



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ROBERT (BOB) L. PALMER

January 22, 1918 - February 1, 2005



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*The following was written by Model Aviation magazine staff and published in the March 1982 issue under "Hall of Fame Awards." He was inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 1981.*

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Known as "Smoothy" to his friends, Bob Palmer has a record of competing and helping people that anyone would be proud to know. He has been a member of U.S. FAI teams and competed in 1960 in CL Aerobatics. He won the CL Aerobatics event at the 1955 and 1959 Nats.

As a Contest Director, he has given hundreds of hours to the sport for the benefit of others. He helped organize the Burbank Model Club in 1946.

An innovative designer, Bob developed the use of wing flaps for CL Stunt which changed the event, and the design was such a success it is still in use today. He also pioneered the use of engines in the .35 to .46 range which contributed greatly to the development of CL Stunt flying. However, it is his skills and dedication in the development of molds for fiberglass fuselages that has made Bob such a valued part of today's scene. A highly skilled model maker who was at home with wood, plastics and metal, he developed the very precise plugs needed to produce finely detailed fuselages and other components. In his work with the Lockheed aircraft company he was responsible for great contributions to their research programs involving scale models, saving the corporation well over one million dollars and receiving a commendation from one of the highest officials of Lockheed. Bob has been a wind tunnel model builder since 1950 and is now head of Lockheed's wind tunnel model shop.

As a model designer, Bob produced many airplanes and had articles published in the modeling press throughout the 50s covering such planes as the *Go-Devil*, *Chief*, *Squaw*, *Papoose*, *Thunderbird* and *Smoothie*.

His expertise with fiberglass has been shared with Prather, Bridi Enterprises, Bob Smith, and American RC Helicopters. His patience and skill in the evolution of aluminum plugs and keying methods has made it possible for thousands of modelers to enjoy precision and accuracy of detail in thousands of model planes and boats. A modeler since he was 12 years old, Bob richly deserves the thanks of all of us and the Award.

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*The following was written by Model Aviation magazine staff and published in the April 2005 issue.*

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Robert L. Palmer was an accomplished model builder and wind tunnel expert for Lockheed Aircraft Company. He worked in the Lockheed Skunkworks, working on the *P-38* through the *P-80*, then the *SR-71* and the *F-117 Stealth Fighter*.

Bob was known for the first practical use of flaps on Control Line aerobatic models. He was world renowned for his pioneering designs with light wing loadings and – for their day – comparatively small power plants, culminating in his *Thunderbird* design, which is regarded as one of the better flying aircraft from the Classic Era.

Bob lost the fingers of his right hand early in his career as a machinist in 1949. Most of his accomplishments in aeromodeling and his career with Lockheed were accomplished after that time.

Bob was the National Open Stunt Champion in 1955 and 1959, and was the National Stunt Champion in 1955. He was a member of the United States Control Line Aerobatic team at the 1960 Control Line World Championships in Hungary, placing third individually and assuring the United States team a first place.

Always willing to share his ideas and designs, Bob published many how-to articles including “Stunt for 1954” in *Model Airplane News* and “Straighten Out and Fly Stunt” in *Flying Models*. He designed Radio Control and Control Line models that were produced by several kit manufacturers spanning decades and supplied the motion picture industry with models used in the production of movies.

Bob was the guest of aeromodeling clubs around the world and had a model park named after him in Switzerland.

Born in Boise, Idaho on January 22, 1918, Bob lived in California for many years. In his retirement, he moved to Montana for a short period, and then moved to Tucson, Arizona to live with his flying friends and good friends of many years, Bill and Elaine Heyworth.

Bob had a keen eye, a sharp wit, and a wonderful memory right up to the end. He was scratch building a *Smoothie* until the last two weeks of his life. Bob passed away quietly in his sleep on the evening of February 1, 2005. Private services were held in Tucson on February 5, 2005.

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