The AMA History Project Presents:

Autobiography of

L.F. (RANDY) RANDOLPH

December 17, 1925 – April 8, 2005

Started modeling in 1935

AMA #10931

Written & Submitted by LFR (08/2000); Transcribed by NR (08/2000); Edited by SS (2002), Updated by JS (01/2008), Reformatted by JS (01/2010)

Career:

- Appointed to the AMA contest board by District VIII Vice President Frank Huffman
- Became an AMA Leader Member – Johnny Clemens, Bill Winter and John Worth signed his application
- District VIII Vice President Ted White appointed him contest coordinator; he held the job for 14 years
- Became an assistant vice president under District VIII Vice President George Aldrich, still holds that position.
- Author of two books, “Basics of Radio Control Airplanes” and “Radio Control Airplane Building Techniques”
- Author of 350 articles on modeling techniques in National magazines such as Model Airplane News, Model Aviation, RC Modeler, Flying Models, and Model Builder

Honors:

- 1986: AMA Superior Service Award
- 1998: AMA Pioneer Award
- 2002: Model Aviation Hall of Fame

Born on the 22nd anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first successful flight at Kitty Hawk, it was inevitable that I would love aviation and airplanes. My dad and I would go to Love Field airport to watch the airplanes and bask in the dust and dirt blown back by the propellers of the old Fokker and Ford tri-motored transports. I honed my reading skills on aviation magazines learning wonderful words like longeron, aileron, fuselage, stabilizer, and elevator. In the early 1930s, barnstormers would fly into Dallas and land just west of the area now known as the Triple Underpass near the Kennedy assassination site.

On my ninth birthday when my aunt sent me a model airplane kit, it arrived somewhat crushed in the mail. The maze of sticks, sheets, and tissue along with assembly drawings was a real puzzle. I had no idea I should build it over the plan, which looked like something that should be framed and hung on the wall! It was not a success and ended in the wastebasket. A year later, my next attempt was more successful for I had discovered dime models! They were usually completed with unsightly paper gussets surrounding the glue joints, a common problem in my pre-wax paper era of model construction. They would glide, but not really fly! Only one, a Polish fighter, flew well enough to make it all the way to the street and under a car.

My first really successful flying machine was a glider called Whisper. It appeared in a Flying Aces magazine and could be launched catapult style with a rubber band. When launched, it
would go up into a very high, half loop with a roll out on the top and settle into a very nice, wide
circle. I lost five of them from the local schoolyard!

Like most kids of the period, a Brown Junior was my first engine. My first gas model was a
Clipper, followed by a Zipper. Both flew enough to put me into bankruptcy by breaking
propellers on every flight. Rule changes and my new Ohlsson 23 engine enabled me to win a
meet now and then. In addition, the newly arrived Comet Interceptor became a good flying
airplane, and I had good luck with an Ensign and a Brown Jr. powered Flagship. Both had good
thermal seeking glides but were out climbed by the hotter engines; neither survived war storage.

In those days, my flying buddies were Bodie Hopkins and George Ogden, both excellent
modelers. We built dozens of rubber-powered airplanes from Earl Stahl designs to the great
Comet Sparky. That was the period just before World War II that we all became acquainted with
U-Control. Although we built and flew Control Line airplanes on the local schoolyard, we
ridiculed the practice and considered Free Flight the pure form of modeling! Bodie was killed
flying the Hump during the war, but George and I were close friends until his death a few years
ago.

During the summer of 1942, I worked for Johnny Clemens. He had gone into the wholesale
hobby business, and I was his shipping clerk. The pay was small, but the discounts on model
supplies were important, as well as a good insight into the hobby business. Johnny and I
developed a friendship that lasted until his death. He was a true craftsman when it came to
modeling and a good teacher, if you paid attention.

U-Control was the only type of modeling available while in service and by then I flew mostly my
own designs. Almost anything could be made to fly under U-Control and they were quick to
build. I had joined the Navy in 1943, and after boot camp at Faragutt, Idaho and Radio School at
the University of Colorado, I was sent to Alameda for duty. I was attached to the post office, later
the Marine Corps and finally as a code instructor in the Ground School, separating from the
Regular Navy in early 1946.

Later that same year I became a member in the newly-formed Cliff Model Club and served in
most of the elected offices. It seemed there was a Free Flight contest somewhere almost every
weekend, and most of the club members attended all of them within a 50-mile radius. Under the
tutelage of Ken Querman, I was introduced to Wakefield competition. My first and only attempt
was a beautiful flying airplane that was totally useless in anything but dead calm weather, a rarity
in Texas!

Since I had acquired an Amateur Radio license (W5FEG), I became fascinated with Radio
Control because it appeared to eliminate the long chase after each flight! After winning the
Clipper Cargo event at the Nationals in the early 1950s, the prize money financed my first forays
into the world of Radio Control. Actually, my early attempts were not very different from pure
Free Flight. Once I abandoned commercial equipment and built a ground-based transmitter with
good power and a hard tube receiver, I found that model airplanes could be controlled by radio.
In the first Radio Control contest I entered with my home-brew equipment, I placed ninth in a
field of 27 and was very happy indeed! My friend Jesse Shepherd was the contest director and still has the records of that contest after nearly 50 years!

I began writing articles on VHF radio for an amateur radio magazine when the Technician Class Amateur license came into being allowing operation for that license class in the 50-54 MHZ band. I had been operating on that band with homebrew communication equipment for some time and felt it would, and should, become popular. Hopefully, some of my articles helped to popularize that very fascinating part of the radio frequency spectrum. When the 6-Meter Club of Dallas was formed, I was a charter member and for several years served as Net Control for the club's meeting frequency of 50.550 MHz.

