



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of DONALD J. LINDLEY 1931-1993



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## **Donald J. Lindley 1931-1993 Memories of the Man By John Worth**

He was one in a million – a very special and unique individual. They didn't throw away the mold when he was born in West Virginia, because there was no mold; there could only be one guy like Don.

He was interested in and competent to speak on practically any subject. That's one of the things that made him great – when he spoke, he was worth listening to. You knew that he knew what he was talking about.

But he wasn't a know-it-all. What he knew, he learned from life - from a good education at Ohio State University, from studious research (where highly technical matters were involved), and from a great sense of humor.

Don's jokes were legendary. He could go on for hours, consistently topping other jokesters. But he never did it in wise-guy or I'm-the-best mode. He simply let others enjoy what he found to be funny – a sharing of his outlook on life.

Until he retired a little over a year ago, he had worked for 32 years as a staff research engineer for Amoco in Illinois. His specialty was engines and related lubricants, fuels, and materials.

His expertise was extremely important to Maynard Hill's establishment of several Radio Control aeromodeling world records – especially his flights of 24 and 33 hours. Don and Maynard had many discussions about engine technology, and Don provided the lubricant that kept Maynard's engines running clean and cool, hour after hour.

Don knew modeling from one end of the spectrum to the other. He built and flew Control Line Radio Control, and Free Flight (both Indoor and Outdoor.) He flew with all types of power; gas (ignition and glow), diesel, CO2, Electric rubber, and manual (hand-launched and towline gliders).

I remember his simple Control Line trainer design; in order to keep the lines tight in windy conditions, he mounted the engine pointed outward about 30- or 40- degrees from the model's center line so that there was always plenty of pull outboard from the pilot.

He also helped me with a Cox .049 glow engine that I had converted to CO2 power. The problem was how to get a reasonable length of power run without carrying a monster tank of CO2. We decided that because CO2 engines had great low-speed torque, the thing to do was to gear the engine to drive the prop at high speed while the engine ran slowly. He built the gearbox, and the idea worked - quite revolutionary! (I can hear Don groaning now at the pun.)

These days, practically everybody is a one- or two-subject specialist. Don, however, could be considered a specialist in many categories. That's why he was coordinator of AMA's Contest Board for years and years, then became the Special Events Contest Board Chair. He was never challenged by these jobs. His breadth of knowledge and experience made him the most obvious choice, since the jobs required familiarity with all types of model competition.

Before his job at Amoco, Don had gained much valuable experience working at Langley Field, Virginia for the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA), the government organization that became NASA. He worked at NACA from 1949 through 1955.

During those years, he was a member of two major model clubs – the Brainbusters Free Flyers of Virginia and the Southeast Virginia Radio Control Group.

We became close friends during that period, and when we both left Langley Field (he to Illinois and I to D.C.,) we stayed in touch through personal and AMA connections.

Lindley was also a great contest official. For many years during the 1960s and 1970s, it was usually he, his buddy Kemp Bunting, and friends who ran the Radio Control Pattern and Scale events at the Nats.

When the Navy quit hosting the Nats after the 1972 event in Glenview, Illinois, Don was a key Radio Control official at AMA's first post-Navy go-it-alone Nats at Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

He also served at several U.S.-hosted World Championships, notably the Indoor meets in 1980 at West Baden, Indiana, and at Johnson City, Tennessee, in 1988 and again in 1990. More recently, he helped at the 1992 Scale World Championships in Muncie, Indiana.

Don had other interests, too. Not too many modelers knew he enjoyed performing on the stage in little theater productions. Because many knew him for his joke telling, it seems that he would be a natural stand-up comedian. But Don, more often than not, acted in serious stage plays, being absorbed in the group activity rather than as a headliner.

That was typical of him – he was usually more comfortable as part of the group. So, though

capable of leadership in any area he chose, he enjoyed being part of the gang – “one of the boys.”

Don was also part of a great family. Wife Jane (they were married for about 40 years), sons Bob and Dave, daughter Ann – no pretense in this group; all freethinkers who live and “tell it like it is.”

To know Don was to appreciate what a great privilege that was. Especially lucky were guys like Jim Clem (famous Control Line Speed and Free Flight Indoor flier) and me. We shared many hours of “what if” and “how-to” discussions – often into the wee hours – about modeling, people, and the world. He was great for deflating egos and puncturing airhead ideas.

He knew how to zero in on the heart of a problem and to suggest a reasonable solution.

All of us will miss his steady influence, which kept us from straying too far from common-sense thinking. I think many of us will appear to be a lot less bright without his input added to our own.

I’ll always be grateful for the four decades that I enjoyed having Don as my friend. My regret is that I – and many others – will have to wait until we rejoin him on Cloud Nine to pick up where we left off. There’s so much yet that we didn’t get to finish talking about and doing while he was down here.

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