



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of RALPH N. ANDRAE

October 8, 1938 – October 20, 1999
Started modeling in the 1940s



Written by LH for Model Aviation magazine (12/2008), Formatted by JS (01/2009)

The following was published in the January 2009 issue of Model Aviation magazine. Ralph was inducted posthumously into the 2008 Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

Ralph Andrae is possibly best remembered for inventing and patenting a retractable landing gear for Radio Control models.

Ralph was born in Chicago in 1938. Growing up near O'Hare Airport, he spent many hours sitting in a field adjacent to the airport watching the aircraft of the day come and go. At the age of eight, Ralph was already designing airplanes little knowing that he would someday make a living with his knowledge of the hobby and innovative mind.

The American Art Institute of Design in Chicago is where Ralph honed his drafting and design talents. He became a design engineer for Bastian Blessing Company, a company specializing in the design and building of commercial restaurants. He worked with the team that developed kitchen equipment for McDonalds.

With drafting facilities available at the company, Ralph was able to create the blueprints for the scale model aircraft plans he sold to hobbyists of the time and later used to launch his career in the hobby industry. He advertised his *T.B.F. Avenger* plans in *Model Airplane News*, then went on to draw and sell plans for a number of scale World War II models including the *A-30 Baltimore Bomber*, the *F4F Wildcat*, and the *Zero* fighter.

By 1967, Ralph had purchased a building in Morton Grove, Illinois, and was able to turn his endeavors into a full-time operation, Wing Manufacturing. He developed and patented the first operating retract system for model aircraft and sold nearly 250,000 retract sets before the patent expired.

Ralph began developing and selling foam wings for the main line kits on the market. He also began producing the "Short Kit," providing the hard-to-duplicate aircraft parts such as the cowl, canopy, wingtips, landing gear wire, etc., along with plans and instructions. The short kits included a number of warbirds and Ralph sold thousands.

The U.S. Navy and Air Force approached Ralph to develop Remotely Piloted Vehicles (RPVs) for use as target drones and surveillance aircraft. He had to construct a launch system for the airplanes since they had no landing gear.

Other products developed by Ralph included a wheel-well cover door hinge and a "T" type control horn with three mounting screws instead of two to allow the force of the load to be

centered over the mounting screws, eliminating the twist that sometimes occurred soon other control-horn designs.

Ralph designed and built all of the machinery needed to produce his products. He developed a hobbyist line of hot-wire foam cutting equipment that he also sold to architectural firms, upholstery businesses, and the general public.

Aircraft Ralph developed included an 80-inch *B-25*, and *HP 200* short kit, and display-only versions of the Beaver bush plane that sold to a liquor company for advertising purposes. He came out with a low-priced *AT-6 Texan* kit, sponsored several local Pylon races, and even sold the engines at cost so everyone would have the same engine.

Ralph was a member of the Spoon River Flyers in Maquon, Illinois, and the Galesburg Flyers Association. He was an active participant in the Stearman Fly-In every year. Ralph and his Hall of Fame sponsor, Sid Davis, were planning a Radio Control event that would run separate from the Stearman Fly-In when Ralph died from heart failure in 1999.

Nearly every year since his passing, Sid and others have honored Ralph with the Ralph Andrae Memorial Fly Day to keep his legacy alive.

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