



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of JOHN G. BRODAK

April 1, 1939 – April 25, 2020 Modeler starting in 1952
AMA #L181



Written & Submitted by CB (06/2001); Transcribed by NR (06/2001); also written by AMA staff (12/2011); Edited & Formatted by SS (10/2002),
Reformatted by JS (06/2009); Updated by JS (01/2012, 04/2020)

Career:

- Printed and distributed thousands of flyers to welcome centers and hotels in his state to promote Control Line flying
- Lifetime Patron of the AMA museum
- Member of the National Aeronautics Association
- Lifetime member of the AMA
- 1997: Launched the Brodak Fly-in
- Distributed his products to over 150 businesses worldwide by 1999
- 1999: Volunteered to handle all Precision Aerobatics Model Pilot Association's (PAMPA) product sales and shipping
- Began manufacturing J. Roberts three-line handles, perfect tanks, Taft tanks and re-released Control Line classic kits

John Brodak's wife, Coral, wrote and submitted the following biography on September 16, 2000.

John Brodak - Manufacturer and distributor of Control Line Airplanes and Accessories

John Brodak was born on April 1, 1939 in Fairmont, West Virginia. He lived there for one year until his family moved to Carmichaels, Pennsylvania, where he still lives today. John was born into a hard-working family of eastern European ancestry.

His father worked in the local coalmines and tended the family farm while his mother opened a small grocery store that had its beginnings as a roadside vegetable stand. Between school and family chores, there was little time for John or his two brothers to spend on recreation. This work ethic has served John well as he now owns and operates 10 different businesses, but his true love and devotion is to Control Line airplanes.



In 1952, at the age of 13, John purchased a Comet rubber band model airplane from another local grocery store. After taking it home and building it, he became so enthused that he was soon purchasing and building two to three planes a week. He tried to convince his mother to carry the planes in their store, but she declined saying that John would be opening them and building them faster than she could get them on the shelf.

In 1954, John visited Jewel's Hobby Shop in Kiedive, Pennsylvania, which was a very small establishment operated out of Mr. Jewel's garage. There John purchased his first real airplane kit and motor. It was a Sterling P-51 with a Fox .35 engine. As John and his brother had no adult guidance or leadership, the building of the plane took quite a while and, to be honest, was not done very well but the flying of the plane took even longer. Completely self-taught, purely by trial and error it took two years before John was able to fly an entire tank of fuel without a wreck. There was no one to offer any insight to the problems that John was having. He could only fix the plane and start over. This is probably one of the reasons John insists complete building instructions be included in all of his kits and that flying information be part of the annual catalog distributed by his company.

One year later, in 1955, John talked his mother into allowing him to stock model planes, glue, dope, props and a few engines in the gasoline station corner of the grocery store. Here John became a businessman, the owner of Carmichaels Hobby Shop. John started the Carmichaels Flying Club and although it was not registered with AMA, it showed that John was an organizer. His club met once a week at the hobby shop and would then go out to his father's field to fly their planes.

In the fall of 1960, John married Coral (Buzz) Welsh and the couple moved to Washington, Pennsylvania, leaving the hobby shop and the planes behind but not for long. Two months after they were married, John spotted a vacant storefront on his way home from work. They rented and rejuvenated the old building and moved in. The new business was listed as Brodak's Hobby Center and they expanded to carry trains, model cars, chemistry equipment, etc. but model planes were still John's main interest. He located other young men in the area who flew, and they spent many hours on the deserted ball fields of Washington. All along John picked up hints and ideas from everywhere he could.

With the impending birth of their first child in 1962, it was back to Carmichaels for the couple. They bought and moved into the same house they live in today on Locust Street and, although they kept the Hobby Center in Washington for a while, the discount houses of that era were financially making things very difficult. So, when the lease ran out in January of 1963, John packed up his merchandise and brought it to Locust Street to be stored in the garage. And there it stayed for the next 15 years.

In those 15 years, John took over his parents' grocery store, enlarged it, built two new grocery stores, added video stores, purchased a mobile home park, opened a printing shop, and in all ended up running 10 different businesses.

