

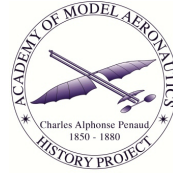


# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ABRAM VAN DOVER

September 17, 1931 – October 30, 2020

Began modeling in 1939

AMA #894



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Information Submitted by AV (11/2002); Written by ES (2002); Written & Edited by SS (11/2002); Updated by JS (10/2008, 03/2023)

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## Career:

- Built rubber models and gliders during World War II
- Joined his first model club in 1961 at Fort Rucker, Alabama
- Placed third in cargo and third or fourth in ½-A gas at his first model airplane contest in 1961
- Placed ninth in the Wakefield Free Flight event at both the 1985 and 1986 Nationals (Nats)
- Covered the Free Flight events of the 1985 Nats for Model Aviation magazine
- Served in various capacities at both indoor and outdoor Nats
- Directed both the indoor and outdoor Free Flight Nats in 1995
- Designed an indoor model for the A-6 event called the Brainbuster
- Officer for two years for the Fort Rucker Wiregrass Hoppers
- Senior adviser and president of the Brainbusters club in Newport News, Virginia, from 1970 to 1977 and 1987 to the present (2002)
- Began editing the newsletter for the Brainbusters club in 1981
- Directed over 50 contests at all levels since 1961
- Written numerous articles and published photos in the National Free Flight Society (NFFS) Digest
- Started teaching a model building class at Denbigh High School in Newport News, Virginia, in 1994
- His club has taught modeling at their local 4-H camp since 1992
- Served in the U.S. Army from 1950 to 1981, first as an Airborne Infantryman and then in Army aviation for 19 years; retired as a command sergeant major E-9

## Honors:

- 1990: AMA Superior Service Award
- 1996: AMA Distinguished Service Award
- 1999: AMA Superior Service Award
- 2002: Model Aviation Hall of Fame

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*The following was written and edited in 2002 by Stacey Shannon, AMA's Assistant Historian, with information submitted by Abram Van Dover.*

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## In the Beginning

Abram Van Dover started modeling at age eight when his father bought him a model airplane kit of a Nieuport 28 World War I biplane to build. His father then helped him put the model

together. Abram had the most trouble with covering the model and trimming it to fly, but really enjoyed cutting and gluing the pieces together then watching it evolve into a finished model.

During World War II, Abram built rubber models and gliders. After the war, he continued building these kinds of planes because he could not afford a gas motor. Unfortunately, there was no model club in Abram's area during this time, so he didn't join his first model club until 1961 when he joined a club at Fort Rucker, Alabama. He remained a member of that club for two and a half years.

## Competition

The same year he joined that first model airplane club was the same year he began competing. Abram's first contest was the Heart of Dixie held in Montgomery, Alabama. At age 30, he competed with a ½-A gas model, an A-1 towline glider, a hand-launched glider, and a clipper cargo. Abram placed third in cargo and third or fourth in ½-A gas.

Abram got involved with the Nationals (Nats) in 1985 at age 54. He competed in the Wakefield Free Flight event and placed ninth. At a request from Model Aviation magazine, Abram wrote the information and took photos of the Free Flight contests. His coverage appears in the

November 1985 issue. Abram competed in the same category at the Nats the following year and received the same place.



Throughout his modeling career, Abram has served in various capacities at the Nats, both indoor and outdoor. In 1995, he was the contest director for both the indoor and outdoor Free Flight Nats.

The one model that Abram designed was an indoor model for the A-6 event. This model was called the Brainbuster.

## Leadership

Though Abram got a late start in model airplane club activity due to not having clubs in his area, he has made up for that loss by being active in the clubs has been able to be a part of. He was an officer of the Fort Rucker Wiregrass Hoppers from 1961 to 1963. He then served as senior adviser and president of the Brainbusters club from 1970 to 1977 and 1987 to the present (2002). When he retired from the U.S. Army in 1981, he took on editing the club newsletter and has continued to edit it ever since (2002).

Aside from serving as club officers, Abram has been directing contests in 1961 and has directed contests at all levels from his club contests to the Nats. Abram's involvement with model airplanes was hindered a bit by serving in the U.S. Army from 1950 to 1981, including serving

12 years overseas (three of those in Vietnam), but since he started directing contests in 1961 he has directed over 50 contests.

### **Publication Information**

As mentioned before, Abram covered the 1985 Free Flight Nats for Model Aviation magazine. He has also written numerous articles and taken pictures for the National Free Flight Society's (NFFS's) NFFS Digest. He also served as club newsletter editor from 1981 to the present (2002).

