



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of RANDALL TRUMBULL



Written by RT (10/1998); Reformatted by JS (12/2009)

Randall Trumbull wrote the following autobiographical account of his beginning in Radio Control for the October 1998 issue of the AMA's National Newsletter.

A Beginning in RC Flight

This month's National News Letter is dedicated to those who are beginners and those who teach them. You will find many articles on learning to fly and teaching, but first let me tell you my story of learning to fly and what I've learned from it.

Randall Trumbull, National Newsletter Editor

I had only been working for the AMA for a week when I was bitten by the modeling bug. Rich LaGrange, Museum Librarian, invited me out to Stage Center of AMA's International Modeling Center on a sunny day in May.

The excitement that I got from merely watching Rich fly easily pushed me toward wanting to try for myself.

After finding out what I thought I needed to know about beginning in Radio Control flying, I headed to the local hobby shop. As I asked for help choosing an airplane, I got a whole new set of instructions on beginning in the sport. This left me a little confused, so I headed home hanging my head.

I returned to work the next day and talked with more modelers. I couldn't believe it, but everyone had different advice about how to get started!

A few weeks later, after talking to many people, I chose a plane that the local club recommended and fit my budget.

It was about the third week that I decided that I probably wouldn't ever finish the plane. The CA was hurting my eyes and all the little pieces of the wing were eating away at my patience.

Shortly thereafter, I attended AMA's Grand Event. There, I had a chance to learn to fly with Clarence Ragland, originator of a pass-the-box technique of learning to fly. Clarence was able to spark my excitement once again about modeling. My mid-modeling crisis was over, and I headed back to the shop.

After finishing my plane, it was time to start looking for a radio, engine, and accessories. Once again, I realized that everyone had a preference, and none of them fit my budget. I headed back to the hobby shop and talked with the owner. There I found a very nice used radio that a gentleman was selling because he wanted to get out of modeling.

Shortly after walking away from the hobby shop with my used radio, I acquired a box load of equipment from an uncle who also wanted to get out of modeling. My budget appreciated the used equipment, and my plane was falling together nicely.

I spent the next few weeks getting everything lined up and in place. All control surfaces were now straight and everything worked. I was ready to fly!

I headed to the flying site with Rich. He was going to fly my plane and make sure everything was in working order before my flight training would begin.

Much to my surprise, the plane flew horribly. It was flipping end over end doing maneuvers that I didn't know were possible while Rich was talking about thrust and control surfaces. I heard very little of what he was saying as my mind was fixed on my airplane fluttering through the air. Rich brought my airplane in for a safe landing and sent me off with more adjustments to make. I once again tucked my head and carried my airplane back home.

After the conclusion of Nats, the site was once again open to the public, so Rich and I headed out again. The airplane, now with more down and right thrust, was a great flier. The simple addition of some spacers behind the engine mount made a world of difference.

As we prepared to connect the buddy-box, we realized that the radio I had purchased was designed for use with a helicopter. This meant that it would not support the buddy-box. Once again, I would be using the Ragland technique.

For the rest of the afternoon, Rich would launch the airplane and let me fly around until I would toss the box back his way for a dead stick landing. Finally, I got to fly!

A few days later, I headed out to the flying site with Mike Stokes, Education Director. Again, Mike would launch the plane and let me fly around until I was out of fuel. After a couple of flights that way, we decided that it would be a good time to learn to take off and land. After my first few attempts ending up with the plane off the end of the runway, I finally made a successful take off. Shortly thereafter, a successful landing. All was well and my confidence was growing.

After a short break to relax, I fueled up and headed out. As I taxied out, Mike reminded me to relax and kept the plane going straight down the runway. I did just that, and up the plane went making a hard left. I lunged for the controls. Too late. I watched my beautiful red trainer crack into what seemed to be a million pieces.

We spent the next few minutes picking up pieces and reviewing mistakes, much of which I did not hear as I was trying to figure out how much I could get out of the tattered plane and if it would be enough to buy a set of golf clubs.

That night, upon returning home, something reached up and smacked me. Before I knew it, CA was all over my hands and in my hair. And before me sat my trainer, stripped of covering and neatly glued back together. I haven't had a chance to fly the newly revived trainer, but I plan to do so soon.

It took me many months to get to this point, and I still am not able to fly on my own. Truthfully, it's a lot harder than I thought. The pilots who have been out there for years make it look a lot easier than it actually is.

For the beginner, I suggest patience.

Here are my very own tips and tricks for the beginner, from the beginner.

Find a club. The greatest source of help comes from those who fly regularly. Clubs are willing to help and eager to teach. To find a club in your area, visit the AMA on the web at <http://www.modelaircraft.org>, or call the AMA at (765) 287-1256.

Choose your instructor wisely. I asked for help from guys I had seen fly in adverse conditions and trusted with my plane. After you've put three months into building a plane, don't let just anybody fly it for the first time. Every club has instructors. They carry that status for a reason, so go there for help first.

Choose your equipment wisely. In my case, I took full advantage of buying used equipment to match my budget. However, a different choice of radios (one that supported using a buddy box) could have given my instructor enough time to bail me out and save my plane. Be careful about what you buy. Ask questions and find out exactly why it is being sold.

Before giving up, remind yourself why you started. Some element of satisfaction or a goal must have gotten you interested in modeling. Keep yourself interested by watching people fly and visiting with your local club, even if your plane isn't ready to fly.

Don't fly alone. Even though I had made a few successful flights and flying seemed easy, I won't rush out to try it on my own. By doing so, you will put yourself and your equipment in danger.

Crashing isn't the end. It's the beginning, so put your plane back together and get out there again!

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