



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of ROBERT L. WALKER

Born February 21, 1933

Modeler since the 1940s

AMA #5409



Written & Submitted by RLW (10/2002); Transcribed & Edited by SS (10/2002), updated by JS (01/2009), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

Career:

- Bought and operated Walker's Hobby shop in Saint Charles, Illinois, starting in 1967
- Received his private pilot's license as an adult and built his own full-scale plane
- Began Robart Manufacturing Company in 1971 with partner Bart Furey
- Robart, which sells products globally, grew and was reorganized in 1986 when Bob and his wife, Sylvia, bought out Bart
- Robart now has a 13,000 square foot building and 25 employees
- One of founding fathers of the Radio Control Hobby Trade Association; has served on its board of directors and as its treasurer
- Active member of the Fox Valley Aero Club

Robert Leslie Walker was born in Lake Forest, Illinois, on February 21, 1933. He graduated from Main High School in Park Ridge Illinois, in 1951. He was a corporal in the Army during the Korean War and served as a map draftsman with the 48th Topo Battalion. He attended Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, and Northwestern University in Chicago. He is married to Sylvia Kraft Walker and has 4 children, 4 stepchildren, and 14 grandchildren.

Bob has been active in the hobby industry since 1967 when he bought and operated Walker's Hobby Shop in Saint Charles, Illinois. However, his interest in airplanes and models began as a young boy growing up near the Glenview Naval Air Station. He was fascinated by the airplanes and by the naval aviators training there during World War II. Bob built many model airplanes during World War II, and a few years after, until he bought he first car. He continues today to build and fly scale Radio Control models. As an adult, Bob received his private pilot's license and built his own full-scale plane, a Breezy.

Bob gained experience in machine tool basics in high school. His father brought home a metal lathe when Bob was 13 and other tools for Bob to work with. The skills that he learned early on and the fascination of making precision parts led him into industrial model making, machining, design, tool making, and supervision.

In 1967, Bob was the production manager of a large machine tool company. Growing tired of the day-to-day grind of working for someone else, he left the machine tool company and bought what was to become Walker's Hobby Shop.

In 1971, after building Walker's Hobby Shop into one of the better hobby shops in the Chicago area, Bob, along with a partner, Bart Furey, began Robart Manufacturing Company. The name Robart is a combination of Robert and Bart.

Bob prides himself on his ability to create innovative products for the modeler. He is very proud of the hinge point system that he developed for hinging model airplane control surfaces. This system was perfected 33 years ago, and is copied by many today. The second item he is very proud of is the model incidence Meter that has become the standard tool modelers use when building their models. But his real pride and joy is the R780 Radial Engine that he designed and put into production in 1993. They are still available in limited quantities.

The company has grown by leaps and bounds due to the innovative products that Bob has designed, produced and sells worldwide. From its modest beginnings in 1971 in Bob Walker's garage, it was moved to larger and larger buildings. In 1986, the business was reorganized when Sylvia and Bob bought out his partner, Bart. The company moved its facility to a larger, 7,000 square foot building in 1991. In 1999, they added another much-needed 6,000 square feet. Robart has 25 employees.

Aside from being president of Robart, Bob Walker is one of the founding fathers of the Radio Control Hobby Trade Association (RCHTA). He was on the board of directors and was the organization's treasurer for seven years. He was a Rotarian and a Paul Harris Fellow of Rotary International. He is an active member of the Fox Valley Aero Club.

Bob resides with his wife in Saint Charles, Illinois, and Indian Shores, Florida.

*(signed) Robert L. Walker
October 2002*

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AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