In 1988, John took what hobby supplies he had stored and put them in a corner of his Carmichaels Video store. He ordered a few new items and put up a sign naming the business

Brodak Hobbies, but he really didn't have the time to put much effort into it. As could be expected, John was a tremendously busy man and had a difficult time relaxing even when the time presented itself. For that very reason, he decided to build a model plane. He needed something to occupy his mind and his hands that did not include the daily running of his businesses.

He began to build from the kits he had, and it didn't take long for his infectious excitement to affect a few of his friends and they too began to build. Soon he started another club. This one was named the Flying Circus and was registered with AMA as Club #3099 in 1988. He has served as its president every year since.

John was in for a big surprise, however, when he found that there were no other hobby shops in his area that sold Control Line products. He felt part of the fun of building and flying was visiting new hobby shops, seeing what they carry and talking to their customers about their experiences. He was told time after time, "Control Line is dead. Nobody flies that stuff anymore."

Well, John wasn't one to take no for an answer. He started answering ads and making phone calls and discovered that there were numerous cottage industries throughout the United States that were manufacturing Control Line items. He contacted these owners and put together a catalog listing all of them under one cover.

He began advertising in model magazines letting people know what was available. As the demand grew, many of the smaller industries were unable to keep up and John began purchasing these small businesses and producing the items himself. This marked the beginning of Brodak Manufacturing & Distributing.

In the following 10 years: he purchased four businesses and began manufacturing J. Roberts three-line handles, perfect tanks, Taft tanks and re-released Control Line classic kits. Every year he would update and improve his catalog and add to the number of hobby shops that were beginning to carry Control Line products. He offered consignment orders, "Earn Your Wings" promotions, and unlimited availability to answer any questions. By 1999, John was distributing to over 150 businesses worldwide.

To promote Control Line flying in his own state, John printed and distributed several thousand flyers to the welcome centers and local hotels. He also encouraged his club members to attend and put on flying demonstrations at local county airport special events.

By 1999, John added three more businesses to his manufacturing group. Now he produced BY&O props, Grish props and the Control Line Specialties line. He had also by this time put on the market 55 different kits of his own. He takes great pride in introducing a new kit and giving complete credit to the original designer, i.e., George Aldrich, Bob Palmer, and Alan Brickhouse. He insures that any kit he produces be manufactured exactly as it was designed. John believes that the amateur builder, if instructed properly, will not become discouraged, and so he demands that his kits include full size plans, a step-by-step instruction booklet including pictures and a complete list of additional items needed to complete the kit. These are printed on his full color

boxes. His kits have been reviewed in many magazines worldwide and the February 1996 issue of Flying Models magazine did an extensive article on John himself.

Also, in 1999, John brought onto the market Brodak Butyrate Dope, which many modelers have declared the best on the market. John has always been a great Precision Aerobatics Model Pilot Association (PAMPA) and AMA enthusiast and believes wholeheartedly in their organizations running ads for them in all of his catalogs, which helps to generate membership. In 1999, John volunteered to handle all PAMPA product sales and shipping. He holds a lifetime membership in AMA (L181), is a member of the National Aeronautics Association and a Lifetime Patron of the AMA museum.

In 1997, John launched the Brodak Fly-in. This was a sanctioned, two-day competition that was held in his backyard in Carmichaels, Pennsylvania. This has become a yearly contest, which grew in the year 2000 to 103 contestants that flew 199 flights. It is held every June over Father's Day weekend and has expanded to four days. There were flyers from England, Germany, South Africa and Canada as well as states from California to New York. The contest only shows signs of growing larger every year. After all of this, if you were to ask John what he is most proud of he is most likely to tell you of his July 1999 trip to the Nationals (Nats). He took his Ryan PT-21 and after years of building, manufacturing and distributing Control Line planes, he was about to enter his first competition. One week earlier he had driven to St. Louis for Frank Beatty, who had designed the plane, to give it the once over and pilot her maiden flight. With Frank's approval of the Ryan's performance, it was off to the Nats and the excitement of the judges' evaluation of his building skills. This paled, however, to the pure exhilaration of John's first flight in the competition.

