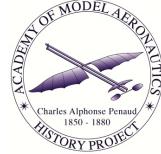




The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of RALPH WARNER



Written & Submitted by LE (2025); Additions by RW (2025/2026); Written by JS (2014, 2021); Transcribed, Reformatted, & Edited by JS (2025/2026)

The following was a submission by Lawrence (Larry) Erbach for Ralph Warner's nomination for the AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame, with information added and edits made post-induction by Ralph for the AMA History Project, and further slight edits by AMA History Project staff. Ralph was inducted into the AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 2025.

AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame Nomination for Ralph Warner

Ralph Warner, born and raised in Chicago, developed a passion for aircraft at an early age. At just 14, he competed in his first model aviation competition on July 10, 1949, sponsored by Plymouth Motors at the Glenview Naval Air Station. Though he didn't win an award at that event, Ralph soon excelled in local contests. His talent and determination earned him qualifications for the Detroit Plymouth Internationals three years in a row, where he competed in Control Line and Free Flight events. Ralph was an active member of Chicago's Model Nuts Free Flight Club, and one of the highlights of his competitive career was receiving an award from renowned air racer Roscoe Turner.

When Ralph's family moved near Leonard's Hobby Shop in Chicago, he found a second home there. He spent so much time helping out at the store that, according to popular lore, if his mother couldn't locate him, she would simply call the shop! Through this experience, Ralph connected with influential figures in model aviation, such as Carl Goldberg and Wally Simmers.

Ralph's association with Leonard's Hobby Shop, later purchased by his friend Joe Stanton, culminated in him authoring an article for the May 1960 edition of *Popular Mechanics*. The article featured a Baby Bee-powered Radio Control (RC) boat and car. As radio-controlled flying gained popularity, Ralph built and flew his first RC model airplane in 1956. It was a modified Esquire outfitted with a Galin radio and Babcock escapement. He joined the Chicagoland Radio Control Modelers and served in various leadership roles over the years.

In 1976, prior to his retirement as a school administrator in 1991, Ralph turned his lifelong hobby into a business. Revising his design for a radio-controlled airboat, he founded what is now RAM R/C Models. A suggestion from an industry friend at Lindbergh Models to use vac-formed plastic led to the creation of the Quicke 18. Ralph molded these and other early products on friend Orv Broberg's machine at DuBro.

In 1977, Ralph showcased his products at the Toledo RC Show, one of over 300 tradeshow he displayed at over the years. Don Andersen of Great Planes Distributors (Hobbico) was one of his first customers. Encouraged by the response, Ralph added two additional boat models, waterproof radio boxes, and five pilot figures. As electric power became more popular, he collaborated with an electronic engineer modeler to design and manufacture a reversible ESC

(electronic speed control). At the suggestion of the engineer, lighting systems for R/C airplanes were produced. Eventually, sound systems, fail safes, and control devices were added, resulting in a line of 200 products and the production of over 300,000 units for RC modelers and model railroaders.

Beyond running a thriving business, Ralph was one of the founding members of the Radio Control Hobby Trade Association (RCHTA), which ran a series of international shows in Chicago that contributed significantly to the hobby's growth.

Many of you may remember various fund raisers that Ralph conducted from his RAM booth at RC shows around the country. Several thousand dollars was raised selling "Donut Seeds" (Cheerios) for an AMA project. He brought planes and equipment gathered from deceased and former club members for sale at a booth next to his, provided by the Weak Signal club, at several Toledo shows. He continued this in recent years at the AMA National Fun Fly in Muncie, Indiana in June 2024. All proceeds went to the AMA. When he was the show chairman (two years) and president (six years) of the RCHTA, he helped get grants for various AMA activities. He also has donated – and continues to donate – books and magazines, modeling memorabilia, catalogs and papers from his career in modeling, and much more to the National Model Aviation Museum.

Now a vibrant 90-year-old, Ralph remains an active member of local AMA clubs, including the Chain-O-Lakes Eagles and the Skyknights RC Club in northern Illinois. He continues to enthusiastically share his expertise with fellow enthusiasts, acting as a living repository of model aviation history.

