



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of RICHARD G. TANIS

Born October 17, 1926

Started modeling in 1932

AMA #627



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Written & Submitted by WI (06/1996); Transcribed by NR (11/1996); Edited by SS (2002), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

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## Career:

- For 37 years he helped organize and run model airplane clubs in many of the schools in his area
- He has a record of over 30 years of loyal and dedicated service to his fellow club members
- He was reporter and printer of the clubs newsletter, the Printed Circuit
- He turned a dump and a swamp into flying fields for all area Radio Control flyers
- He received a second field complete with a macadam runway from the town
- Rich as Contest Director sponsored weekly soaring meets for the club members and was responsible for large AMA contests to be held at the field
- The AMA based their first Old-Timer/Radio Control contest on concepts that Rich put into effect in 1971 at Lakehurst

## Honors:

- 1988: Received the Carl and Beth Goldberg Vital People Award
- 1998: AMA Pioneer Award

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*William Iurato wrote the following text.*

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Richard Tanis has been an active full-scale aviation enthusiast, pilot, model builder, inventor, designer, and club administrator over a span of 50 years.

In his youth, modeling was a family and community activity. Fathers, sons, and relatives gathered at the local schoolyard to fly their airplanes.

As a high school student, he was a member of two Civil Air Patrol groups, one in Paterson, New Jersey, and later he helped to organize a group in his own hometown of Hawthorne. He learned to fly and soloed at the age of 16 just before enlisting in the Army Air Force. He received an Air Force scholarship and, as an aviation cadet, he was a member of the A.S.T.R.P. at the University of Buffalo in 1944.

This background has given Rich the knowledge and experience to be a leader in model aviation. After his stint in the Air Force, he organized a model-building club at the Newark State Teachers College for Industrial Arts Major.

Upon graduating, he has organized and promoted model airplane clubs and activities in Hawthorne High School, 9 elementary schools and 1 junior high in Montclair. In the city of Clifton, he continued these activities in three junior high schools.

While others bemoaned the lack of junior model builders, Rich was quietly turning out modelers for 37 years. His students have been AMA champions and won awards at local science fairs. Modeling activities were incorporated in shop and drafting classes. One of his students, Kenny



***1996: Richard and his 1938 Miss Fortune X. Richard is considered by some the originator of the Old Timer Radio Control airplane.***

Bonnema, has worked on major projects with your own Don Lowe.

As an outstanding member of the North Jersey Radio Control Club, his is a record of over 30 years of loyal and dedicated service to his fellow club members.

When help is needed, Rich is never more than a phone call away. Rich has been asked to serve on every major committee during this time. He has contributed many new ideas and activities to our club. He has served five times as president, four years as treasurer, and five terms as vice president. He was just elected vice president for 1988-1989.

He has served as a reporter and printer of the clubs newsletter, the Printed Circuit, for several years. He redesigned the club paper and included photos of the clubs activities for the first time.

Over the years, he has helped to build and maintain 10 different flying sites. He has spoken to county officials and received two flying fields. Rich turned a dump and a swamp into flying fields for all area Radio Control flyers regardless of club affiliation. He received a second field complete with a macadam runway from the town.

Howard McEntee asked Rich to put on a soaring demonstration for a local landowner. Rich did so and the club received the field for their exclusive use. Rich was responsible for the N.J.R.C.C. Joining the East Coast Soaring Society. Rich as contest director (CD) sponsored weekly soaring meets for the club members and was responsible for large AMA contests to be held at the field. He supplied the prizes for all these meets over the years.

Rich went on to win honors in soaring (ranked fifth best pilot in ECCS) and represented the USA in the 1974 Aero Olympics at Lakehurst, New Jersey. He helped and encouraged fellow club members to participate in Bearing activities. Rich has always shared his knowledge and experiences with other club members.

Rich won first prize in an original idea contest sponsored by the ECCS with his method of repairing plastic sailplanes. He also won several other prizes for his original ideas in the field of soaring. He has been active as a CD, pattern and scale judge, arranged fun flies, awards, fieldtrips

and award banquets.