Having never flown the plane or ever competed at any contest, John made his flying debut at the Nats. With video cameras whirling and John's wife and niece screaming out praises, he landed the plane in one piece. He placed sixth and thoroughly enjoyed the challenge. But that is pretty much the story of John's life. He knows what he wants to do, and he does it.

Keep your eye on Carmichaels, Pennsylvania. John promises to keep flying into the 21st century.

*(signed) Coral (Buzz) Brodak
September 16, 2000*

Addendum

Coral Brodak wrote the following update to John's biography in November 2002.

In 2002, John initiated the idea of promoting model aviation as a sport instead of a hobby. He gave many passionate talks on the subject to both groups and on a one-on-one basis. He commissioned specially designed lapel pins [*one of these lapel pins is on file in the National Model Aviation Museum's file on John*] and printed fliers explaining his ideas. He gave these to whomever he discussed the topic. John believed that flying sites were being taken over by teams of organized sports players in part because model aviation is considered a hobby and its participants do not deserve consideration in the use of public fields. Also, he believes that if

model aviation were viewed as a sport instead of a hobby it would help to attract media coverage for the events. This could lead to more interest and participation in the sport.

Also, in 2002, John introduced an engine to his stock of products. The Brodak .40 was designed especially for Control Line flying. In the near future, three more engines are scheduled to be added to the line. They are the Brodak .049, Brodak .15, and the Brodak .25.

The following was printed in the January 2012 issue of Model Aviation by AMA staff. John was inducted into the AMA Hall of Fame in 2011.

John G. Brodak

John G. Brodak was born April 1, 1939, in Fairmont, West Virginia, and has been in the retail business all his life. He began working in his parents' grocery store/gas station at a young age, before opening his own hobby shop in 1955. In 1962, he took over the reins of the grocery store. Today he is an entrepreneur who owns 13 different businesses.

John's family moved to Carmichaels, Pennsylvania, when he was a young child. At age 13, he received an *Aeromite* model airplane as a gift. He never got to fly it, but that was the beginning of a lifelong love of model airplanes. He soon learned to fly and build his own aircraft from kits.

At age 21, John and his wife moved to Washington, Pennsylvania. Three months later, he moved his hobby store to Washington and carried a full line of hobby supplies.

He returned to Carmichaels to run his parents' business, but the increasing size and number of stores left no time for models. He went to a hobby shop to buy everything he needed to fly CL. Surprisingly, he was told, "Control Line is dead."

Combining his business expertise and his love for CL models, John was determined to find out what killed the sport. Through telephone calls, he located many who still produced equipment in their homes and decided to publish a catalog. The catalog was a success, but the small producers had difficulty keeping up with the demand. John bought some of them out and took over production.

As other companies began deleting CL kits from catalogs, John added to his. His catalog evolved into an information source that covered all aspects of CL flying. This was something never before attempted in a sales catalog. The 17th catalog in the series was distributed in 2010.

John devoted his attention to kits and created step-by-step instruction manuals, with images for each airplane. The first kit was produced in 1994, and he had more than 100 kits on the market by 2010.

John introduced his own line of paint and began distributing motors with the Brodak name. Today, Brodak Manufacturing and Distributing Inc. occupies a 10,000 square-foot building and has a growing demand for model airplane kits and supplies. The facility carries more than 1,000 CL items.

In 1997, John opened the field behind his home for a fly-in weekend. Each year for the past 15 years, the group has grown. In roughly 2000, John began sponsoring the unsanctioned event, Intermediate Stunt competition, at the Nats.

John hopes to open a museum-type venue in Carmichaels to house the many aircraft, kits, motors, handles, etc., he has acquired throughout the years.

Jack Sheeks, John's sponsor for the Class of 2011, wrote in his nomination:

“It has been an uphill struggle to get the building from the drawing board to reality, but whatever you do, don't tell John Brodak that his idea is dead. Look at what he has been able to do for Control Line.”

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