Our hobby owes much to dedicated individuals like Ralph Warner, whose contributions have left an indelible mark. Without a doubt, Ralph deserves recognition as a member of the AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

An interview of Ralph Warner by Jay Smith appeared in I Am the AMA section of Model Aviation magazine, April 2021 issue.

I Am the AMA: Ralph Warner, Owner of RAM Products

Jay Smith: *How did you get involved in model aviation?*

Ralph Warner: I'm as old as the AMA and as a youngster during World War II, there was great interest in building models of the military airplanes in the newspapers and movie newsreels. The sky above northern Chicago was filled with Navy airplanes from Naval Air Station Glenview and the Douglas Aircraft Plant west of the city. Every patriotic kid was building models. Some were used for military identification training.

***JS:** How has model aviation impacted your life and/or career?*

RW: Learning to work with my hands and tools gave me skills that I've used throughout my life. Understanding instructions and three-view concepts applied to many other activities. Accepting and learning from failed projects prepared me to handle life's challenges and my career as a schoolteacher and principal.

Working part time in the hobby industry primed me for starting and operating RAM Products for 45 years.

***JS:** What disciplines of modeling do you currently participate in?*

RW: I started flying RC in the mid-1950s. After many years of flying fuel-powered models, I started flying electric in the early 1980s, with the wise counsel of Bob Boucher (Astra Flight) and Lewis Polk (Arista Craft). The continual improvement of batteries, motors, and electronics has allowed me to enjoy flying sites that are unavailable to engine-powered aircraft. Living in northern Illinois, I just enjoyed some electric indoor flying roughly two weeks ago.

***JS:** What other hobbies do you enjoy?*

RW: Along with my large family (15 children), I've done a lot with photography, sports, traveling, and full-scale power boating.

***JS:** Who or what has influenced you the most?*

RW: My father was the sergeant of a salvage team that recovered downed airplanes in Europe during World War I. His personal interest was passed on to me in visits to various local airports and activities before and during WWII. He bought me my first airplane ride when I was 10 years old. He didn't build models but encouraged me and was very proud when I started to win trophies, especially one I received from a racing pilot, Roscoe Turner.

Growing up in Chicago, I found myself at contests with modelers who were, or became, very important to the industry. Carl Goldberg, Wally Simmers, and Frank Garcher (Midwest), Sid Axelrod, Mike Schlesinger (Top Flight Models), and others were active and helpful at many of the model contests that I attended.

***JS:** Looking back, what are you most proud of?*

RW: In the early days, it was my learning activities in Free Flight and Control Line. My first RC model had an escapement. Then I went on to reed receivers and servos, proportional control, and finally channel-free receivers. During that time, I worked at a retail hobby shop, started a kit business, then a mail-order sales company. Eventually, I started RAM and have enjoyed it to the present. A few years ago, I traveled with my sons to Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, and flew an RC model from the spot where Orville Wright made the first powered flight! What a thrill! I've lived through the best years of the model hobby industry.

Jay Smith wrote the following about Ralph Warner's RAM Products, published in the About Us section of Model Aviation magazine, March 2014 issue.

About Us: RAM Products

LED lights and the occasional sound system have become popular accessories on our aircraft. One of the oldest and largest suppliers of these items is RAM Products, owned by Ralph Warner.

Ralph was interested in aircraft from an early age, partly because his father worked in aircraft recovery during World War I. Ralph began modeling aircraft using cardboard that he salvaged from shoe boxes to copy the penny gliders available at the corner candy store.

Living on the northwest side of Chicago near Naval Air Station Glenview afforded him opportunities to see naval aircraft in flight, which further spurred his interest. Ralph built all of the model airplanes he could get his hands on from companies including Comet Models, Joe Ott, and Cleveland Models.

After World War II, the family moved near Leonard's Hobby Shop where Ralph spent much time and helped out in the store. "If my mother couldn't find me, she would call the store and tell me to come home," he recalled.

Ralph met many people who would have a lasting connection to our hobby, including Carl Goldberg and Wally Simmers. He spoke fondly of the interesting conversations and insight they provided him.

