



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of GIL COUGHLIN

February 20, 1930 - May 29, 2009 Started modeling in 1936  
AMA# 4792



Written by GL (n.d); Formatted and Edited by JS (07-08/2007, 06/2009)

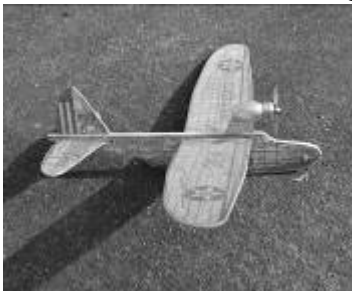
*Gil Coughlin wrote the following autobiography.*

## Airplanes and More Airplanes

*Autobiography by Gil Coughlin*

It all started in 1936 with a ten-cent model of the Folkerts *Racer*. So much to learn! The model was formed by hand, you see, and I did not have anybody to tell me that you could build it right on the plan. All I used the drawing for was to get the size of each stick. I held them together in my hands until the glue dried. I did that over and over again until I had something that looked like what it was supposed to be!

About this time, I received a glider by saving five Popsicle bags plus five cents in cash. Then, I bought my first Jim Walker model from the local Ben Franklin 5&10-cent store. The **Walker Hornet** was a great model to learn what made an



airplane fly. I also enjoyed the **Coast Guard Walker glider** that had a dummy aluminum engine nacelle on the top of the fuselage. This model came out in 1937. In my opinion, the best model at this time was the **Jim**

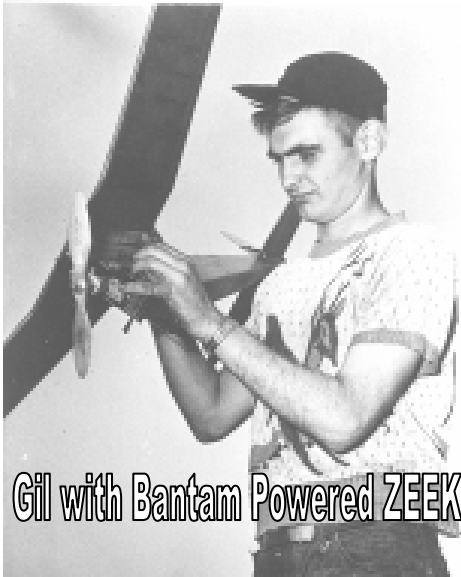
**Walker Pursuit**, a ready-made airplane with a ball bearing for the prop. To my knowledge, no other model had this feature. I did not have many *Pursuits* as they went for the princely sum of 50 cents!



I made many of the Hi-Flier 10-cent kits up until the mid-forties. At this time, I discovered ***Air Trails*** and ***Model Airplane News*** magazines. **WOW!**

U-Control was the rage but the cost of engines held me up. With a pole and some string, I was flying whip-power at the school playfield. After discovering ***Air Trails*** and ***Model Airplane News***, I discovered model shops. It was another big **WOW!** So now, I went to see my first contest and was hooked!





My first Control Line model did not last long because -- a little up control, neutral, and **SPLAT** on the other side of the circle. (This maneuver is known as a wingover with no pullout.) It was all over in a flash, but it did not stop me for long. I next started flying U-Control Speed. What a **RUSH!**

Around this time, I was taken under the wing of another modeler, Jerry Thomas, from whom I learned a great deal over the years. I flew in many events including Class A, B, C, and D Speed, Combat, Scale, Rat Race, Proto Racing, Free Flight Power, Wakefield and Nordic.

In 1950, flying in my first Wakefield elimination contest, I could not believe what happened. I had made my first Wakefield, a *Korda*, which I started three days before the contest, finished the night before, and I won! And, against

long odds with Henry Cole, Chuck Hollinger, Chuck Wood, G. Thomas, and several others as my competitors, I was really hooked.

In 1954, another **WOW!** This time I won a trip around the world by winning a Jim Walker contest, but I did not take the trip for two years. Then, when I won the right to compete in the World Wakefield competition in Sweden, I used the trip to get me there. At this time, the AMA asked me to represent the U.S. by flying Power in England. In 1956, the AMA could not afford to send a team, so I was appointed team manager and flyer. This year, all the models in the U.S. team were flown by proxy, and we finished second. Not bad for an all-proxy team!

After flying at Cranfield, England, I went on to Hoganis, Sweden to fly Wakefield. This ended my six-year love affair with the event. **Herb Kothe** and I were the only U.S. flyers, and there I met the great (in his own mind) **Gerald Ritz**. He was to be our team captain, but, as a person, I was not taken with Mr. Ritz. He spent most of his time trying to impress us by flying some of his models. I gave up Wakefield flying because I was short-timed on two of my flights when the ugly head of nationalism got in the way.

**Tacoma Model Airplane Builder Wins Contest**

First place winner of Northwest finals held last Sunday at Yakima, Gilbert Coughlin Jr., 20-year-old Tacoma vocational school machine course student, is now hopeful of making a trip to Finland as one of six U. S. contestants in the Lord Wakefield international model airplane trophy cup contest. He has already won a trip to Sacramento, California.

The Tacoma son of Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Coughlin, 6614 So. Cherylene St., modestly says he has no particular aspirations to become a flyer, and designed and built the winning ship, "Just as a hobby." His ship, meeting the specifications of having a 44-inch wingspread of 200 square inches and weighing at least eight ounces, beat all others at Yakima last Sunday in meeting strict terms of the contest as defined in 1929 by the English Lord Wakefield.

By rules of the contest, the ships, powered with rubber bands, must take off under their own power and remain aloft at least five minutes in the view of the contest judges. Coughlin's ship, adjudged winner by best average of three out of five flights, ~~was announced~~ ~~was announced~~ ~~and~~ ~~an~~ ~~average~~ ~~of~~ ~~40~~ ~~minutes~~ ~~a~~ ~~flight~~.

The ship is powered, the modeler Coughlin said, with about 70 feet of twisted rubber bands.

Coughlin, who will compete with 24 other Pacific coast regional winners May 28, in the Sacramento finals, hopes that his winning ship will again give a good performance, enabling him to be picked as one of the two winners.

The two Pacific coast men, together with one winner each from the New York and Chicago districts and two from middle west districts, will receive free transportation to the world-final contest to be held in Finland at a date not yet determined.

The silver trophy cup is now held by a Finland winner in the 1949 contest.

GILBERT COUGHLIN JR.



“Burned-out” from model flying, I now took up water-skiing and sailing *Hobie Cats*. I also

married and raised a family. We sailed *Hobie Cats* and backpacked.



After going through a divorce, brought about by my purchase of an Ultra-Light aircraft (this aircraft saved my mind and soul,) I went back to my first love, model airplanes. At first, it was just rubber-powered models, but then I began to collect stuff. What do I mean by “collect?” It started with old model kits. Then old engines, spark plugs, props, books, plans, and models from departed friends who went to where we will all eventually go --- to the great flying field with no trees or foxholes. Now I have a houseful of these items.

I enjoy sharing what I collect. I spend time presenting models and building techniques at schools. I also spend a lot of time showing school kids how to build models for the **Science Olympiad**. Best of all, my job for 35 years was working as a model builder for the **Boeing Aircraft Company**. Imagine having a job doing what you like to do best! What a life!





Last of all; please do feel free to  
come visit **Gil's Model Hangar!**

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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](mailto:historyproject@modelaircraft.org)

