



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of JAMES H. ALVIS, SR.

Born March 27, 1929 Started modeling in the late-1930s  
AMA #472960



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Information submitted by JHA (3/2003); partially written & Edited by SS (3/2003), updated by JS (11/2007)

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## Career:

- November 13, 1953: Received his private pilot's license
- Pieced together a good Free Flight model using parts from various other planes
- Served as the Mid-Mississippi Radio Control club's safety officer from 1994 to 1996 and president from 1997 to 1998; while president the club was named AMA club of the year for District V
- 1998: Became an AMA Associate Vice President for District V

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*The following autobiography was in the publication "Who's Who in AMA, 2003, District V"*

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I began modeling when I was six years old. I used to drop by a drugstore on the way home from Sunday school where you could buy a balsa wood kit for ten cents. I never completed an airplane at that age, as my fingers would be cut to the bone using a double-edged razor blade cutting out the parts.

Later, I moved up to U-Control and Free Flight with an *Ensign*, *Playboy*, and *Buzzard Bombshell*. Power plants were the Old Phantom, Super Cyclone, and Ohlsson engines. Hurricane engines came out right after World War II. My introduction to Radio Control came about in the late 1980s and early 1990s to date. Through my older son, Jim Junior, I am in it so deep now I will never get out.

I am a native Jacksonian, having lived in Mississippi all my life. I spent three years in the Air Force, practically all the service-time spent at MacDill Air Base in Tampa, Florida. (SAC or Strategic Air Command.)

I have been self-employed in the Municipal Bond business for 46 years. I raised five children, three boys, and two girls. We now have five grandchildren and one more on the way.

I really was hooked on Radio Control and thought it would be easy since I have held a private pilot's license SEL since November 13, 1953. I found it is not that easy, as I am still picking my teeth with the balsa wood from my first Radio Control airplane that bit the dust on the third flight.

I fly with the Mid-Mississippi Radio Control Club in Jackson, Mississippi. Browning-Ferris Industries (BFI), who has really been a friend to our hobby, provides our flying field. Our club now consists of 68 members and is still growing. We are very proud of our selection as "Club of the Year" in 1998 by District V.

I was President of the Mid-Mississippi Radio Control Club for 1997 and 1998. I am an AMA Leader Member and an Associate Vice President of District V at present. Radio Control flying has been the best part-time activity and something I really enjoy.

Anytime AMA flyers are in this area and would like to visit our field to fly, just give us a call. We will provide an airplane and an easy chair to make you comfortable.

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*The following was submitted by James H. Alvis, Sr. in 2003.*

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## **The Beginning**

Jim first started modeling somewhere between the ages of 10 and 12 in the late 1930s. He started to build his first model at age 12 on his own using a kit from Test's, which only came with sheet balsa printed parts. He was never able to finish such a kit, because it needed to be cut with a razor blade and with only double-edged razor blades, Jim cut his fingers badly trying to cut out the parts. The planes would be six-inches in length near completion. Though building them was so painful, Jim said he must have purchased around a dozen kits and tried to build them anyway.

As Jim grew older, his modeling activities began to change and he advanced into Free Flight modeling starting with the Buzzard Bombshell, Playboy, and Ensign. Later, he also built a few Control Line planes but found he enjoyed Free Flight more.

Though Jim had a great interest in aeromodeling, he didn't join his first Radio Control club until 1992. It was called the Mid-Mississippi Radio Control club and located in Jackson, Mississippi. Jim is still (in 2003) a member of that club. Jim got into Radio Control modeling in the late 1980s when his older son was attending Mississippi State University. His son then got Jim involved and he has stayed involved with Radio Control ever since.

## **Competition**

The first competition Jim competed in was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in the mid to late 1940s at age 15 or 16. He entered a Control Line model with a McCoy engine, but the engine burned out and he was unable to compete. Jim had, however, designed the model himself but now (2003) says it was too heavy for its size. Glider competition is the latest favorite test and Jim has one several first place ribbons with his Rover, 10-foot wingspan glider.

## **Experiments**

Jim has experimented with the design of Free Flight models. He took the fuselage of a Pacer, the tail section of a Buzzard Bombshell and shortened wings of a Playboy, squared them off and had a good Free Flight model. He had the power of the Super Cyclone engine running on one plug. Unfortunately, one day the timer malfunctioned and the last time he saw the plane it was headed toward New York City.

## **Leadership**

Jim has been involved with the Mid-Mississippi Radio Control club. From 1994 to 1996, Jim served as the club's safety officer then was president from 1997 to 1998. During his time as president, the club was named club of the year for AMA District V. In the five years since, Jim has served as AMA associate vice president for District V under Vice President Jim McNeill.

Jim is proud of his club, which has doubled in size during the late 1990s and early 2000s. He said, "We sincerely invite any AMA member to visit us and enjoy our facilities. And if you don't have a plane, we'll provide one and let you pick out the color."

After World War II, Jim helped organize a modeling club in Jackson, Mississippi, but the club didn't last very long. Most of the members were returning war veterans who decided to continue their education and ran out of time for the club.

### **Personal Information**

Jim is a long-time resident of Jackson, Mississippi. After graduating from high school there, he went on to attend Huids Junior College and Millsape College. Jim served in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War and was stationed at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida with the strategic air command, 307<sup>th</sup> bomb wing. Jim was able to fit in well in the Air Force after sneaking off as a youth to take flying lessons at an old cow pasture. He paid for the lessons with money he earned from his newspaper route. He received his pilot's license on November 13, 1953 after returning home from military service.

When he returned home from the Air Force, Jim delved into the investment securities business dealing mostly with municipal bonds and has been in the business for about 50 years. He and his wife, Dorothy, have three sons and two daughters and currently (in 2003) have six grandchildren.

*(signed) James H. Alvis, Sr.  
March 2003*

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