As a professional magician, he has entertained flyers, children, and wives at the clubs various social events. As fund raising chair, he raised over \$2,000.

He designed the clubs two fold ID card, which was copied by the Wayne Modelers Radio Control club. He established the Howard McEntee youth award for the outstanding junior member of the NJRCC Inc.

Old-Timer Radio Control and Free Flight Radio Control was originated and established solely by Richard Tanis in 1969. Hundreds of clubs throughout the United States copied this meet. The Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) also copied Rich's ideas and concepts and added Old-Timer Radio Control to their flying program in 1972.

The SAM organization then grew from a mere 200 members to over 3,000 in a few short years. Many new SAM chapters were established throughout the USA, Canada, Europe, and Australia due to the publicity from Rich's first Old-Timer Radio Control contest.

The success of the nation's first Old-Timer Radio Control contest was not a matter of luck. Rich spent an entire year exploiting this contest in the model press, talks at local clubs and demonstrating at flying fields. He promoted all efforts prizes to 15th place in each event, and trophies to fifth place for three years in a row. He designed and built many special awards in his own workshop along with a three-level trophy display stand that also held the clubs logo. Rich designed a beautiful participation award, which displayed the AMA name. He also designed a souvenir Old-Timer patch. These items were given to each contestant. The remaining patches were sold to the spectators. This contest, by the way, drew the largest spectator audience in the history of Lakehurst due to Rich's publicity efforts. The Old-Time patch was encased in the AMA display unit, which travels about the country.

Rich Tanis used the WRAM show to exploit the first Old-Timer Radio Control contest. Rich built a special display stand complete with photos and word description of Old-Timer activity. He designed, printed, and distributed 1,000 handbills at this show.

Old-Timer models are now part of the WRAM show due to Rich's efforts in 1971, 1972 and 1973. Other shows have also copied this idea that Rich put into effect some 17 years ago.

This year the AMA will hold its first Old-Timer Radio Control event. This contest is actually based on concepts that Rich put into effect in 1971 at Lakehurst. Rich requested the president of the AMA in 1972 to make Old-Timer Radio Control part of the Nationals (Nats).

For the past eight years, Rich has worked to build and maintain the clubs latest flying field at the Brushwood Pond area in Ringwood State Park. Cutting trees, mowing grass, removing brush and repairing the rustic dirt roadway have been part of his club activities. He has served two terms as president and two terms as vice president during the construction of the flying field.

Richard Tanis is indeed a vital person – he has vigorously promoted and sponsored AMA activities in schools, social organizations, scouts, churches, mall shows, clubs and full scale air shows at Lakehurst, Fairfield Airport, Stewart Army Air base and West Point. He has acted as a speaker, demonstrator, flyer, and teacher. He is a hard-worker, originator, innovator, CD, and AMA club officer.

He has quietly made model aviation go and grow locally, nationally, and internationally through his Old-Timer Radio Control program.

Richard Tanis received the Carl and Beth Goldberg Vital People Award in 1988.

*William Turato - AMA 313*

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*The following is a testimonial to Richard G. Tanis by his club members.*

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North Jersey Radio Control Club, Inc.  
391 Central Ave.  
Hawthorne, New Jersey 07506

FROM: North Jersey Radio Control Club Inc. Press Release  
SUBJECT: 25th Anniversary Old-Timer Radio Control 1971 to 1996  
Date: 6/10/96

Old-Timer Radio Control as originated and founded in 1969 by NJRCC member Richard G. Tanis (AMA- 627, SAM 103). Historical outline page two, photos included.

**Club officers:**

President: Doug Nasto  
Vice President: Bill Turner  
Secretary: Jeff Hartos  
Treasurer: Tom Fuchs

In 1968, North Jersey Radio Control Club Member Richard G. Tanis noticed a decline in club and AMA contest participation. Rich Tanis decided to reverse this trend.

