
Autobiography of ROBERT L. UNDERWOOD

Modeler since 1956

Birth Date: October 16, 1931

AMA Number: 690

Written & Submitted by RU (3/97)

Transcribed by NR (9/00)

Edited by SS (2002)

Career:

- Served on the Radio Controlled (RC) contest board and scale contest board for District VI
- 1983 - Elected to the executive council in District VI
- Contest director for two World Championships
- Coordinator and chairman, frequency committee for 12 years
- 10 years as AMA Technical Director

Honors:

- 1974 – AMA Distinguished Service Award
 - 1985 – AMA Meritorious Service Award
 - 1997 – AMA Hall of Fame
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Bob Underwood was born October 16, 1931 in Plymouth, Indiana. By age three, the family was located in St. Louis, Missouri. Vague memories exist of having attended a model meet in Forest Park in St. Louis, where a most unsuccessful attempt was made at flying a rubber-powered model. This was probably a Plymouth meet.

During the years following, many models were built. These ranged from an O&R powered scratch built Free Flight (that perhaps attained a spectacular 20 feet of altitude) to Control Line sport and acrobatic models. Many Thermic 50's were part of that time, including one which landed in the middle of Notre Dame stadium while he visited relatives in South Bend, Indiana, and another that remained aloft for some six hours before it landed in the Mississippi River and was retrieved by a tug boat captain.

Bob's modeling activity continued through the years up to high school and then seemingly ended. Photography, school and track consumed his time. It was not until returning from Army service in 1956, that the lack of peeling Ambroid from his fingers once again struck.

Between then and 1966, he went through a Sterling American Scout, 5011, cargo ship, a scratch built Mississippi River tugboat and an unfinished submarine while living with his wife, Rae, in an apartment. Upon buying a house, HO gauge railroading became the order of the day. Dismayed at the time required to clean the track finally sank in, that interest and suddenly aeromodeling was back!

With a Falcon 56, Citizenship six channel reed set, he was on the way. There was, however, a slight detour to put the Falcon aside, because it was too hot to use to teach himself to fly and a White Cloud served in that capacity. At first, the trips to the field were short in duration. However, to Rae's surprise, by the end of the summer, Bob returned home, not because the model needed repair, but because it was time for dinner.

The rest of the 1960s were consumed learning more and ultimately becoming involved with the local St. Louis modeling groups. He became president of the Signal Chasers RC (Radio

Controlled) club and chairman of the Greater St. Louis (GSLMA) Modeling Association. His eight years as chairman of the GSLMA did much to prepare Bob for AMA administration activities.

Composed of some 15 clubs, at one point, the association encompassed Free Flight, Control Line and RC. All the many activities, such as a June AAA contest, mall shows, community programs and a yearly air show to benefit a scholarship program, involved participation by all three disciplines.

In 1970, John Worth asked Bob to attend the Nationals (Nats) at Glenview and work with the AMA Cub (Delta Dart) program. Accompanied by his father, he did so and by 1975, found himself, his wife and two daughters all “working the Nats.”

Having moved in the competition arena from flying RC pattern to scale, he finished fourth in FAI and found himself the alternate for the team headed to Sweden in 1976. Due to the fact that Bob Wischer was the reigning World Champion from 1994, the AMA decided to send Wischer and move Underwood to the third team position. While he finished toward the middle of the pack that year, the team was able to finish in the top three. Subsequent trips to the World Championships resulted in an individual second place in England, 1978; a fifth in Canada, 1980; and a third in 1984 in France. After beginning his career as AMA technical director, Bob felt it necessary to refrain from further attempts to make the team.

During this entire period, from the late 1960s to 1985, when Bob joined the staff of AMA as technical director, the administrative and competition tasks escalated. Clearly, modeling had become an important part of not only Bob's life, but his wife and daughters as well. The following represents the various activities in which he participated during that time.

Local St. Louis Area Administrative

- President, Signal Chasers RC Club - five years
- Chairman, Greater St. Louis Modeling Association - eight years
- Contest Director for yearly AAA, multi-disciplined contest, two Control Line FAI team selection programs and numerous fun flies, mall shows, demonstrations, etc.
- Appeared twice on local TV shows concerned with modeling
- Spearheaded a Cub Scout pilot program of 18 outdoor camps using the Delta Darts
- Ran newcomer classes
- With Travis McGinnis, developed a script and program for the local PBS TV station (Unfortunately, it did not reach fruition due to lack of funds)
- Missouri Park Board Award, 1980

AMA District Administrative

- Served on the RC Contest Board
- Scale Contest Board, District VI
- Elected to the Executive Council in 1983, District VI

National Administrative

- Contest Director for two World Championships
- Hospitality Chairman for two World Championships
- Member and Chairman, Scholarship Committee - 15 years
- Coordinator and Chairman, Frequency Committee - 12 years
- Member, Safety Committee
- 10 years as AMA technical director
- Education director
- CIAM delegate for scale
- Interim executive director
- Member, coordinator, education committee
- RC scale category manager, Nats - five years
- Organized National Association of Scale Aeromodelers
- 1977 Nats scale category manager - five years
- Scale team manager, Netherlands 1984
- AMA, Distinguished Service Award
- AMA, Meritorious Service Award, 1985

Competition

- Scores of places at local and regional pattern and scale contests in the Midwest
- Nats wins from 1972 through 1984
- Sport scale
- Precision scale
- FAI scale
- FAI World Championships; second in 1978 and third in 1984
- Scale Masters Louisville; first and second place
- Top Gun; tenth 1996

Published Material

- Model Aviation - Various columns and plans
- Model Builder - Scale column, "One to One"
- Model Airplane News - Scale column, "Scale Techniques"
- RC Scale Modeler – Article
- "Thingamabob" - Trainer that can be flown Control Line, RC, electric, glow, trike gear, tail dragger or tethered RC with a five minute conversion time

Bob Underwood

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