



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ROBERT GENE CHAILLE

Born September 1922 Started modeling in the late 1930s



Written & Submitted by JB (03/2013), Reformatted and Edited by JS (04/2013)

Career:

- Flew twin engine Cessna at the Army field in Lawrenceville, Illinois
- Became a member of the 67th B-24 Bomb Group, 8th Air Force in England; Commanders were Gen. Jimmy Doolittle and Gen Curtis Lemay
- Piloted twenty seven missions over Europe in World War II
- Born: Miami Florida, September 1922
- Learned to fly in a Taylorcraft at fifteen
- Built Rubber powered and Gas under the Miami Herald aviation program
- Won a trip to the Detroit National Meet in 1939.
- Placed first in the 1939 Wakefield Eliminations becoming captain of the U.S. team.
- Joined US Army Air Forces and flew the Boeing/Stearman PT-17
- Returned to U.S and began flying for Eastern Airlines under Eddie Rickenbacker.
- Retired at sixty after thirty eight years of airline flying DC-6's to Lockheed's Tristar Turbojet Transports.

The following was written and submitted to the AMA History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program) by Jim Bennett in March of 2013.

The Rest of the Story



Old Timers remember the 1939 Wakefield with Dick Korda's amazing flight as one of the greatest of contests and Wakefield's for America.

Korda was the first to fly and made his famous forty-three minute flight. Robert Gene Chaille of Miami won the U.S. Wakefield team eliminations at the 1939 Detroit Nationals, at age sixteen in Senior and scored higher than Dick Korda and the other open flyers thus becoming team captain winning the right of first flight for the American team. Chartered busses transported contestants to the field, Aviation Golf Club adjoining the Bendix (later called Teterboro) Airport in Newark, New Jersey from their Hotel, the New Yorker in Manhattan, New York City. Gene's plane, (featured in *Air Trails*, May 1940) was damaged enroute by a contestant's tool box falling and breaking the vertical fin. At the site the English team won the toss to fly first but they were not ready when called. America was next and Gene's plane was not ready due to repairing break from the bus accident. Air was quiet and hot. Quickly Korda wound and got his plane on the takeoff board. His launch was perfect and the red plane climbed steeply into a thermal and amazingly stayed over the field for a record breaking time. Canadian Fred Bowers flying his "Diamond" (1940 *Popular Science*) with a two blade folder, got in the good air later, after realizing conditions were perfect. His plane got very high and the flight lasted thirteen minutes. Bob Copland of England, holder of the thirty-three minute record set in the King Peter Cup event in Yugoslavia the year before, congratulated Korda as his plane surpassed thirty-three minutes. New Yorker Maurice Schoenbrun, proxying for French flyer Giovanni got in an eight minute flight. Gene Chaille with his repaired model did seven minutes. British Bob Copland's (*Air Trails*, April 1940) top time with his streamliner was a little over five minutes. Korda's second and third flights were two and a half minutes and one and a half minutes. The other U.S. team members Ralph Baker, flying his "California Champ" featured in Sept, 1940 *Air Trails*; Jim Thames, Pennsylvania, Jim Bohash, Detroit, and Earl Stahl's entry flown by Ted Just of Pittsburgh all placed in the lower half of the list, same for Canadian Roy Nelder two time Moffett winner (1938 and 1940). Gordon "Scotty" Murray of Brooklyn flew South African Phil Dalgetz's streamliner. Henry Struck flew an entry for Frenchman Barthelmy. Roger Hammer famous for his rubber scale models flew for Frenchman Chabot. John Zaic, Frank's brother flew for Frenchman Vincre. Bruno Marchi proxied for Chinaud of France. South Africa's four entries were all flown by New York City builders.

The meet was held as the war was about to begin in Europe. At least two of the flyers, Canadian Fred Bowers flying for the RCAF and Gordon Murray, RAF died in the war. Murray an American of Scottish ancestry, joined the RAF became a Spitfire pilot and was killed in the Battle of Malta. Robert Gene Chaille, of Miami our second place flier learned to fly at fifteen in a Taylor Craft. Floridian Gene flew a lot of hours over the "Glades" searching lost models. Gene became a flight cadet in the Army Air Forces, multi-engine. He got his twin engine training at the field in Lawrenceville, Illinois near Vincennes, Indiana where we held three national meets, 1989, 1990, and 1991 before Muncie. Gene became a four-engine B-24 Liberator pilot and commander and flew twenty-seven



Chaille and Team Winner airplane.

missions over Germany when the loss percentages were very high. Jimmy Doolittle and Curtis Lemay were commanding the 8th Air Force. Loss rate was fourteen per cent per mission. Probabilities say survival for twenty-seven missions would have been nil. Gene survived with flack damage on every flight. He returned from England after the war with a Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with four Oak leaf clusters, European theater medal and bronze battle stars and the World War II Victory medal. On return to the U.S. Gene joined Eastern Airlines then under Eddie Rickenbacker. He flew Douglas DC-6s, Martin Airliners (one of the Martins flap designs was patented by Charles H. Grant). The Convair Liners, the Lockheed's, Constellation, Electra Four Engine TurboProp and the Tristar Three Turbojet wide body transport.

