



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of DON DELOACH



Written and Submitted by WB (05/1997); Transcribed and Edited by SS (06/2002), updated by JS (10/2007), (05/2010), (05/2012)

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## I Am the AMA Don DeLoach, NFFS Digest editor and FF competitor by Jay Smith

*Jay Smith: How did you get involved with model aviation?*

**Don DeLoach:** I'm a third generation modeler, born in 1972. I was taught by my dad, who was born in 1937 and grew up during World War II and the golden age of modeling. He progressed from Free Flight (FF) to Control Line to primitive RC in a few short years, and eventually soloed a full-scale Aeronca on his 16th birthday. His dad, a scientist and methodical craftsman, started in the pre-AMA (and pre- balsa!) days in about 1920.

I cut my teeth on Sleek Streaks and other slide-together models in the 1970s, progressing to Comet, Guillows, Peck, and Jetco kits. By the early 1980s, I was designing and (sloppily) scratch-building FF models. My dad reminisced with me of the huge FF contests of the 1940s, but he assumed that FF was probably dead. Then in 1985 he found out about a FF contest in Fort Worth, Texas. We attended and were awestruck by the gorgeous models and how well they flew. We were instantly hooked. We joined the AMA about a week later and began attending contests about once a month, going to our first Nats in Lake Charles, Louisiana, in 1986.

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

**DD:** It has given me so much, from a close relationship with my dad traveling to untold numbers of contests in the 1980s and 90s, to a deep love of aviation history and respect for military pilots. I took a few soaring lessons but, unlike my dad, I never really got the full-scale bug; I simply enjoy watching my airplanes fly too much.

In 2009, I got involved with the National Free Flight Society (NFFS) in a big way when I accepted the editorship of the NFFS *Free Flight Digest*. I guess the biggest impact of modeling has been to instill in me an attention to detail that the world seems to be losing. Details matter in almost all areas of life.

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

**DD:** I enjoy virtually all facets of FF, from Scale to Duration, Indoor and Outdoor. My first love is Outdoor Rubber power, especially the Flying Aces Club (FAC) scale events. I also fly FAI events (F1L, F1G, and occasionally F1B) and dozens of AMA and NFFS events from glow power to electrics to gliders.

I have won the Nats a few times and still hold a few AMA records. Probably my greatest (and luckiest) achievement was winning dual Grand Championships (Scale and Non-Scale) at the 2012 FAC Nationals, winning nine individual events. Proving that 2012 was a fluke, I followed

up with *zero* wins at the next PAC Nationals.

**JS:** *What are your other hobbies?*

**DD:** I'm an avid fly angler and bamboo fly-rod aficionado. During a hiatus from FF in the late 1990s, I built a couple of bamboo rods from scratch. I also enjoy hiking, carpentry, history, and volunteering at our daughter's school.

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

**DD:** First and foremost, my dad, who was a Vought manager, got me interested in aviation, practically from birth. He was also a keen FF modeler. Other FF mentors included Bud Tenny, Bill McCombs, Jesse Shepherd, Jim Clem, Stan Chilton, Larry Kruse, Marvin Mace, Russ Snyder, Don Srull, and Mike Midkiff.

In recent years, I've learned at the feet of FF Hall of Famers Herb Kothe, Bud Romak, and others. The greatest thing about FF is the towering figures who engage in it. Flying at a large contest such as the Nats is like taking batting practice with Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris. The depth of knowledge available is immense if you open yourself up to help.

**JS:** *What advice would you give someone looking to get started in Free Flight?*

**DD:** Number one: Recognize that whatever you're thinking of building has probably been done before. Join NFFS. Buy the *Symposium* books and back issues of the *NFFS Digest*. If you are interested in small stick-and-tissue models, join the FAC. Read! Scour the AMA website for old FF articles in *Model Aviation*. Go to the Hip Pocket Aeronautics ([www.hippocketaeronautics.com](http://www.hippocketaeronautics.com)) and NFFS ([www.freeflight.org](http://www.freeflight.org)) websites.

Most importantly, find a nearby mentor. A visit to his or her shop can save you years of time in becoming competent. Finally, don't be scared away by contests. Attending them is probably the best way to pick up tips quickly and make friends with the top fliers.



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