



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of CARL ALEXANDER HOPKINS

January 18, 1895 - December 5, 1959



Information Collected & Submitted by OS (02/2003); Compiled, Written & Edited by SS (02/2003), Reformatted by JS (09/2009)

Career:

- Organized the first model airplane club in Clarksburg, West Virginia
- Mid-to Late 1940s: Served as model aviation director of the Veterans of Foreign Wars promoting model aviation throughout the country

Orval C. (O.C.) Stewart collected information on Carl Alexander Hopkins throughout a number of years. The following biographical information was compiled through using that information collected and submitted by Mr. Stewart. The article below ran in Air Trails magazine's August 1944 issue.

Carl's Boys

By Davis Grubb

Bill, a Hellcat pilot, is 21 and Roy is nine, but they both have a pretty important place in their hearts for a slim, graying man in his 50s named Carl Hopkins. Both of these boys, separated by a decade of time and the turmoil of war, are "Carl's boys." Carl would probably be the last to admit that there was anything important about it all. To Carl, it has always been just a matter of being crazy enough about kids to do something about helping them get into aviation.

In 1928, he got busy and organized Clarksburg's (West Virginia) first and only model aviation club. Sponsored by the local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the club has held a meeting every Thursday night now for 16 years. For a long time it was pretty tough, but somehow things got going and have kept going ever since.

Nickel dues were to be collected each Thursday, but some of the boys could as easily lay hands on a \$100 bill as a nickel. Since then everything has been free. Dues are sweat and work; the initiation fee is good sportsmanship and a ready smile. Clarksburg, beset by the usual wartime problem of juvenile delinquency, watches the incredible success in Carl's barn-like club quarters with the growing realization that wonders can be worked by giving the kids half a chance. While other model clubs throughout the country are folding up as their older members left for defense plants or the war, the Clarksburg, West Virginia VFW club, despite losing over 70 of its older members, has increased its membership over 600% in the past two years. Carl says the secret of the model club's success lies in the cooperation it has received from the VFW (which sponsors it), the press, the local radio station, the moms and dads of the model builders, local service clubs, and individuals.

A full schedule of planned activities consisting of regular meetings, contests, and instruction classes keeps the members enthusiastic. Outdoor contests run from May to September. To encourage beginner activity, some of these outdoor meets are restricted to model builders who have never had a model exceed 30 seconds' flying time. The big contest of the year is the state meet, which attracts contestants from all over West Virginia and nearby states. Around

December the indoor season begins, and although there are no large buildings available suitable for setting records, it helps to hold the gang together during the winter months.

When this was written, an election was to be held. Carl's barn was plastered with election banners and posters advertising candidates. Street parades were planned and Carl said the election would make Clarksburg's approaching municipal tussle look tame.

You find yourself thinking of the 70-odd pilots, bombers, engineers, technicians and navigators in the jungles of New Guinea and the wind tunnels at NACA and Vought-Sikorsky – all graduates of Carl's barn.

The following obituary ran in a local newspaper following Carl's death on December 5, 1959.

Carl A. Hopkins, 64, of 140 Thompson Street, died of a heart attack shortly after noon Saturday at the Clarksburg Veterans Hospital.

Hopkins, widely known in the Clarksburg and rest of the Harrison County section, was closely associated with and well liked by many boys and young men for his devotion to them during the several years he served as director of model aviation, which was sponsored by Meuse Argonne Post No. 573 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. In recent months, he had been interested in midget automobile racing.

A member of the local post of the VFW, Hopkins was an honorary member of the Clarksburg Exchange Club and was a former member of the City Park Board.

Born January 18, 1895, in Clarksburg, Hopkins was a son of William and Mary Huch Hopkins.

Surviving are the widow, Ruth E. Hawkins Hopkins; two daughters, Mrs. Louis (Mary Joan) Reiser of 124 W. Main Street and Mrs. Robert (Diane) Garrett of Clearwater, Florida; one brother, Ralph Hopkins of Alexander, Virginia and six grandchildren.

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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

