



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of BERTRAM (BERT) PHILLIPS POND



**Modeler, Pioneer, Manufacturer  
AMA Organizer, Author**

May 31, 1901 – June 30, 1999 Started modeling around 1916  
AMA #F6

Written & Submitted by BPP (08/1996); Transcribed by NR (08/1996); Edited by SS (2002), Updated by JS (10/2007, 05/2014), Reformatted by JS (01/2010)

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## Career:

- An engineer and a modeler and with a broad and extensive background
- 1936: Helped create the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA)
- Produced several thousands of air-powered motors, 3 cylinder radial
- 1925: Won first in Nationals at New York Air Races
- Wrote a book, “6 steps from glider to scale model” – like a textbook
- Wrote articles for two years for *Popular Aviation* magazine
- Wrote three articles for *Popular Science Monthly*

## Honors:

- 1977: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1978: National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
- 1989: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame
- 1996: Kits and Plans Antiquitous Hall of Fame

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*The following was written by Bertram P. Pond in 1996.*

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**Name:** Bertram Phillips Pond.

**Date of Birth:** 31 May 1901, Chicago, Illinois

**Father:** Harvard University

**Me:** University of Illinois; Mechanical Engineering, 1925, took all aero courses available then ROTC Air Unit Major

Engineering Officer for six weeks at Chanute Field, flying daily in Canucks & Jennies

Saw crude model in Peru, Indiana in 1913. Thought could do better so read all old Colins books and Langley memoirs. Built 12" biplane, which flew well enough that I was invited to join Illinois Model Aero Club (I.M.A.C.) in Chicago. Learned how to really make all types of rubber models tractors, twin pushers, scale, including *SE5* and *Junkers* (copy of mail plane from actual measurements on real plane with armed guard looking other way). Held several records. In 1922, tried to get NAA interested in running a National Contest (Nats). In 1923, was successful and first Nats were run in St. Louis at Air Races. Won fourth or fifth place.

In the 1924 Nats at Dayton, I placed third or fourth. Won first in 1925 Nats at New York Air Races. Helped compile booklet of best contest plans to date. Schoolteacher in Detroit, whose young entrants in 1924 and 1925 were not very hot or good, persuaded Garber at 1926 Nats in

Philadelphia to allow Jack Laughner to fly after the event was officially over. Jack barely made first even then, pushing me down to third from second.

Wrote a book for the Paul Jones Company, which was sold through the Kresgy Chain stores. Book had six steps from glider to scale model; like a textbook. Joe Ott copied this idea with a five-step series book.

Rubber models were boring so designed and produced several thousands of air-powered motors, three-cylinder radial. Still assemble a few from residue of parts. I currently import an Air Motor from Italy along with a model kit.

I wrote articles for two years for Popular Aviation magazine in Chicago, Illinois. Also wrote three articles for Popular Science Monthly. (They paid more!)

With a family - wife and four children - I got better position in Springfield and moved from Minneapolis where I had formed the Minneapolis Model Aero Club, which is still going strong today. Joined the Pioneer Valley R.C. Club here.

Worked on Life Support Systems for the moon walkers, jet engine controls, and assorted projects at Hamilton Standard.

During war, was at Wright Field in Equipment Laboratory and Engineering Officer of the 11th Air Force. Am retired Air Force LT.COL.

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*The following is from the April 1978 issue of Model Aviation magazine, pages 60 and 63.*

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Bert Pond (Bertram P.), age 74, has been an active aeromodeler for nearly 60 years.

His long span of activity is unique. From the Illinois Model Aero Club of 1916 to the Pioneer Valley Radio Control Club of 1976 (in New England), Pond's involvement has been continuous. His achievements and distinctions are many - world record holder, writer, designer, manufacturer, contest director, historian, and competitor. However, his greatest contribution to model aeronautics was his efforts in leading and organizing during the early years, particularly his role in helping organize contests, which were national in scope.

In 1923, Bert Pond accompanied a contingent of model airplane fliers from Chicago to St. Louis with the sole purpose of persuading the St. Louis Air Board to include in the National Air Races a "Model Airplane Race." After several days of energetic contact with then new National Aeronautic Association by telephone, the model airplane event was included.

This was the first time NAA involved itself in models, and the 1923 National Air Races is viewed today as the very first "Nats" by NAA's affiliate – the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Thus, Bert Pond participated in, and made substantial contributions to, the beginning of the first national championships for model aircraft. Even more important, historically, was the basic decision by NAA to involve itself in model airplanes. This eventually resulted in the beginning of the AMA.

