



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of WILLIAM O. HERSHBERGER

May 29, 1916 - March 2, 2012



Written by AMA staff (01/2010); Transcribed & Edited by SS (08/2002), Updated by JS (10/2008), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

The following was published in the January 2010 issue of Model Aviation magazine. William was a 2010 Model Aviation Hall Fame award recipient.

William “Bill” Hershberger was born on May 29, 1916, and spent his early years in Ohio. Inspired by Charles Lindbergh’s 1927 solo flight across the Atlantic, Bill taught himself to build and fly models.

Bill graduated from Valparaiso Technical Institute in Indiana with a degree in radio broadcasting and electronic engineering. He first worked for the Sears & Roebuck Company where he serviced the company’s defective radio broadcast receivers, eventually transferring to the Atlanta, Georgia branch of Sears.

Atlanta was the home base for Delta Airlines, and air transportation relied heavily on reliable communication equipment. Bill was able to expand his technical experience beyond a simple entertainment receiver to full-fledged communication systems.

Bill joined the Army at the onset of World War II and eventually found himself stationed on various assignments, including the Manhattan Project and radar research.

Reading the news of successful Radio Control flights in model magazines, Bill visited Corr’s Hobby Shop in Washington D.C., and returned to the base with a Free Flight kit for a five-foot-span Standard Buccaneer, and determined that the aircraft would no longer be flying free. He designed and constructed a lightweight, single-tube receiver and a transmitter that successfully controlled the Buccaneer. The year was 1944 and the Buccaneer is still in his stable of models and has served as a test bed for many of Bill’s original Radio Control systems.

After the war, he became a technical officer with the Voice of America (VOA) in its high-powered broadcast stations in Africa, the Middle East, and Europe.

Upon returning from Europe in 1955, he was stationed near Washington D.C., where he joined the newly formed District of Columbia Radio Control Club (DCRC). Other members included Radio Control innovators Walt Good and Maynard Hill. Bill was welcomed as a contributor to the relatively new Radio Control hobby.

In 1984, at the request of AMA Frequency Committee Chair Fred Marks, Bill joined the committee. The committee’s main focus at that time was the transition of the old wideband Radio Control frequencies to the 80 newly acquired narrowband frequencies.

Bill spent many hours defining a relatively easy procedure to evaluate the performance of Radio Control transmitters according to AMA guidelines. Independent conversion verification became necessary when the FCC agreed to permit conversion of old transmitters to the new frequencies.

Bill's work was the foundation of AMA's Gold Sticker Program that was implemented nationwide. Bill and other Frequency Committee members evaluated transmitters and isolated unacceptable ones from those that met the guidelines.

The FCC staff was acquainted with Bill from when he represented the VOA. A visit with old friends alerted Bill to FCC Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NRPM) 92-235. The FCC proposed to split the 72-76 channels to establish 200 new 72-76 MHz channels for low-power mobile use in the general category pool. Many of these new land-mobile frequencies would be only 2.5 kHz removed from the Radio Control frequencies. Bill's analysis of the potential interference to Radio Control made it clear that the AMA needed to take immediate action to oppose this NPRM.

The committee initiated a multipronged effort to address this potential threat to Radio Control flying safety. The FCC invited the AMA to conduct testing to provide empirical data on the impact of the proposed land-mobile operation on Radio Control. The committee asked Bill, George Steiner, and Warren Plohr to conduct flight tests at the AMA's International Aeromodeling Center in Muncie, Indiana.

A report of the flight tests, "Experimental Evaluation of 72 MHz land Mobile Operation on Radio Control Model Aircraft," by William O. Hershberger, George Steiner, and Warren Plohr, was released as an AMA technical report in May 1993. The reported flight-test data confirmed earlier analyses that a 10 kHz separation between land-mobile and Radio Control frequencies was necessary to avoid harm in the Radio Control hobby and public safety. The FCC retained the 10 kHz separation as requested by the AMA.

Bill is still actively pursuing the model aviation hobby. His curiosity has led him to flight-test the limitations of 2.4 GHz equipment. His latest interest is in the technology of small unmanned aircraft systems.

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