



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of JOHN W. ROTH

April 16, 1916 to March 29, 1998

Started modeling in 1938



Written & submitted by R&JR (05/1998); Written by CM (n.d); Transcribed by NR (09/2000); Edited & Formatted by SS (10/2002); Updated by JS (11/2008);
Reformatted by JS (01/2010)

Career:

- Worked for Grumman aircraft for 36 years, mostly as a flight line mechanic
 - 1970: First in scale at the Willow Grove Pennsylvania Naval Air Station
 - 1971: Third in scale at the Nationals
 - 1972: Fifth in F.A.I. scale in Toulouse France
 - 1973: First in scale at the Nationals
 - 1974: Second in F.A.I. scale in Lakehurst, Naval Air Station, New Jersey
 - 1975: First in scale at the Lake Charles, Louisiana Nationals
 - 1976: Eighth in F.A.I. scale in Dalavana, Sweden
-

This biography was written, composed, and assembled into an album by Bob and his children, Janet and Bob. The biography here resembles that album, but could not be recreated exactly. The biography is dated May 1998.

Biography of John W. Roth:

Model Airplane Enthusiast for 50 years

Biography and stories related by John Roth and
compiled by his children Robert Roth and Janet Plantin

Special recognition to Betty, John's wife who passed away in February 1985.

She had the foresight to create scrapbooks enabling us to put most of this information together accurately. We also thank her for her many hours on the road traveling to one contest after another and spending her vacations sitting at some remote airfield watching John compete.

How I Got Started in Modeling

I bought a Control Line airplane for my 7-year old son, Bob, around 1949. He remembers it being a plastic orange airplane. I had to learn how to fly it myself before I could teach him how to fly. By the time the third flight was over, the plane was beyond repair. I worked for Grumman Aircraft at the time and was able to get my hands on several pre-built Control Line planes from some of the guys I worked with. I flew Control Line with my son for several years before moving over to Radio Control (RC).

The first time I flew RC was with a kit I built, the Champion, which had a K&B 19 engine. It was a short first flight – I remember flying it into a fence and having to go home to repair it. I moved into RC scale in 1969.

I started working for Grumman Aircraft in 1937 and worked there until I retired in 1973. This created an interest in the Grumman planes and through the years, I built many of them. These included a F3F Bi-Plane, F8F Bearcat, F7F Tigercat, and the Guardian. The last Grumman plane I built was a 1/5-scale F6 Hellcat.

How I Gained Experience in Modeling

First engine: The first engine I ever used was a 49 Madewell. Other early engines were with the Control Line planes including the Torpedo 29, Ohlsson 23, K&B, Vecos, and Fox 35.

First planes: The first Control Line planes I used were the Ringmaster, Smoothies, and All Americans.

First RC Scale planes: The Bucker Jungmeister and a Fairchild 24.

Building: I started building from kits, but found it more challenging to build from scratch. I would make drawings and then develop templates, which I would build from.

Early RC Equipment: Early equipment used was a Citizenship receiver (single channel and used a 3V4 vacuum tube). The transmitter was home-built.

Early Competition

I joined the LIDS (Long Island Drone Society), which often held local competition. This was my first introduction to contest flying. My first major competition was the New York Daily Mirror meet, which was held at Grumman Airport in Bethpage, New York. I ended up winning this event in 1958, 1959 and 1960. I was the winner of the inaugural Lindbergh Trophy presented to the winner of the Tournament of Champions hosted by the Academy of Model Aeronautics. This competition was open only to flyers that held regional or state championships. I participated in the first Annual New York State RC Championships in Rochester, New York, in August 1960.

During one of the Mirror Meets, I remember flying against Danny Mast, a local modeler and good friend. The score was very close and while I was flying my last flight, the guys told me I needed a perfect score for the last maneuver, which was landing in the inner circle. I came in for the landing, managed to land right in the center of the inner circle, and won first place.

National Competition

I competed on all levels including national competition. My wife Betty and I would travel quite extensively to compete in these competitions. Thanks to my wife who put together photo albums, I am able to provide in this biography detailed information about these competitions. My first Nationals was in 1966. I also competed in 1967 and 1968 in the regular Radio Control division. In 1969, I changed over to the scale division. At the 1970 Nationals, held at the Naval Air Station

in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, I finally broke through with some success and finished in fifth place. There were 43 entries and 28 qualifiers that year.