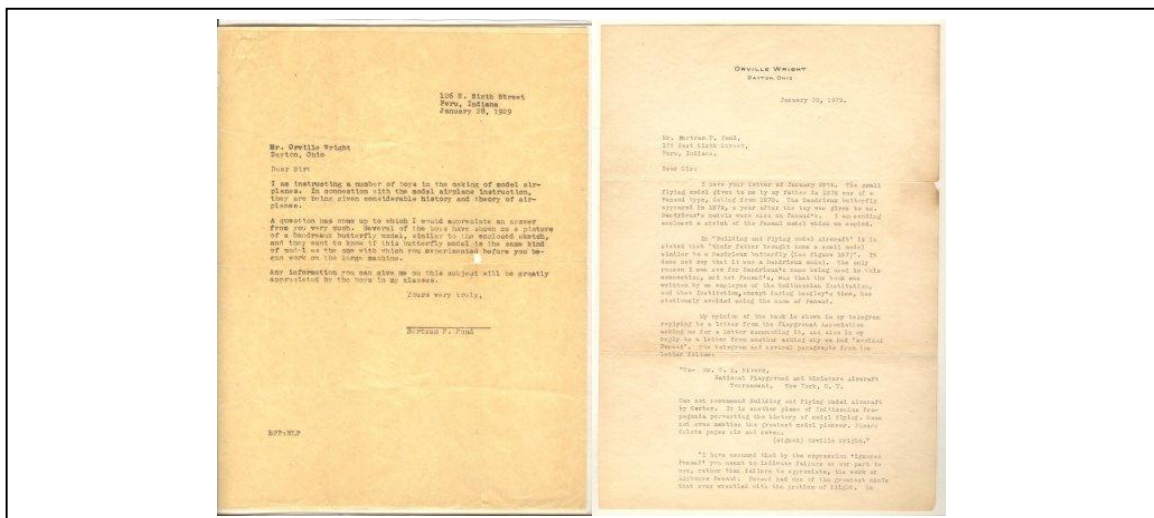
Bert Pond is a retired Air Force Reserve Lt. Colonel, a professional engineer currently working on the Space Shuttle Program. He has manufactured and sold model airplane components through the years and has published extensively. His Free Flight designs have had a profound and lasting influence on rubber outdoor models. His national Rubber-Powered Free Flight records include Indoor and Outdoor in 1921, and Twin Pusher Hydro in 1922. He has worked at National Contests since 1933; his latest contribution was at the 1975 Nats.

*The photograph below is from the AMA History Project Collection.*



**1944 or 1945: Bertram Phillips Pond in Air Force uniform with "Oak Leaves" rank insignia on his shoulders and wedge cap**

*The following are scans of the letters between Bert Pond and Orville Wright about Wright's toy helicopter, as well as transcripts of the letters.*



Mr. Orville Wright

describing several important inventions, one of which was his system of inherent stability. Apparently, however, among the valuable qualities he did not mention was some quality of his hand and some ability to operate for long flights. Oswald was the inventor and designer of the system of inherent stability used in most flying models today, but one of the rubber bands used in your model is all of them. We have always looked upon him as the father of the modern flying models, and have repeatedly stated that the first flying toys were copied from his.

"We always appreciated the great ability of Oswald, and hope we shall never learn to use the methods of one of our prominent scientific institutions in ignoring great pioneers. In a recent book on 'Building and Flying Models, Aircraft', written for boys by the warner of models in the Smithsonian Institution, Oswald's name does not appear once, although every model mentioned in the book used his or one of his inventions. For this the same reason as the Smithsonian's official 'Hand-book of the National Museum', 'Aircraft Collection', although Langley and the Puffin system of inherent stability in all of its and in his 400-page monograph. The responsibility for this failure to recognize Oswald belongs not to Langley, but to the administration of the Smithsonian after Langley's time. Langley himself repeatedly mentioned Oswald."

Very truly yours,  
*Orville Wright*



105 E. Sixth Street  
 Peru, Indiana  
 February 11, 1909

Mr. Orville Wright  
 Dayton, Ohio

Dear Mr. Wright:

Your fine sketch of the toy helicopter and your friendly letter were greatly appreciated by the boys and by myself.

Some of the boys are making toy helicopters of this type and another very similar type. In fact, they have become so efficient that they have made 37 seconds stop-watch time indoors with one of these machines.

The boys were especially interested in your remarks about Oswald, and several of them reminded me that your father at one time lived very close in the vicinity of Peru, and often visited with friends here.

Should I ever be in the vicinity of Dayton, I would appreciate your permission to call on you at your convenience and have a short talk with you, providing I let you know when I expect to come in advance.

Yours very truly,  
 Herbert F. Voss

377:567

**RETURN RECEIPT.**

Received from the Postmaster the Registered or Insured Article, the original number of which appears on the face of this Card.

*Orville Wright*  
 (Signature or name of addressee)

Deliver to addressee only.

(Signature of addressee's agent.)

Date of delivery, 1 29 1909

Form 3511

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**Initial letter from Bert to Orville  
Dated January 28, 1929**

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126 E. Sixth Street  
Peru, Indiana  
January 28, 1929

Mr. Orville Wright  
Dayton, Ohio

Dear Sir:

I am instructing a number of boys in the making of model airplanes. In connection with the model airplane instruction, they are being given considerable history and theory of airplanes.

A question has come up to which I would appreciate an answer from you very much. Several of the boys have shown me a picture of a Dandreaux butterfly model, similar to the enclosed sketch, and they want to know if this butterfly model is the same kind of model as the one which you experimented before you began work on the large machine.

