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## Biography of KEN WILLARD

Modeler since: 1916      Birth Date: February 18, 1912      AMA Number: 1124

Transcribed & Edited by SS (4/03), Update by JS (10/07)

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### Career:

- Set a world's indoor record for seaplanes at the age of 15 in 1927
- His first design article was published in Model Airplane News magazine in 1932; since then had had hundreds of articles published and many models kitted
- Has designed many Radio Controlled (RC) airplanes, including the School series, the Roaring 20, Top Dawg, Wavemaster and Santa Anna
- Holds a 1940 Control Line patent
- Developed a "kick-up" elevator and quick blip motor control for RC
- Made the first Radio Control cross-channel flight from California to the Catalina Islands using sport Radio Control equipment in 1957
- Helped organize the League of Silent Flight and the South Bay (California) Soaring Society
- Contributed to the design and layout of the Los Angeles, California, model airport
- Won the 1959 National Aerobatic Championship in the intermediate class
- Built and flew the world's smallest Radio Control model in 1962 and the largest Radio Control model using sport Radio Control equipment in 1972
- Wrote a "Sunday Flying" column in Radio Control Modeler magazine from 1963 to 1980
- Member of the 1974 U.S. Aerolympic team
- Took over as editor of Radio Control Sportsman magazine in 1980

### Honors:

- 1977 – Model Aviation Hall of Fame
  - 1984 – National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
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*The following information on Ken Willard ran in the April 1978 issue of Model Aviation magazine after Ken's induction into the 1977 Model Aviation Hall of Fame.*

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Ken Willard, age 64, is nationally known for his Radio Control designs through the years along with his "Sunday Flying" column in Radio Control Modeler magazine. Some of his designs that were kitted include the School series (School Boy, Girl, Master, etc.), the Roaring 20, Top Dawg, Wavemaster and Santa Anna.

He also holds a 1940 Control Line patent, developed a "kick-up" elevator and quick-blip motor control for Radio Control, and has done extensive research in Free Flight and Radio Control seaplane step locations, as well as experiments in sailplane wing efficiency.

Willard helped organize the League of Silent Flight and the South Bay Soaring Society (California). He was president of the Los Angeles LARKS and chairman of the LARKS' Fund Drive for the Los Angeles Model Airport. He also contributed to the design and layout of the model airport working with the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks and the L.A. Model Hobby Association.

Some of his other contributions include: an unofficial AMA world endurance record for indoor seaplanes (1927), world's smallest Radio Control model (1962), first cross-channel Radio

Control model flight from California to Catalina Islands using sport Radio Control equipment (1957) and the world's largest Radio Control plane using sport Radio Control equipment (1972). He was a pilot for two U.S. Department of Defense contractors for RPV's from 1972 to 1976, providing one with a basic design used for airborne real time TV transmission.

Ken, like his fellow Hall of Famer Maynard Hill, is one of those who has been instrumental in gaining appreciation from aeronautical scientists and engineers for the capability of model aircraft in research programs. He has thus done much to gain professional respect for model aviation as an adult activity. And the Hall of Fame gains respect from his addition to the roster.

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*The following information about Ken ran in the May 1980 issue of Radio Control Modeler magazine as part of Don Dewey's column "From the Shop." Bill Foster suggested this article to the AMA History Program.*

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In November 1963, Ken Willard, former Nationals winner and world-renowned Radio Control modeler, wrote his first column for RCM (Radio Control Modeler magazine) and has appeared monthly ever since that time. Ken's column has been one of the most popular among RCM readers and, from that first issue, Ken has been affectionately known as the Chief Sunday Flyer – his monthly columns and his aircraft designs are geared to the sport fliers who constituted 95% of RCM's readership.

It is with regret that we must announce that effective with our next issue Ken Willard's Sunday Flyer will no longer appear in the pages of RCM. We will all sorely miss Ken, but on the other hand, we are both happy and excited for him as he takes over the reins as editor of Radio Control Sportsman magazine.

Ken was born in Ionia, Michigan, on February 18, 1912. His entire life has been devoted to aviation and aerospace, having been the manager of administration missile systems division at Lockheed Aircraft in Sunnyvale, California. This lifelong dedication to aviation was due in large measure to the inspiration and encouragement that he always had from his father and mother. "Chet" Willard, his father, was a rigging instructor at the Air Service Mechanics School at Kelly Field, Texas, during the last year of World War I. He crashed while learning to fly, but survived and guided Ken through the formative years as Ken pursued the fascination of flying – both with model airplanes and full-scale aircraft.

Ken Willard is a graduate of Northwestern University, class of 1933, and his academic record won him a fellowship in aeronautics at Caltech in 1934. After one year and an M.S. in mechanical engineering, he switched to meteorology and earned an M.S. in that field.

Ken designed and built his first model airplane at the age of four. In 1927, at age 15, he set a world's indoor record for seaplanes. In 1932, Model Airplane News magazine published his first design article. Since then he has been a regular contributor to model magazines with hundreds of articles and designs, many of them kitted for others to build.

In 1957, Ken's Big Breathless design successfully accomplished the first crossing of the Catalina channel and the following year set the world's endurance record of five hours and 29 minutes – a

mark that stood for five years. In 1959, he won the National Aerobatic Championship in the intermediate class scoring more points than many of the entrants in the unlimited class. In 1962, he flew the world's smallest Radio Control airplane, which had a wingspan of only 7-½ inches. In addition, in 1972 he flew the world's largest Radio Control airplane that used sport Radio Control equipment – a 12-foot monster that weighed 340 pounds! In 1974, he was a member of the U.S. Aerolympic team in soaring competitions at Lakehurst. Ken Willard was voted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 1977 – an honor well deserved. While we at RCM will miss Ken's monthly column, there is no doubt in our minds that his contributions to model aviation will continue in the years to come as they have throughout his entire lifetime. On behalf of the entire staff of RCM and its readers, we wish this outstanding gentleman of model aviation the very best in his new position as editor of Radio Control Sportsman magazine.

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