



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of DONALD (DON) J. MCGOVERN



Started modeling in 1939

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The following was published in the January 2009 issue of Model Aviation magazine. Don was inducted into the 2008 Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

The late Don McGovern began modeling in 1939. By the time he was 10 years old, Don was designing and building his own aircraft. By age 12, he had begun submitting articles to modeling magazines, and a few years later, they were being published.

Perhaps best known as the editor of *Flying Models* magazine from 1953 to 1979, Don was also a competitor and prolific designer. He designed the *Custom Privateer Seaplane* that was kitted by Berkeley Models. Nicknamed "*McGovern's Monster*," the nearly 10-foot-wingspan aircraft was considered the largest seaplane ever built and flown at that time and the largest ever kitted.

Don designed a series of smaller *Privateer* models, including the *Navigator* that was kitted by Jetco Hobbies and several other designs kitted by Berkeley. Enterprise Models kitted Dons 30-inch Control Line twin-rudder *Pirate*.

"He would always say, 'Build with 'NAG,'" wrote Jim O'Brien, Don's sponsor for the Hall of Fame. "NAG meant 'no air gap.' He drew plans for all of his designs the same way."

Don wrote hundreds of articles, covering topics including the National Aeromodeling Championships, product reviews, others' designs, and his own models. He became editor of *Flying Models* in 1953 and published more than 70 of his own designs.

As Berkeley's chief designer, Don was known for his hand-inked plans that attracted so many modelers to the company's kits. His plans, easily hundreds, were accurate and extremely detailed, making them easy for modelers to understand and construct.

Every model Don built contained hundreds of sticks and stringers. He didn't use planking and plywood, and relied on a single-edge razor for cutting. "Can you imagine building McGovern's *Monster* with little more than a razor blade?" wrote Jim.

"It was Don's whole focus to get more people involved in the hobby. He was a person who did not seek notoriety."

Along with a number of others, Don was responsible for introducing Jim to aeromodeling. "He took me almost everywhere he went if it was related to modeling and taught me almost every one of his building secrets," Jim wrote. "He told me that I needed to teach others and he even made me shake hands on that."

Jim was mentored by Don for several years, learning about Free Flight, Control Line, and the fledgling Radio Control flight. Although Don eventually moved to a larger house to accommodate his growing family, the two never lost touch. He left Jim with a thorough building legacy, but much more.

“Do was one of the most devoted and meticulous modelers I have ever met,” wrote Jim.
“Everyone who met Don took an instant liking to him. He contributed significantly to the growth of all facets of modeling, and in some small way, we’re better today because of his efforts.”

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