Ralph joined the Model Nuts Free Flight club. He won a number of local contests and qualified to attend the Detroit Plymouth Internationals three consecutive years, competing in CL and FF events. He met Roscoe Turner, a famed air racing pilot, who presented Ralph with an award.

Ralph started working part time for his friend and club member, Joe Stanton, who bought the hobby shop from George Leonard in 1954. Together they began a company to manufacture a wooden airboat kit, the RaBoat, which was sold through the hobby shop and Ace Radio.

As RC flying became more prevalent, Ralph built and flew his first RC model in 1956, a modified Esquire with a Galin radio and Babcock escapement. Radios were regional in the early days, and Ralph said, "If one worked, everyone in the club got one. The gold radios were popular in Chicago."

As did many of us who began modeling at an early age, Ralph pulled away from the hobby to apply himself in college, but he still managed to construct an occasional CL model. After graduating, he taught science and history, then became a school principal, a position he held for 22 years until he retired in 1991.

Still interested in the hobby and wishing to develop a business in which he could be involved after he retired from the education system, Ralph decided to again manufacture the RaBoat. An industry friend from Lindberg Models suggested that it be constructed from vacuum-formed plastic for easy assembly, and the Quickee 18 was born. He molded the models using his friend Orv Broberg's machines at DuBro. The parts were trimmed and packaged in Ralph's basement.

Encouraged with his new product, Ralph reserved a booth at the 1977 Toledo Show in Toledo, Ohio, under the name of Radio Controlled Models. The boats proved popular and Don Anderson of Hobbico bought a couple of cases as did others.

Ralph began advertising in modeling magazines and Radio Controlled Models became RAM Products. Encouraged by sales, two other boats were produced, as well as vacuum-formed radio boxes to house the radio gear.

Looking to expand the business, Ralph purchased the prototype carvings for pilot figures from Lindberg Models. They were used to develop five pilot figures.

The O Bee 30 boat was an electric conversion that allowed an Astro 25 motor to be mated with a K&B outboard bottom end. In need of a reversible ESC for the boats, Ralph began working with an electronic engineer who produced two designs.

The engineer presented Ralph with an idea: why not sell lighting systems to be used on RC aircraft, cars, and boats? A few systems were produced and taken to the 1979 Toledo Show to determine interest in the product.

They turned out to be extremely popular and five lighting systems were made available. This was the beginning of the electronic line that would eventually offer nearly 200 products for RC and model railroads.

In 1984, Roland Bouche from Astroflight marketed an electronic conversion of the popular Jerobee .049 glow-powered race car. Other manufacturers were also releasing electric-powered vehicles.

Ralph jumped at the opportunity to design sound systems for them. He and his engineer designed three systems to make the cars sound like their full-scale counterparts. A modified system was also conceived for use with trains and a division of RAM, called RAMtrack, was born.

Ralph purchased a 5,000-square-foot complex for RAM products in northern Illinois. He told me he wanted to continue to develop and produce products. Throughout its 38 years in business, RAM has produced more than 250,000 products!

Ralph is proud to be a founding member of the Radio Control Hobby Trade Association in 1985. He served on its board for 12 years, was show chairman for two years, and president for six years.

Ralph still actively participates in the hobby and enjoys flying model airplanes, helicopters, and quadcopters. He no longer competes, but regularly attends trade shows and flying events. Ralph is the proud father of 15 children, two stepchildren, 26 grandchildren, and 13 great-grandchildren. He is sharp and has a great sense of humor. If you speak to him for more than a few minutes, you'll be sure to hear a hearty laugh as he shares stories and insights into a lifetime dedicated to the hobby.

Before we ended our conversation, I inquired as to what he was most proud of when it comes to RAM. "The fact that we have introduced so many new categories and I am still here," he told me before laughing again. He also shared the enjoyment of seeing people successfully using RAM products and the positive feedback he receives.

If you're in the market for a sound or lighting system, give RAM Products a call and speak to Ralph. Not only will you find him knowledgeable about his products, you might even get to hear a story or two from the past!

-Jay Smith
jays@modelaircraft.org

Sources:
RAM Products
(847) 740-8726
www.ramrcandramtrack.com

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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