Gene said flying in the Wakefield contest with Dick Korda and U.S. team members along with Canadian, and British team members was a wonderful time especially at sixteen. At nearly ninety Gene admits to flying RC gliders, towline's in Florida in winter and slope soaring in Colorado summers.

Since the meet was held in the New York area at the time of the World's Fair contestants were treated to extra sight-seeing. On the Friday preceding the Wake-field contestants they were treated to a lunch by Charles H. Grant, Editor of Model Airplane News at the Midtown House, 22 East 38th St. In the afternoon they did sightseeing in the city's downtown and visited the Statue of Liberty. That evening, sponsor Bernarr MacFadden had the contestants as guests at a "get acquainted" buffet supper at the Hotel New Yorker.



*1980: Captain Chaille,
Eastern Airlines.*

On Saturday contestants and sponsor MacFadden, founder of a large 'pulp' magazine company, were interviewed on a local radio station. Next the chartered busses took contestants to Bendix airport for practice. A tour of the museum of Science and Industry followed. Sunday morning the day of the Wakefield contest, August 6, 1939 chartered busses left the Hotel New Yorker at 9 AM for the Aviation Golf Club at Bendix Airport. Box lunches were provided. 7:30 that evening the victory dinner was held at the Hotel Ambassador where the Wakefield trophy and other awards were presented. The dinner was given by the local chapter of the National Aeronautics Association and sponsor Bernarr Mac Fadden. Tuesday morning they visited the North Beach Airport and met Mayor LaGuardia at the Summer City Hall. Lunch was sponsored by Mrs. Winthrop Aldrich, prominent New Yorker and her panel of the committee for the World's Fair after which they toured the fair. Luncheon at the golf club house followed. Next the captain of the Goodyear Blimp took them for a ride over the city. The rest of the afternoon was spent test flying. That evening they took a tour of the New York Daily News.

On Monday at 10:30 contestants were taken to Newark airport for a Douglas DC-3 trip over the city. At noon contestants were guests of the Kresge Aero Club for lunch at the Kresge Dining Room in Newark. That afternoon, they made a trip through Radio City and the Museum.

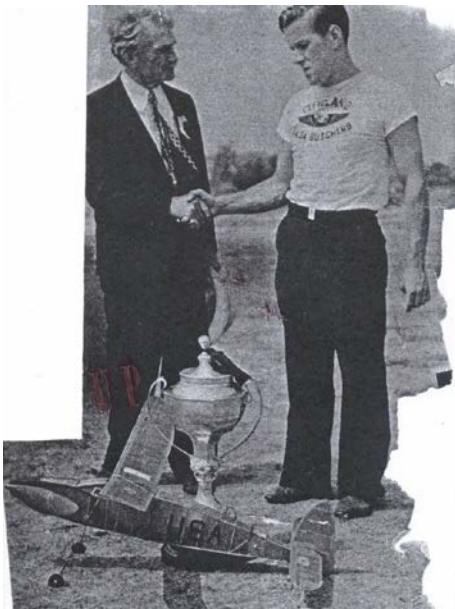
Per the rules of the SMAE (the British Society of Model Aeronautical Engineers the rules used before the FAI became the ruling organization) Wakefield teams in the 1930s and in 1948 were six men and boys. U.S. teams were selected at the National Meet.

In 1939 one team member was from the west coast, from a selection there, since in those years the Nationals were always in the East.

Ralph Baker qualified out there winning with his "California Champ" designed by him and Tom Engleman. The plane was later featured in an article in Air Trails.

The Wakefield team elimination process was conducted the National Meet (Detroit in 1936, 1937, 1938, and 1939) as a separate event in Open and Senior/Junior. Senior in those years included ages up to but not including 21. In 1939, Korda and Cahill were tops in Open, then the over-21 bracket. Chaille, Thames, Bohash, and Stahl were highest in the Junior/Senior bracket. Cahill in Open was eliminated because his time was a couple of seconds less than the lowest Senior. (He was the 1938 Wakefield champ but was not given a chance to fly in the 1939 meet though I heard he opted out). That made five team members and the sixth became Californian Ralph Baker.

- 1) Thanks to the late Frank Zaic for his notes, pictures and three view drawings in his "The National Model Airplane Meet."
- 2) Thanks to the late Charles Hampson Grant for his notes on the 1939 Wakefield meet in the October 1939 Model Airplane News.
- 3) Thanks to the late Bill Winter, 1939 editor of Air Trails, and the late Gordon Light, Model Editor of Air Trails.



Bernarr MacFadden awards the Wakefield Cup to Richard Korda.

Wakefield Winners 1928 –1939

*1928 England
Thomas .H. Newell
1929 England
Ralph N. Bullock
1930 U.S.A.
Joe H. Ehrhardt
1931 U.S.A.
Joe H. Ehrhardt
1932 U.S.A.
Gordon Light
1933 England
J.W. Kentworthy
1934 England
J.B. Allman
1935 U.S.A.
Gordon Light
1936 England
Albert Judge
1937 France
Emanuel Fillon
1938 U.S.A.
James B. Cahill*



*1939: U.S. Wakefield Team
Robert Gene Chaille, Ted Just for Earl Stahl, Jim Thames,
Jim Bohash, Ralph Baker, and Dick Korda.*

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