equal a previously set record. Once a club member, one was expected to help the other club members. We were extremely fortunate to have an outstanding aeronautical engineer named Raul Huffman as a member. His expertise was instrumental in solving the various problems encountered by club members. Huffman's book, "Model Aeronautics Made Easy," is still available for sell by the AMA. Other outstanding club members include Sid Axelrod, Frank Garcher, Carl Goldberg, Frank Nekimkan, Wally Simmers, and many others whose names I cannot recall after 65 years. This team concept was extremely successful. The Chicago Aeronuts held approximately 95% of the AMA records prior to World War II. The Aeronuts are still an active club.

In 1935, I attended the Nationals in Saint Louis, Missouri, as a spectator. I met Jimmy Doolittle there and got his autograph (which I still have). That year I also set indoor glider records in several classes. In September 1941, I wrote a construction article on the record-setting H.L. Glider for Model Airplane News magazine.

I left Chicago in 1942 as a flight engineer for the U.S. Air Force during World War II. After four years of service, I returned to Chicago when the war ended. Returning to civilian life, I thought my days of model flying were behind me. I went to art school, married, started a family and felt I had no time for my former hobby. Years later, my young son came home saying that a neighbor had stated that, "model airplanes don't fly." That statement did it! I phoned my old friend, Wally Simmers, bought a Jabberwock kit, and found myself back in modeling. I have remained an active modeler ever since.

In 1978, I wrote an article on an indoor Radio Controlled (RC) model for Model Aviation magazine.

John Pond Plan Services still carries a number of my 1930s model airplane designs.

*(signed) Leo Vartanian*

*Note: My original AMA number lapsed when I joined the Air Force during World War II. The number on this autobiography is the replacement number I was issued.*

---

**This PDF is property of the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Permission must be granted by the AMA History Project for any reprint or duplication for public use.**

**AMA History Project**  
National Model Aviation Museum  
5151 E. Memorial Dr. Muncie IN 47302  
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511  
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