### **Education Information**

For eight years, Abram has worked at Denbigh High School in Newport News, Virginia, teaching students how to build Delta Darts, hand-launched gliders, Control Line models and Radio Controlled (RC) models.

His club has worked with the 4-H camp for the last 10 years helping children build AMA Cubs, also called Delta Darts.

Abram himself has a high school GED and spent two years in college. He graduated from the U.S. Army Sergeant and Major Academy in 1974 as third in his class.

Abram retired from the U.S. Army as a command sergeant major E-9. The first 10 years of his Army career were spent as an Airborne Infantryman and the final 19 were spent working various jobs in Army aviation, first as a sergeant and then as a sergeant major.

*(signed) Abram Van Dover  
November 2002*

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*A number of people submitted Hall of Fame applications for Abram Van Dover for the 2002 Model Aviation Hall of Fame. These submissions came from Edward M. Sullivan, Robert A. Champine, Jim Coffin, John Worth, and Hurst Bowers. What follows is the "Special Achievements" section written by Edward M. Sullivan that he sent with the application he submitted. This application was endorsed by Robert A. Champine.*

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### **Introduction**

Abram Van Dover has been an active AMA member for approximately 50 years. His lifelong involvement with model aviation began as a boy growing up in New Jersey. He maintained his enthusiasm for model aviation throughout his 31-year military career and since retirement. In both military and civilian life, he has been an active contestant at model aviation competitions and won awards in both the U.S. and Europe. Recently, he has led a resurgence of interest in the AMA cargo event and was national champion in this event for 2000.

### **Model Aviation/AMA Activities**

Mr. Van Dover is a "sparkplug" for model aviation. After Army retirement, he returned to Newport News, Virginia, and the Brainbusters model airplane club (AMA chapter number 628).

He was soon elected club vice president and two years later president. He has held this continuously for over 20 years. Under his leadership the club has grown from approximately eight to 25 active members and activities have increased from one outdoor contest a year to two, monthly indoor winter contests, hosting of indoor postal contests, building contests five times a year and an annual “Swap Shop” along with the Tidewater Model Soaring Society (an RC sailplane club where Mr. Van Dover is secretary).

He has served as editor of the Brainbusters newsletter for over 20 years. This publication – because of the newsletter swap program he started with other clubs – carries current information from around the country and is sought each month by over 100 recipients.

As Nats Free Flight category manager, Mr. Van Dover recognized the need for more help in operating the Free Flight Nats. He proposed that various clubs dedicate one day to help with processing models and posting and tabulating scores. Since 1998, the Brainbusters have assumed these duties for the first day of competition and set the standard for other clubs, improving operation of the Free Flight Nats and reducing the workload for the Nats contest director.

### **Honors and Awards**

In recognition of his service as Nats contest director and Free Flight category manager, the AMA awarded Mr. Van Dover the Distinguished Service award in 1996 when he resigned as Free Flight category manager. After two years of searching for a suitable replacement, the AMA asked him to resume his place on the Nats planning committee, where he is currently (in 2002) serving.

### **Airplane Education Programs**

Youth and community-related activities are of particular interest to him. For the past five years [according to Abram himself, it has been the past eight years as of 2002], he has served as a member of a team of volunteer teachers in the Denbigh High School (Newport News, Virginia) Aviation Academy Magnet School. The curriculum required ninth or 10<sup>th</sup> grade students to build and fly a simple Control Line model. The school faculty welcomed his experience and expertise in showing the students model building techniques and flying skills.

The school, because of a recent influx in students, has been forced to discontinue the modeling program as part of the curriculum. Mr. Van Dover has, however, volunteered to teach five students who wanted the modeling experience and were willing to take it as an after-school activity. He currently spends four to five hours per week helping these students.

Some other activities he has been involved with:

For four years, he led a group of local members who built and sold small hand-launched gliders to raise funds for the Seaford (Virginia) Elementary School.

For the past five years, he has led a group of local modelers who visited the local 4-H summer camp and introduced inner-city children to model aviation by teaching them to build and fly AMA Cub models.

In 1997, he led a group of Brainbusters in support of the Technology Students Association Convention in Washington, D.C. by assisting the students as they designed, built, and flew indoor hand-launched gliders.

## Summary

Mr. Van Dover is an outstanding individual who loves model aviation and has the skills and attributes associated with the best AMA traditions. His superior organizational and leadership skills have been generously given to them AMA and other modeling-related activities. He is known and respected by modelers around the world. His accomplishments and stature show that he deserves a place in the Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

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