



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of JIM H. BENNETT

Born September 2, 1926 Modeling since 1938
AMA #812



Written & Submitted by JHB (08/2000), Updated by JHB (08/2012); Transcribed by NR (08/2000); Edited by SS (2002); Reformatted and update by JS (08/2012)

Career:

- 1940: Joined AMA
- Contest Director, Scientific Leader Member
- Served as a contest director for over 30 years and over 150 meets from A to regional AAA
- 1981-1983, 1990: Editor and producer of the 100 plus page symposium reports in
- 1990: Served as contest director of the US Nationals I was the contest coordinator for District VI for 20 years
- Served as director of the National Free Flight Society (NFFS) Symposium

Honors:

- 2012: AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame inductee
- 2017: National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame inductee
- Awarded three awards of Distinguished Service by the NFFS

Jim Bennett wrote the following and submitted it to the AMA History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program) in August of 2000.

My AMA number is 812. My card says "Contest Director, Scientific Leader Member." I joined AMA in 1940.

I was born in St. Louis, Missouri on September 2, 1926. I started building model airplanes of the dime model, Megow, and Comet variety in the 1938. In 1939, I built the Korda 54 Minute Record Breaker and Goldberg's Zipper.

My first contest was the Mississippi Valley Contest in 1941. The second largest US contest after the Nationals (Nats) in those days. I won the Missouri State Championship with high time. I flew indoor and outdoor at several Nats but never placed higher than fifth. I won a trip to the 1949 Plymouth International Model Contest in Detroit.

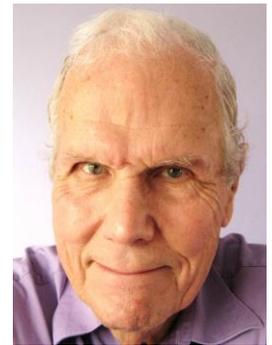
My highest single flight, before dethermalizers, was two hours and 10 minutes. We followed all the way in a car through back roads of St. Louis County to the edge of the Mississippi River and watched it fly over. It was found by a farmer in Illinois. Other unusual flights include flying across the Mississippi in the westerly direction flying from an East St. Louis field into the South side of St. Louis. Another St. Louis flight crossed the Missouri River.

I served as a contest director for over 30 years and over 150 meets from A to regional AAA. I also served as contest director of the US Nationals in 1990. I was the contest coordinator for District VI for 20 years. I served as director of the National Free Flight Society (NFFS) Symposium and editor and producer of the 100 plus page symposium reports in 1981, 1982, 1983, and 1990.

I was awarded three awards of distinguished service by the NFFS. I served in the Army at the end of World War II in the Philippine Islands and then the Korean occupation. I graduated in Aeronautical Engineering from Saint Louis University and Washington University in St. Louis. I bought my first aviation magazines in the 1930s – Air Trails, Flying Aces, Model Airplane News, and Popular Aviation. I still have them in the basement but many are in poor condition. I have all of Zaic's books too.

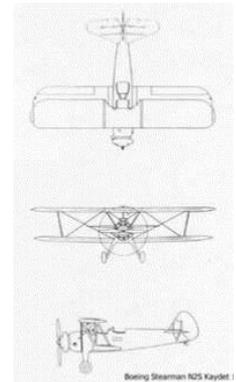
Jim Bennett updated his autobiography in 2012 with the following and submitted it to the History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program) in 2012.

Jim became an aeromodelling enthusiast in 1938 and joined the Academy of Model Aeronautics in 1940. His first meet in those years was the country's second largest, the Mississippi Valley Contest in St. Louis under Contest Director Bob Sommers and local sponsors including Stix, Baer and Fuller. It was a day of Indoor events in the St. Louis Arena's 120 foot ceiling on Saturday, followed by a day of Outdoor events on Sunday at an Illinois airport, a field owned by Oliver Parks. All this was followed by the banquet at the Desoto Hotel in downtown St. Louis. Contestants included the Chicago Aeronauts club, Carl Goldberg, Wally Simmers, et al, Jim Cahill, the Purdue Aeromodellers and others from Indiana, Al Rohrbaugh (Fort Wayne), flyers from Wisconsin, Roy Marquardt from Iowa, Arkansas modelers, Bob Dunham from Tulsa, many St. Louis-ans, Ray Podolsky, and Par Schoenke... There were four hundred in all. Jim flew in Outdoor rubber events in the Junior/Senior division. World War II ended contests for the duration, including the National Meets.



Jim's rubber-powered Class D Stick.

