



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of GORDON S. LIGHT

July 7, 1915 – September 20, 1999
Started modeling in 1927 AMA #F2



Compiled, Transcribed & Edited by SS (01/2003), Updated by JS (10/2008), Reformatted by JS (10/2009)

Career:

- 1931: Entered his first contest
- Won a place on the 1932 Wakefield team after breaking a world record; also made the 1933, 1934, 1935 and 1936 Wakefield teams
- 1935: Won the Wakefield trophy
- 1936: Placed third at the Wakefield Contest
- Worked in engineering for various companies
- Wrote for American Modeler magazine and served as model editor for *Air Trails* magazine

Honors:

- 1982: National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
- 1986: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1989: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame
- 1996: Kits and Plans Antiquitous Hall of Fame

The following information on Gordon S. Light was written by James Bennett. Unfortunately, no note was made of where or when the information appeared.

Lindbergh's 1927 Paris flight stirred aeronautical interest over the country. Eleven-year-old Pennsylvanian, Gordon Light, was no exception. He found American Boy magazine to be the best place for model airplane information. They also sponsored the Airplane Model League of America (AMLA). He built one of their designs, a baby Rise-off-Ground (ROG) model, and continued with a twin pusher.

Wright Field was the site of the 1931 National meet (June 29, 1930). It was 15-year-old Gordon's first contest. He entered the Stout outdoor cabin event with a design using a removable motor stick. His best flight was 82 seconds. In the following year, he improved the design and entered the 1932 National meet in Atlantic City. The Wakefield International Trophy Contest was held with the meet. The U.S. was again the host since Joe Ehrhardt repeated his victory the year before. Team eliminations were held in the morning and the Wakefield meet was flown that afternoon. His 26-minute flight – with Charlie Grant riding in a motorcycle sidecar as the timer – won him a place on the team. The model headed toward the ocean dropping over the cool water then rising over the hot beach and finally landing on the beach. A near eight-minute flight won the cup for Gordon that afternoon with the model landing in Pleasantville, New Jersey, five miles away.

The group governing Wakefield competition decided to disallow the results. In their opinion, the proxy models were penalized by being boxed too long before the contest since the Nationals and the Wakefield event were postponed until late in the summer (September).

The Wakefield was held in England in 1933, 1934, and 1935. Gordon was on the U.S. team but had to mail his entry. He was now a sophomore in engineering school. On July 6, 1935, Gordon received a cablegram from London with the message: "Congratulations, you won." Tommy Ives was the proxy flyer. On the winning flight, the model flew from Fairey's Aerodrome (contest site) and landed at Hanworth Aerodrome two hours later. A Puss Moth pilot flew it back to Fairey's. The 1936 Wakefield meet was held with the Detroit Nationals at Selfridge Field. The British sent a full team and Albert Judge took the cup back to England. Gordon placed third.

Gordon graduated in engineering that year and went to work in Philadelphia for the Budd Company after the contest. He continued as model editor for Air Trails magazine and later wrote for American Modeler magazine. His start in model aviation writing had helped with college expenses.

In his full-scale engineering design work, Gordon continued building models to help demonstrate concepts in a thrust reverser, a thrust vectoring rocket nozzle, a supersonic missile wing actuating mechanism and many other new ideas.

Gordon has done engineering work at several companies, including Glenn L. Martin and the U.S. Navy. He was vice president of engineering at the Applied Physics Laboratory.

The following information was taken from part of an article about the 1932 Atlantic City Nationals. The article ran in Universal Model Airplane News magazine. The date is not given, but it was most likely published in the fall or winter of 1932

Gordon Light Breaks World Record

Several features of interest deserve special comment. One was the record-breaking flight made by the unusual cabin model built and flown by Gordon Light of Lebanon, Pennsylvania... One of the remarkable and interesting features of this plane is the fact that it resembles a scale model. It has a transport fuselage with cellophane windows. This did not take away any of its flying ability, however. In the elimination flights for the Wakefield trophy, this plane flew for 25-feet and 53-inches and landed eight miles from the airport. Luckily, it was recovered without being damaged.

The following information about Gordon Light ran in the Junior N.A.A. (National Aeronautics Association) News in October 1935. This information also includes some background information on the Wakefield contest.

Wakefield Cup Returns to America.

Won for United States by Gordon Light.

The Wakefield Cup for international competition has been won again for the United States after being in England since 1932. Gordon S. Light, 20, Lebanon, Pennsylvania, has been declared the winner of the 1935 contest by the Society of Model Aeronautic Engineers (SMAE), the body controlling model aeronautics in Great Britain.

Details of the contest are lacking at this writing. The following radio message from Mr. B. K. Johnson, SMAE secretary, contains the welcome news: "America wins Wakefield Cup. Gordon Light writing."

The Wakefield Competition is held annually in the country that has the Cup in its possession. It was held this year at Fairey's Aerodrome, Hayes, Middlesex, England, on Monday, August 5. Only rubber-powered cabin fuselage models of 200-square-inches wing area are permitted to compete. The average time of three flights determines the winner.

Each country is allowed to enter a team of six contestants and those who are not able to attend in person are provided proxy flyers by the contest management. The United States team was made up of only five members this year, the sixth member failing to ship his model in time for the contest. Gordon Light, Frank Zaic, Donald Mertens, Vernon Boehle, and Ralph Kummer were the representatives of this country.



*Gordon launching his Wakefield at the 1934 Nationals.
Robert Cahill submitted this photo.*

As prizes for winning, the Cup will be held in custody of the National Aeronautic Association for one year and Gordon Light will receive a silver medal and cash award amounting to somewhat more than \$10.

Joseph Ehrhardt of Saint Louis, Missouri won the Wakefield Cup for the United States in 1930 and 1931. The 1932 contest was held in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and was won by Gordon Light. However, due to the contest being held later than prescribed by the international rules, the Cup was not awarded and was returned to England. It is, therefore, most fitting that Light should be the winner this year.

The Wakefield Competition is open only to entrants appointed by the model plane governing body that enjoys the official recognition of the Federation Aéronautique Internationale (FAI). In the United States, this body is the Junior National Aeronautic Association. Another rule is that the contest must be held on an airport that is approved by the FAI.

The place and date for holding the 1936 Wakefield Competition has not been set. Announcement of this will be made in these columns as soon as possible. It is a practical certainty that Gordon Light will be defending his 1935 victory.

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