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James Francis Zockoll was born on February 14, 1930, the youngest of Fred and Margaret Zockoll's six children. He was raised in the tough steel town of North Braddock, just outside of Pittsburgh, PA. The family was poor, but he completed high school before serving in the US Armed Forces in Korea as an aircraft crew chief.

Jim returned to the US and enrolled in the Pittsburgh Institute of Aeronautics to build on the mechanic skills he learned during the war. In 1955, he applied to Pan American World Airways (Pan Am) as a flight engineer on the DC6 and DC7 aircraft, based at Idlewild, NY (now JFK).

When Pan Am introduced Boeing 707 jets in the late 1950s, engineers were no longer required on every flight. Jim bought a few houses on Long Island where he lived with other crew and rented out the remaining properties. As landlord, he maintained the homes and started a small drain-cleaning business in the event he was made redundant.

He met his English wife, Ann, on a trip to London and set up home and started a family on Long Island.

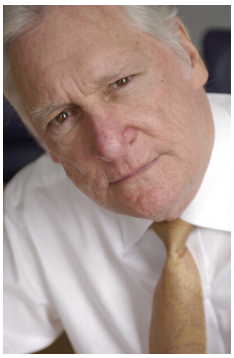
While Jim was on a layover in London, the manager of the hotel where Jim was staying was on the verge of cancelling the hotel's Christmas party when faced with removing the ballroom floor to unblock a drain at a cost of 40,000 guineas (equiv. £1m today). Jim offered to clear the drains for a fraction of the cost; if he didn't succeed, there would be no charge. A few days later, Jim returned from the US with his electro-mechanical drain-cleaning machine and did the job in fifteen minutes. The manager happily paid Jim what amounted to the equivalent of a pilot's annual salary. Sensing an opportunity, Jim moved his family to the UK and set up business. To make his commute to London manageable, Jim transferred to Pan Am's West Berlin base (IGS) and moved onto the Boeing 727.

With the help of his father-in-law and the plumber who had worked at the hotel, Jim built a team and started Dyno-Rod. Jim recognized that franchising would be the fastest and most cost-effective way to deliver a national service in the UK. The problem was that the modern US style of franchising was unheard of in the UK. Jim not only had to learn how to franchise; he had to introduce the concept in a country that was completely unfamiliar with it. As Dyno-Rod grew, he introduced more US concepts to the UK, including Pit-Stop car exhaust service, Autrac mobile engine tuning, Piggy-Back trailers, Texon car paint shops, and ZIF parcel delivery . Pit-Stop and Old San Francisco American-style ice cream parlors were introduced in West Germany. In 1977, Dyno-Rod became the founding member of the British Franchise Association (BFA). Dyno-Rod's involvement and experience helped provide the foundation of good practice in franchising, and, in turn, encouraged other franchises to join. Jim took early retirement from Pan Am in 1981 to focus on his growing empire.

Jim sold Dyno-Rod to Centrica in 2004 and, instead of retiring, he looked for new ways to bring innovative brands to the marketplace through franchise consulting and the licensing of brand concepts. In 2017, Jim became a British citizen. He worked every day in his role as chairman of the Zockoll Group, right up to the very end, a few weeks shy of his 94th birthday. His legacy as the godfather of modern franchising in the UK is just one way he will be remembered. It took enormous effort, risk, and perseverance to not only make Dyno-Rod a household name, but to also develop the UK drain-cleaning and plumbing industry into what we know today—all while flying overseas two weeks a month. Jim was a private person and yet the very definition of an entrepreneur. He was a philanthropist, a larger-than-life character, who touched a great many lives on both sides of the Atlantic. His innovative spirit lives on in the family business that bears his name.

Jim died January 25, 2024, and is survived by his wife Ann, and sons Steven and Jim.

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