Any information you can give me on this subject will be greatly appreciated by the boys in my classes.

Yours very truly,

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Bertram P. Pond

EPP: NLP

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**Response from Orville to Bert  
Dated January 30, 1929**

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ORVILLE WRIGHT  
DAYTON, OHIO

January 30, 1929

Mr. Bertram P. Pond,  
126 East Sixth Street,  
Peru, Indiana.

Dear Sir:

I have your letter of January 28<sup>th</sup>. The small flying model given to me by my father in 1878 was of a Penaud type, dating from 1870. The Dandrieux butterfly appeared in 1879, a year after the toy was given to us. Dandrieux's models were also on Penaud's. I am sending enclosed a sketch of the Penaud model which we copied.

In "Building and Flying Model Aircraft" it is stated that "their father brought home a small model similar to a Dandrieux butterfly (See figure 187)". It does not say that it was a Dandrieux model. The only reason I can see for Dandrieux's name being used in this connection, and not Penaud's, was that the book was written by an employee of the Smithsonian Institution, and that Institution, except during Langley's time, has studiously avoided using the name of Penaud.

My opinion of the book is shown in my telegram replying to a letter from the Playground Association asking me for a letter commending it, and also in my reply to a letter from another asking why we had "avoided Penaud". The telegram and several paragraphs from the letter follow:

"To- Mr. T.E. Rivers,  
National Playground and Miniature Aircraft Tournament, New  
York, N.Y.

Can not recommend Building and Flying Model Aircraft by Garber. It is another piece of Smithsonian Propaganda perverting the history of model flying. Does not even mention the greatest model pioneer. Please delete pages six and seven.

(signed) Orville Wright."

"I have assumed that by the expressing 'ignored Penaud' you meant to indicate failure on our part to use, rather than failure to appreciate, the work of Alphonse Penaud. Penaud had one of the greatest minds that ever wrestled with the problem of flight. He

Mr. Bertram P. Pond ----2

contributed several important inventions, one of which was his system of inherent stability. Apparently however, among its valuable qualities he did not recognize also some qualities not so good and some actually dangerous for man-flight. Penaud was the inventor not only of the system of inherent stability used in most flying models today, but also of the rubber band motor used in practically all of them. We have always looked upon him as the father of the modern flying models, and have repeatedly stated that our first flying toys were copied from one of his.

“We always appreciated the great ability of Penaud, and hope we shall never learn to use the methods of one of our prominent scientific institutions in ignoring great pioneers. In a recent book on “Building and Flying Model Aircraft”, written for boys by the creator of models in the Smithsonian Institution, Penaud’s name does not appear once, although every model described in the book used one or more of his inventions. Nor does his name appear in the Smithsonian’s official “Hand-book of the National Museum’s Aircraft Collection”, although Langley used the Penaud system of inherent stability in all of his models and in his full-size machine. The responsibility for this failure to recognize Penaud belongs not to Langley, but to the administrations of the Institution after Langley’s time. Langley himself repeatedly mentioned Penaud.

Very truly yours,  
(signed) Orville Wright

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**Response from Bert to Orville  
Dated February 11, 1929**

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February 11, 1929

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Should I ever be in the vicinity of Dayton, I would appreciate your permission to call on you at your convenience and have a short talk with you, providing I let you know when I expect to come in advance.

Yours very truly,



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Bertram P. Pond

BPP: NLP

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*Scans of photographs from the Bertram P. Pond Collection, held at the National Model Aviation Museum Archives in Muncie, Indiana.*

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The Chicago I.M.A.C. Contingent.  
Standing L-R Paul Shiffler-Smith, Walter Brock,  
Bert Pond, Harry Wells, Francis Dampitz, Major R. W.  
"Shorty" Schroeder (official), Robert Jaros, William E.  
Schweitzer, Eugene G. Docherty. Seated  
Joseph Lucas, Edward T. Lange.

*Label reads "The Chicago I.M.A.C. Contingent. Standing L-R Paul Shiffer – Smith, Walter Brock, Bert Pond, Harry Wells, Francis Dampitz, Major R. W. "Shorty" Schroeder (Official), Robert Jaros, William E. Schweitzer, Eugene G. Doeherty. Seated Joseph Lucas, Edward T. Lange."  
(Unknown date)*



*Clipping from Model Airplane News article, October 1934. Caption of photo in clipping says "Bert' Pond who flew Kenworthy's British model in the Moffett International Contest. This model placed highest of all foreign models."*





*Model aviation contestants at the first "Nats" at the International Air Race in St. Louis, Missouri in 1923*



*Written on front of photograph in ink: "DAMST - SHIF, SMITH, W. BROCK, POND, WELLS, MAV. JAROS, SCHWEITZER, DOGHERTY, LUCAS, LANGE, R.W. SCROEDER "SHORTY"". (Unknown location and date)*



*Bert Pond, c. late 1910s-early 1930s. (Unknown location)*



*Bert Pond with Bottle Baby #2 (Unknown location and date)*

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