During the International Geophysical Year, I became interested in the space program with the intended launching of artificial satellites. I ground, polished and figured a 6-inch mirror and built a reflecting telescope. Though I had poor luck with satellites, I found the stars fascinating.

Model building had taken a back seat to these other pursuits together with earning a living and raising three children. There were a few Free Flight airplanes, kites, and rockets built for my sons, but no modeling activity as such.

One evening in the late 1960s while building what I hoped would be the perfect communication receiver, I heard a local ham talking about the problems he was having learning to fly a Radio Control airplane. I could not believe it could be that difficult with the new equipment available, so I consulted my old flying buddy George Ogden, who had kept up with the hobby during my quiet years. With some advice from George, I built a Ken Willard Showmaster from RCM plans and flew it with a three channel EK Radio system. Power was a Golden Bee with an exhaust restricting throttle. On the third flight, I was comfortable with the airplane and flew for an hour of so every morning before going to work.

After becoming interested in Radio Control for a second time, I joined the Dallas Radio Control Club. Currently the Club secretary, over the years I have held every elected office in the club and for a while published the newsletter.

I discovered that the so-called trainers of the day were not all that easy to fly unless you had an instructor handy. Lending my Showmaster to other fliers convinced me that a simple, light-weight airplane was the best way to learn. Over the next few years, I built nine or 10 Showmasters and 20 or 30 different airplanes with engines in the .15 to .40 size range. All seemed to fly as well or even better than the Showmaster! As a result, I submitted a construction article of an airplane called Misfit to Bill Winter at Model Aviation. At the same time, I submitted one called Passkey to Bill Northrop at Model Builder magazine. To my great surprise, both were published!

I was not happy with either article and thought I could do better; some 420 articles later, I am still trying! I have always thought that simple, light-weight construction was the answer to enjoying model airplanes and have tried to sell that idea. Together with friend Joe Wagner, I formed the
Small Model Airplane Lovers League (SMALL) that now has a web site, e-mail, and members in the tens of thousands all over the world. It is an organization that has no dues, no officers and only one precept, the building and flying of small model airplanes.

While in the Cliff Model Club, District VIII Vice President Frank Huffman appointed me to the AMA contest board where I served until relieved by the next administration. When I became an AMA Leader Member, Johnny Clemens, Bill Winter, and John Worth signed my application, a document I wish I had copied before submitting for approval. Later, District VIII Vice President Ted White appointed me contest coordinator, a job that I held for 14 years until becoming an assistant vice president under District VIII Vice President George Aldrich, a job I still hold. I was awarded the Superior Service Award in 1986. I still have AMA 10931 issued to me in 1941 by Al Lewis when the AMA was three desks on the mezzanine of the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C.

In 1997, a friend of Randy, Mr. Howard Chevalier, sponsored Randy for the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. In this Hall of Fame, application was a letter that Mr. Chevalier included with the application.

Supporting Remarks

Ask any modeler: Who is Randy Randolph? The likelihood is that they can tell you. They will tell you that his articles, over 350, in model magazines and books have helped them to be a better modeler and that their first scratch built model was probably a Randy Randolph design. His articles “with the new or inexperienced builder in mind,” in my opinion, have done more to cause youngsters to take up the hobby of model aviation than any other person has.

He started building model airplanes in 1934. At that time a dime model could fly. His first contest model was built from plans in Flying Aces magazine that introduced him to thrill of losing it in a thermal. He was hooked! The balsa bug had bitten him.

His first gas-powered model was a Clipper powered by Brown Jr. He built other gas models, such as the Zipper, that were powered with the same engine. His first contest win was with a Zipper powered with an Ohlsson .23. While in high school, he worked for Johnny Clemens at his Hobby Counter in Dallas building display models.

In 1941, he gave Al Lewis one dollar at AMA Headquarters in the Willard Hotel to become an AMA member and got number 10931 that he has to this day. (AMA member for 56 years)

It was after serving in World War II that he began a long and distinguished modeling career that contributed to model aviation as a competitor, designer, experimenter, leader, organizer, and writer. In 1947, he was appointed to the AMA's Contest Board by Frank Huffman and helped start Cliff Model Club of Dallas.

A few years later, 1951, he began experimenting with Radio Control and obtained an Amateur Radio License (W5FEG). He built his first transmitter and receiver from surplus parts, and using
a Bonner escapement, he started building and flying Radio Control models.

In 1977, he submitted his first design article to Bill Winter at Model Aviation. Not only was it accepted, at Bill Winter's suggestion Bob Hunt, then editor of Flying Models, called him and asked for more articles. The rest is history. He has written over 350 articles and 2 books mostly with the new or inexperienced modeler in mind. Enclosed is a list of most of his publications.

In 1982, he was appointed Contest Coordinator for District VIII. A post he held until 1994. During that period, he received AMA's Distinguish Service Award. In 1994, he was appointed to the position of District VIII Associate Vice President. A post he still holds.

In preparing this nomination, I have talked to many modelers. To quote all the favorable comments about Randy would be too lengthy. However, the comment of the editor of Model Airplane News, Dr. Larry Marshall, sums up their opinion of Randy Randolph: “Randy has provided more building techniques information to the modeling community over the years than anyone. There are few people on earth with Randy's publication credentials. His involvement with SMALL development and the fact that people love his work are simply icing on the cake.”

It is a privilege and honor to nominate L. F. (Randy) Randolph to the Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

Thank you for your consideration.

Howard L. Chevalier  3/6/97

The following is a list of Randolph’s publications. The list is a scanned image of the original list turned in with Randolph’s Hall of Fame nomination.