



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ROBERT E. HODGDON



Transcribed and edited by JS (11/2007)

The following portion of an autobiography was in the publication "Who's Who in AMA, 2003, District V"

My earliest memories are of aviation and modeling. My father is a World War II Army Air Corps veteran and was a modeler in his youth. He introduced me to modeling by buying me my first flying model airplane when I was two. We were in a department store; all I wanted to do was see a model one more time before we left. Next thing I knew, we were on our way home and I was holding that model, a shiny new Comet blue and yellow Piper *Tri-Pacer* powered by an OK Cub .049 engine. I still have it. We flew that model endlessly in front of our home. I have been hooked ever since.

I learned to fly U-Control at age six on a Cox *PT-19*, and then progressed to most every plastic u-controlled model available. Dad then introduced me to balsa kits and I began to build the entire lines of Goldberg, Sterling, Guillow's, and Scientific models, both U-Control and Free Flight.

In 1960, my family moved from Maine to Huntsville, Alabama so my parents could work for the U.S. Space Program at Redstone Arsenal. Dad worked for the Sperry Rand Corporation and Mom worked at the Marshal Space and Flight Center.

I flew models every chance I got. I remember going around the neighborhood on Christmas Day, helping the kids fly the airplanes they received. I owned several Free Flight models and would fly them on Saturdays at the local schoolyard, which seemed large enough, but I cannot remember any Free Flight ever landing on the property. After losing several Free Flight models, especially my favorite Veco Taylor *Cub*, I became very discouraged. I figured there had to be a way to keep from losing my models.

I was now about 14 and had my first motorcycle, so interest in models took a back seat until I could find a way to stop losing them. One afternoon, while enjoying my new found freedom, I was riding around the recently closed Huntsville Airport. I was riding up and down the runways when in the distant sky I noticed several models flying around on what appeared to be extremely long lines. I approached the area, noticed that they were not on lines at all, and asked the men how they were able to control the models. He introduced himself and carefully explained that the airplanes were controlled by radio. Each pilot had a hand-held transmitter, the model was equipped with a receiver, and servos controlled each flight function. He demonstrated this with his model, an Andrews *Aeromaster*.

As he flew the model, I realized I thought I had found the solution to losing my models. At least I discovered that in most cases you could see where they crashed and could take home the remains. After his flight, he wanted to ride my motorcycle because he rode one when he was younger. I was not really keen on letting anyone ride my new toy, so I told him - thinking there was *no way* he would agree - that I would let him ride my motorcycle if he would let me fly his model. I could not believe it when he agreed.

He borrowed a transmitter and connected them together, explaining how each stick controlled the model. He took the airplane off and after getting several-mistakes high, said, "You have it." I did everything he told me and flew for about five minutes before landing. I had discovered Radio

Control and was in heaven! He rode my motorcycle all over that airport. I rushed home to tell Dad about my discovery and asked if we could get one. Dad had not done much modeling because the Space Race had him working fourteen-hour days supporting the moon shots. Dad was just too busy, so the answer of the day was, "Sounds good. We'll see." I knew that meant it was to be my hobby."

Soon I found a person in our neighborhood who knew I was looking for some Radio Control equipment. One afternoon, he showed all of it to me and said I could have it if I would cut his grass for the entire summer. It included an EK Logitroll radio installed in a deBolt *Jenny* high-wing trainer, and a flight box with all the support equipment. He had the best-mowed lawn in the neighborhood. This was the summer of 1970 or 1971, and I joined the AMA.

The Rocket City Radio Control (RCRC) Club had only been around a few years. I went to a club meeting at the old Huntsville Public Library Building and joined. I learned to fly Radio Control that summer and soloed on August 15, 1971 in probably one of the worst crosswinds I can remember. I could not even taxi the *Jenny* back to the pit since it kept tipping over on a wingtip, so I taxied it into the grass before the wind blew it over and damaged it. Suddenly, I was attacked by most of the other pilots who cut off my shirrtail. They told me that it was a tradition that they cut off the person's necktie, but since I did not have one, the shirrtail would have to do.

After that, things progressed rapidly. I discovered that Pattern competitions were held most every weekend and I was interested. At that time, about twenty RCRC pilots regularly flew at these events. At 16, I flew in my first contest in Tullahoma, Tennessee, flying a scratch-built *Ugly Stick*. Out of fifteen contestants in A Pattern, I placed seventh. That contest was in July of 1973. For the next fifteen years, I attended every contest I could get to, flying the current Pattern designs while working my way through the higher classes of competition, including AMA Scale and Sailplane. I also developed many friendships within the RCRC Club, as well as in the hobby, many of which have developed into lifelong friendships.

During my Radio Control hobby career, I became an AMA Leader Member, AMA Contest Director, and instructor pilot, with many former students still flying locally. I have judged at many RCRC Pattern contests and was chief judge at two RCRC Pattern contests in 1982 and 1983, and was selected as a judge for the 1983 Masters Tournament sponsored by RCRC. I am also a former Vice President of RCRC and former President of the North Alabama Radio Control Society (NARCA.) I also write kit reviews for *RC Report* magazine. To this day, I enjoy the hobby of building and flying radio-controlled models of all types, but generally prefer World War II War birds.

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