



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of DONALD J. GRIFFIN

Born May 24, 1913      Started modeler since 1927

AMA #2224



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Submitted by DJG (02/2003); Written, Transcribed & Edited by SS (02/2003), Reformatted by JS (08/2009)

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## Career:

- 1934-1964: Competed throughout the Midwest
- Served as president of the Hell Cats club in Saint Joseph, Missouri; helped establish the club in 1935
- 1936-1945: Directed local contests
- 1944-1951: Owned the Midwest Hobby Supply store
- Served as vice president of the Sky Kings in Kansas City, Missouri; helped establish the club in 1945
- 1986-2002: Ran a helicopter impound with his wife for the Nationals
- 1989, 2001: Ran a Radio Control impound at the Nationals
- 1980- present (2003): Member of the Lake Ozarks Radio Control Society and the Indian Creek Radio Control club, both in the Lake Ozarks, Missouri Area
- Has been involved with various types of modeling, most recently (in 2003) with Radio Control planes and helicopters

## Honors:

- 1999: Received the Don Richard Chapman Award for continued support to model helicopter hobby sport along with his wife, Naomi

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## The Beginning

Donald J. Griffin started his modeling career at the age of 14 by building a World War I bi-plane from a kit. He built the plane with no help and had a bit of trouble understanding the plans. He was really interested in flying full-sized planes, but was unable to get a pilot's license due to a bout with polio. So, instead, he started building models. First, he built stick and tissue models then gliders, gas-powered planes, Free Flight models, U-Control models, U-Control speed models and finally Radio Control airplanes. Donald also was involved with Radio Control boats and now (2003) Radio Control helicopters. He continues to build, but is getting too old to fly.

Donald found a love for model aviation and would build models of any kind for the satisfaction and thrill of seeing it fly. In 1934, Donald joined his first model club, the Hell Cats of Saint Joseph, Missouri, then the Sky Kings of Kansas City, Missouri, and later the Modulated Mites. He was a member of the Hell Cats for five years.

## Competition

Donald competed throughout the Midwest from 1934 to 1964. His first contest was at age 22 in a Kiwanis Club model contest. He flew a Carl Goldberg sailplane and Interceptor model (gas-powered). Donald placed first and down. The next year he followed in competition at the Saint Joseph Model Airplane Contest.

Aside from local contests, Donald also got involved with Nationals. In 1937 and 1938 around age 24 he flew a Goldberg sailplane Free Flight model, competing against Carl Goldberg, the Nationals champion. Unfortunately, Donald crashed and did not place.

He went on to compete in the Nationals at Olathe, Kansas; Lincoln, Nebraska; Omaha, Nebraska; and Wichita, Kansas.

From 1986 to 2002, Donald and his wife, Naomi, ran a helicopter impound for the Nationals and ran the Radio Control impound (world's helicopter) at the 1989 Tidewater, Virginia, Nationals and the 2001 Muncie, Indiana, Nationals.

## **Leadership**

Donald served as president of the Hell Cats club in Saint Joseph, Missouri, and vice president of the Sky Kings in Kansas City, Missouri. He helped establish both clubs, the Hell Cats in 1935 and the Sky Kings in 1945.

From 1980 to the present (2003), Donald has been a member of the Lake Ozarks Radio Control Society Sky Hawks and the Indian Creek Radio Control club in the Lake Ozarks, Missouri area.

Donald was also involved with directing local contests from 1936 to 1945.

## **Hobby Industry and Model Aviation Education**

Donald owned the Midwest Hobby Supply store from 1944 to 1951. He held model building classes in the hobby shop and organized Free Flight contests.

## **Awards and Honors**

At the 1999 Helicopter Internationals and the IRCHA Worlds Jamboree, Donald and Naomi were resented with the 1999 Don Richard Chapman Award for continued support to the model helicopter hobby sport. As reflected by this award, Naomi was also involved with modeling. In 1942, she built and flew a Free Flight gas-powered Playboy airplane in contests and also flew Control speed and stick models, among others.

(Signed) Donald J. Griffin  
February 2003

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