



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ROBERT (BOB) T. HERNDON



Written by PH (12/1974); Transcribed by JS (11/2016)

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So you fly RC but...

If there were no one around with whom to compare skills and share experiences...

If there were no kibitzers, no borrowers or lenders of fuel, props or pliers...

I mean if you were out there in an unmanicured expanse of wasteland utterly alone day after day after day...

Would your interest in RC flying sustain?

Bob's does.

I met Bob Herndon during a Dallas speaking engagement. The Texas Hospital Assn. was in convention and Robert T. Herndon, administrator of the Stephens Memorial Hospital in Breckenridge, Tex., was present.

The convention brought us to Dallas; our hobby brought us together.

The "Lone Eagle of Breckenridge, Tex.," may have a fondness for RC flying greater than anybody's. There is rarely a dry day when the Texas wind is tolerable that Bob Herndon is not out flying - alone.

It wasn't always like that.

In the late 1930s as a schoolboy in Miami, he and neighborhood youngsters were finger cranking rubber band models. His first "gassie" was a Zipper Junior, and it is best remembered bitterly for Bob's first experience with a flyaway.

World War II and the subsequent preoccupation with college interrupted the flying. Then Bob's first job took him to Carthage, Tex. Within days he'd honed in on the drone of mini-engines and found a largish group of CL fliers doing their thing. In less than a week he had a plane in the air and was one of them.

When Bob's son was 10 and developed an interest in free flight (he won a trophy at his first contest) there were some happy years when the interest was shared. At the '65 and '66 Nats, son

John won trophies while Dad picked up a fifth place in C-Gas.

Then, one day, son John discovered girls, and it was about this time that the Herndons moved again. For himself and family, Bob vastly prefers the relaxed informality of a smaller town, but for a hobby flier it does have drawbacks.



*Bob Herndon prefers the loneliness of the small city flier. With a sailplane, pattern ship, semi-scaler, Q/M racer and free flight, Bob enjoys the diversity of our hobby/sport.*

In Breckenridge, the nearest hobby shop is 60 miles away. “I buy two of most things and 12 of some things,” Bob says.

And in Breckenridge there is no one with whom to share his interest yet he continues to fly - perhaps more than do you and I. Why?

“I can’t answer that question beyond saying I love it. I’m not a good pilot. Even flying three and four days a week, the aging reflexes would classify me as nothing more than a ‘Sunday flier’.”

“Besides,” says Bob, “one of the disadvantages of flying alone is that there’s no one around to make your sloppy roll look sloppy.”

And with no one to learn from... “Flying continues to be a trial-and-error proposition, with most mistakes costing a hundred bucks or more.”

“Sometimes,” says Bob, “I’ll drive a hundred miles to fly for a few hours with an old friend.”

At the moment the Lone Eagle is spending most of his time with an old Taurus and a new sailplane. Of the soarer he says, “It’s slower, more relaxed - and maybe my interest hearkens back to that boyhood fascination with free flight. I really enjoy watching that graceful bird sitting up there, floating on a thermal, knowing I can summon it back to roost at my feet.”

Also, west Texas winds are friendlier to sailplanes.

There are other compensations for the small town's inconveniences. For example, the easy accessibility to flying sites.

Often the local airport will grant permission to use their parking apron or taxiways, or the school its playground. And in west Texas there is always level pastureland within minutes of home.

Of course, a loner misses the fellowship and the shared building and the competition and the small talk and the big talk and the somebody to whom you can say, "Remember when ..."

But Bob has a ham radio rig with which he has located other fliers who are hams...

(Aren't we all?)

"And we get together on short wave and talk flying for hours at a time."

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