In 1971 with 34 entries and 15 qualifiers, I managed to finish higher in the standings with a third place finish. Other top competitors that year included Hale Wallace with his Lumley Chipmunk, which was an unfortunate crash victim in the first round. Maxey Hester ended up in first place (Ryan STA) and Bob Wischer in second (Douglas M-2 Mailplane).

I placed first in RC scale in 1973 and first in RC scale in 1975 at the Nationals held in Lake Charles, Louisiana. As reported by George Jenkins in the Scale RC Modeler magazine, "John Roth flew his Volksplane to first place this year. John's plane performed very realistically and made some nice takeoffs. The size of the surfaces on this model makes it a perfect subject for modeling. The red, white, and blue color scheme really helps visibility, especially on a cloudy day."

International Competition

My success at the Nationals qualified me on three different occasions to proudly represent the United States in International Scale Competition.

1972

The U.S. team was the victor in RC scale at the Second Scale World Championships held at Toulouse, France from August 2 through 6, 1972. Scores of Maxey Hester (third place with his St. Ryan), John Roth (fifth with his Volksplane) and Bob Wischer (with his Emeraude), combined to put the U.S. on top. An article published in the Radio Control Models and Electronics magazine shortly after this competition, stated the following: "One could marvel at John Roth's work on the Volksplane. This was the most aeroplane-like model it has ever been our pleasure to examine. To learn that John has spent years on Grumman's flight line at Bethpage gave the clue to his know-how." That year I lost first place in static by only 3.5 points. Terry Melleney from England won with 2380 points and I had 2376.5.

1974

The RC AMA scale entries at the 1974 Aerolympics held at the Lakehurst Naval Air Station in Lakehurst, New Jersey, consisted of myself with the Volksplane, Bob Wischer (Emeraude) and Ralph Jackson (Cherokee 180). Bob Wischer was a substitute on the 1974 team as a result of regular team member Bob Karlsson's loss of his Vought Corsair several weeks before the World Championship. Bob and I were the leaders at the close of round two. At this point, the U.S. team had a significant lead going into the final round. Bob put together a tremendous final flight scoring 2365 points and a total score of 4448.5. I had a final flight score of 2099 for a total of 4435.3. Ralph hit for his best flight of 2046 giving him a combined score of 3980.9. No one could match the combination and the U.S. had done it – a sweep of the first three places and, of course, the team championship with 12864.7 points. For a period, it appeared as though I was the overall winner until it was discovered that one judge had failed to credit Bob's flight card properly. I was extremely proud though that the U.S. was the world champions. The runner-up

team was England at 10,588 points and France third with 9752 points.

1976

The outcome of the 1976 Internationals held in Dalavna, Sweden from June 19 through 24, 1976 were a little disappointing based on the USA's success in the past two competitions. Team USA came in third place behind first place England and second place Germany. The USA Team finishes were Bob Wischer (fourth place), John Roth (eighth place), Bob Underwood (11th place) and Steve Sauger (14th place).

My Famous Volksplane

In national and international competitions during the early and mid-1970s, I was flying my famous Volksplane. I was at a fly-in in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, when I first saw the full-scale Volksplane. The real Volksplane, N-7710-Z was a low wing monoplane dubbed Volksplane because a Volkswagen car engine powered it. It had a 24-foot wingspan, cruised at 75 mph, and was redlined (maximum safe speed) at 120 mph.

I thought it would make a good scale model. I was able to meet with Pat Hartness (the owner and pilot) who put me in touch with Evans, the designer. I bought the full-scale plans from him for \$5.

Producing the Volksplane took about five months and almost 500 painstaking hours. Building the one-quarter scale plane from scratch involved getting permission of the designer of the prototype, securing the plans for the plane, making use of photos of every detail of the original and buying the necessary materials for the construction. Then I had to scale down the plans very accurately for the model. Each step in the production had to be accompanied by an equivalent amount of research directed towards authentication of the plane's structure and appearance.

Working from the scale drawings of the original drawings and from close-up photographs of the engine, landing gear, propeller, instrument panel and other parts of the prototype, the model ended up being nearly an exact replica. As reported to a news reporter back in 1973, I estimated that the cost of producing a plane similar to my Volksplane would be about \$750.

