



---

# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ROBERT DANCE



Written by AMA staff (013); Added to HP files by JS (11/2013)

---

*The following was published in the October 2013 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the "I Am the AMA" section.*

---

## **I Am the AMA Robert Dance, Artist and illustrator**

*JS: How did you get involved with model aviation?*

RD: I was born in Tokyo, Japan, in 1934. At an early age, my brother and I used to fly rubber-powered models in that country. At that time, Japan was already at war with Manchuria and because of increasing tensions between the United States and Japan, Americans were advised by Ambassador Joseph Grew to leave the country.

Downtown Tokyo was having practice air raids and aircraft were simulating attacks on the city – probably the same pilots who attacked Pearl Harbor. Our family left just weeks before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Because of a Japanese nurse, I spoke Japanese better than English.

*JS: How has model aviation impacted your life and/or career?*

RD: We settled for a time in Richmond, Virginia. I was walking downtown one day and in the window of a hobby shop were two Cleveland models built by a master modeler. One was a Grumman Wildcat (our principal naval fighter at the time) and the other was a B-25 Mitchell bomber. I will never forget how beautifully they were made, and I told myself that someday I would be able to build a model to that degree of perfection.

*JS: What disciplines of modeling do you currently participate in?*

RD: Early on, I began to build models. Most of my models were rubber-powered Comet or Megow stick-and-tissue models. I felt lucky if one of them actually flew and knew I needed to perfect my building. Very slowly, my building *did* improve and I was able to build more complex models such as the Thermic 50 and Thermic Floater designs by Frank Zaic. He was one of the master modelers of over time, and was also one of the best draftsmen when it came to drawing plans.

I feel building models is an art and is very similar to sculpture. Since the age of six I have painted and built models, and in many ways they require the same discipline. I have become known for my nautical paintings, and I often make Scale boat models to pose in unusual attitudes for rough-water nautical paintings.

I have built models of almost every type except microfilm Indoor models. From the 1940s on, I have built rubber-powered models, gliders, gas-powered models using the beautiful Bantam engine, FF Rubber and Gas, CL, RC Scale, Quarter Scale, and micro RC.

In the 1970s I won the North Carolina Scale Championship with a scratch-built World War I British S.E.5a. At one time I was art editor of Radio Control Modeler magazine, and designed the logo or Micro-Avionics RC equipment.

The most pleasurable aspect of my modeling is actually designing Scale and sport models. The process of building a model and watching it fly is a pleasure that is hard to beat! I am also very interested in natural flight such as the flight of birds and butterflies... I've *never* seen one crash!

*JS: What are your other hobbies?*

RD: I greatly enjoy fly fishing for beautiful trout in a mountain stream. Observing a master fly fisherman is a beautiful thing to watch, and the jewel-like beauty of a trout is beyond comparison – particularly a brook trout.

*JS: Who or what has influenced you the most?*

RD: Nature has influenced me the most. In Philadelphia, I had some great teachers in art school and was asked to teach there, but nature is the great teacher. I will never tire of the observation of nature in all its aspects – the complexity, the color, the form, and the surprises.

Sit on the shore and watch a line of pelicans skim close to the waves... amazing! Art is the study of nature.

I have three sons – Scott, Mark, and Stuart – and, should the reader want to see my work, Scott has designed my website at [www.robertdance.com](http://www.robertdance.com). My artist/wife, Coleman, and I live near the coast in North Carolina where many of my nautical paintings are based.

*JS: How did you get involved in art?*

RD: Art and painting are not hobbies for me they are a difficult and serious occupation which requires great discipline. When I start a painting I never know if it will be completed to my satisfaction.

Each painting is a different problem. There are no tricks in art, and I seem to be more critical as I get older. So, as a hobby, it is very nice to forget art at times and go outside and fly a model.

---

**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