As a builder and flyer of 1938 powered Free Flight airplanes and gliders, Rich saw the possibility of combining these two disciplines with the addition of Radio Control. The result was the founding of the nation's first Old-Timer Radio Control Contest based on no less than three exciting events.

Event One: With a limited engine run, the airplane was radio controlled from take off to a spot landing circle for bonus points. Three classes: A, B, and C.

Event Two: This was a true Free Flight event. The airplane rose off the ground, flew, and landed without the use Radio Control. The transmitter was used only to shut off the engine (LER). Timing stopped the moment the pilot used his or her transmitter to save the airplane or return to the field.

Event Three: Pylon racing - four airplanes per heat flying against the timers clock. Five laps per heat.

Models designed prior to December 7, 1941 were eligible for contest participation. He chose this date to honor all modelers who entered the service in World War II. Rich served in the U.S. Army Air Force.

Mr. Tanis spent two years (1969-1970) preparing for Americas first official AMA Old-Timer Radio Control meet. A flurry of activity took place. Publishing and distributing rules, press releases to model magazines, contacting manufactures for prizes and model magazines for free subscriptions. Flying Models magazine sponsored the contests for 1971, 1972, and 1973. Rich also flew Old-Timer demonstrations at Lakehurst Naval Air Station and other local clubs.

Photographing pre-contest Old-Timer activities, giving Old-Timer plans to club members, donating trophies, and designing a special three-tier trophy stand that included a silk screened logo of the NJRCC club keep him very busy at this time.

Rich organized the nation's first display of Old-Timer Radio Control airplanes at the WRAM show prior to the 1971 contest. Over one thousand copies of Old-Timer Radio Control rules were handed out at this time.

The first contest was held July 11, 1971 at the Naval Air Station at Lakehurst, New Jersey. This contest drew the largest spectator turn out in the history of Lakehurst. Each contestant received an Old-Timer Radio Control shoulder patch and an 8 x 10 parchment certificate designed and signed by Rich Tanis to commemorate this historic event. The patch has the honor of being on display for the past 25 years in the AMA traveling promotional display.

Before the Old-Timers' contest in 1971, Mr. Tanis joined John Ponds Society of Antique Modelers as Member 103. One year after the Old-Timers' Radio Control contest the SAM Membership grew to 318 members. In 1972 the Society of Antique Modelers incorporated the contest rules and philosophy created by Richard Tanis. The SAM organization now has some 50 chapters and nearly 4,000 modelers throughout the world.

Rich Tanis would like to thank the following organizations and people for helping him to promote his Old-Timer Radio Control Free Flight contests and establishing it throughout the world:

- Flying Models Magazine who sponsored the contest in 1971, 1972 and 1973

- Mr. Gene Fuller - F.M. staff writer, photographer and personal friend
- Mr. Art Schroder - Model Airplane News writer and photographer
- Mr. William Northrup - Founder of Model Builder Magazine
- Mr. John Pond - his historic old timer plans collection that allowed all of this to happen
- Model Aviation
- Radio Controlled Models (RCM)
- The officers and membership of the North Jersey Radio Control Club Inc.

To my assistant Contest Directors:

- 1971 Joe Beshar,
- 1972 Woody Woodman and
- 1973 Russ Glasgow

Special thanks to my official cosponsor, Woody Woodman, and his charming wife and to Virginia Tanis, who passed away November 7, 1988. Last but not least, all of the modelers from the East Coast who participated in this historic contest and carried the spirit of Old-Timer Radio Control back to their local AMA clubs.

All SAM and AMA pilots are welcome to fly their Old-Timer models at the North Jersey Radio Control club to celebrate this, the 25th Anniversary of Old-Timer Radio Control.

*Yours Truly,  
Doug Nasto, NJRCC Inc.*



*1991: This was taken at the Vintage Radio Control meeting in Waynesboro, Virginia in at the Eagles Nest*





*Early 1970s: Richard Tanis*



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