The Volksplane had a Ross Twin .60, Kraft KP-7 53.2, Sig Dope over Coverite, 100% scale. It was noted in Radio Control magazine how the dummy Volkswagen cylinder head/rocker box was grafted on to the cylinders of the Ross engine.

I actually built two Volksplanes. The first one was used in competition through the 1971 Nationals. I built a second improved version for my entry in the 1972 Scale World Championships. This one was built of scale thickness of plywood to duplicate more precisely the construction of the full-size prototype.

This Volksplane was donated to the AMA Museum after the 1976 Internationals.

Other Contributions to Radio Control

Kit Production

Around the mid-to-late 1950s, I designed and built a plane I called The Stunts. Bill Winter, an old time modeler and model aircraft magazine writer connected me with Jetco who agreed to put a kit based on my design into production. The name changed to Citation and was sold in many of the hobby shops. I have to this day, a box the kit came in with some of the original plane parts still in it. My Citation design was published in the Model Airplane News magazine.

Magazine Articles

“How to Fly Multi Stunt” published in the Radio Control Modeler magazine in February 1964. I actually have a copy of this magazine (cost was 50-cents back then). The article contained subheadings on the preflight check, multi maneuvers (including takeoff, the 360 over transmitter, wing over, immelman, loop, outside loops, roll, consecutive rolls, four point roll, Cuban eight, three-turn spin, inverted flight, vertical eight, split S, rolling eight, traffic pattern approach and the tail spin). The ending of the article is still true to this day: “If you’re entertaining the thought of flying in competition, check your eyeballs and make sure those reflexes are lightning quick. In addition, practice, more practice and still more practice are in order. And when you’re through, start practicing again!”

RC Club

I helped organize the Long Island Drone Society (LIDS). This club, which is still active today, promoted model airplane aviation by organizing contests and maintaining an open-flying field. I served as president of the LIDS (I think I was their second president).

Is There Life After Radio Control?

In 1978 when my wife Betty and I moved to Florida, after more than 30 years of flying some kind of model aircraft, I gave up competition flying. In the 1980s, I stayed active in the hobby mostly by building scale aircraft. My biggest project was building a 1/5-scale F6 Hellcat, which had a wingspan of 99-inches. The plane was built with outside line drawings obtained from Nick Zirolì, Senior. Today, my son Bob has the plane and sometimes flies it with Nick Zirolì, Junior.

While living in Florida, I took up golf for a while and bought a boat. Before I tell you the next story, I must include a quote I made for Newsday, a local Long Island, New York newspaper on September 24, 1972: “Roth has no interest in flying a real plane. It’s boring, just being a pilot,” I said. Well on my 75th birthday, I had my first solo in an Ultralight. I set out building two different Ultralights. The first one was called The Hawk, which had a Rotex engine. I built a second Ultralight to gain more air speed. That one was a Titan Tornado, which has a Rotex 503 engine.

This biography was just about completed when John was diagnosed with cancer in February 1998. We had reviewed the final draft with him and the stories and articles we went through putting this

biography together brought back many happy memories to him. Sadly, he passed away at the end of March 1998. His family and friends will miss him very much. We know that John now flies...

On Eagle's Wings.

Claude McCullough wrote the following brief article about John Roth. Unfortunately, there was no date or publication name given.

Meet the RC Scale Team

Refining a proven model paid off for John Roth when he second Volksplane won a spot on the U.S. team with a third at the 1971 Nationals, coming up from a fifth at the 1970 meet. Continuing the process, he is now building yet another further improved version of the popular home-built for his entry in the 1972 Scale World Championships. This one will even be built of scale thicknesses of plywood to duplicate more precisely the construction of the full-size prototype. As the first two, it will be powered by a Ross Twin 60.

John, who lives in Smithtown, New York, has been building models for 30 years – 18 of them in RC work. Starting in RC scale in 1969 with a Bucker Jungmeister and Fairchild 24, he has made a remarkable record in a short time. His other interests include amateur radio, building a 27-foot sea skiff and constructing and racing stockcars. But he does not get very far away from planes – he works for Grumman Aerospace Corporation in Flight Operations.

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