At eighteen, Jim entered the Army and served in the Asiatic/Pacific Theater, the Philippine Liberation and Korean Occupation. He learned to fly in the Boeing/Stearman PT series biplanes powered by the Jacobs, Lycoming and Continental radial engines, and earned CAA airframe and power plant certificates (now the Federal Aviation Administration or FAA). Later he graduated from Washington University in St. Louis and St. Louis University with degrees in aeronautical engineering and applied mathematics.



In 1947, Jim won the Missouri State Model Airplane championship, scoring an overall contest flight high time total over twenty minutes. He flew in the 1948 Olathe, Kansas Nationals, the first of a series hosted by the U.S. Navy. Jim placed in Outdoor Cabin and Outdoor Stick with ten-minute out-of-sight flights. In 1949, he won a trip to Detroit for the Plymouth Meet held at Selfridge Field and the county state fair building, and placed again in Outdoor Cabin with a ten-minute out-of-sight flight.

In the days before dethermalizers and flight time limits, Jim had flights with rubber-powered planes that crossed the Mississippi from both sides in contests held in Illinois and Missouri. One flight was followed by car and timed for two hours and thirteen minutes from Kirkwood Missouri through St. Louis County, and Jefferson Barracks to the Mississippi, going out of sight over the river. The



Jim and his AMA Class E Towline Glider winner.

plane was found by a farmer in Illinois. Jim had a flight cross the Missouri River from a north county contest.

Bennett began working at McDonnell Aircraft (eighteen years later named McDonnell Douglas in 1967, and thirty years later merging with Boeing in 1997). His first job (in 1950) was in the helicopter engineering division in rotor blade composite research. On the next assignment, he was in the aircraft engineering division on projects for the Navy and Air Force. Designs developed fast.

The company progressed and Jim moved from the *Phantom*, *Banshee*, *Demon*, *Voo-Doo*, *Phantom II*, and during a brief mid-1960s interval, worked on a losing proposal to NASA for the space shuttle, *F-15 Eagle*, *Hornet*, *Harrier*, *Super Hornet* and the *stealth fighter* which became the USA *FYF-23* Northrop/McDonnell Douglas *Black Widow II*, eventually losing to the Lockheed Martin *F-22 Lightning II*.

Jim was a charter member of the McDonnell model aircraft club, and as president merged the Free Flight group into the Thermaleers club in 1970. In the 1970s, he co-chaired the Greater St. Louis Model Association (GSLMA) and directed their annual AAA contests of Radio Control, Control Line and Free Flight. He served as a Free Flight contest director for fifteen years with monthly sanctioned A and AA Indoor and Outdoor contests. He was a contest coordinator for District VI for ten years.

In the mid-1970s, he created a renovated “Aero Cup” for Outdoor Rubber Cabin and F1B with winners from 1909 through current Wakefield winners at the National meets.

Jim was contest director of the 1990 AMA/NFFSS AAAA National meet at the Lawrenceville/ Vincennes Airport, now the Mid-American Air Center. It was originally a WWII twin engine training field for bomber pilots. He instituted high point championships for all categories of AMA Free Flight, including Gas, Rubber, Glider, Electric, CO2, Scale and a grand championship. Since computers were not yet available to the Nats, his late wife Joy tallied points. They purchased glass bowl trophies and ribbons for each high point champ.



1979: Joy and Jim



Jim ran unofficial events several years, including a forerunner of the early morning dawn duration single flight he called the “Dick Korda Dawn Event,” because Korda was famous for long flights and liked early testing. Other events Jim ran included Rubber Speed and Rubber Distance. Bennett was the 1990 Symposium Director and editor of the papers and reports. He was also Symposium Director at the National Meets in 1980 (Dayton, Ohio), 1981 (Seguin, Texas), 1982 (Lincoln, Nebraska), and 1983 (Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts.)

Using *American Boy*, *Model Airplane News* and *Air Trails*, Jim compiled winner lists of Nationals from the 1920s through 1989 and entered them in the *Symposium Reports* of 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1990.

In 2001, Jim won a plaque for writing a dozen biographies of AMA famous persons. He has written several technical papers on model aeronautics and also full scale aeronautics as a senior member of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA).

In the early 1990s, Jim recreated the Admiral Moffett Trophy contest, wrote new rules and got them ratified by the AMA. He began the event at the first Nationals in Muncie in 1992 and renovated the 1933 Admiral William Moffett trophy, updating all winner names in the event history. Jim created an annual Moffett newsletter with pictures, three-view drawings, and an article by the winner. In 1994, he designed a Moffett team trophy, the St. Louis Spirit Team Trophy, with a silver plated top figure miniature of Bob Bienenstein's 'Bandit' record-setting Moffett. Three-person teams compete.



Next year (2013) will be the eightieth contest since the event began in honor of Admiral Moffett. Both trophies are in the National Model Aviation Museum in Muncie, Indiana. Jim was the Moffett event director until retiring last year (2011).

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