

EDWARD S. EVANS (2002)
(1879-1945)

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Edward S. Evans was an early patron of soaring in the United States of America and the founder of the National Glider Association, the predecessor of the Soaring Society of America. The first two National Soaring Contests (1930 and 1931) were held under his auspices. From 1930 to 1946, the winner of the National Competition was awarded the Edward S. Evans Trophy. This trophy was retired after John Robinson won the National Championship three successive times and was replaced by the current du Pont Trophy.

Evans, the President of Evans Products, was a Captain in the Quartermasters Corp of the US Army from 1918 to 1920 and later a Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army Air Corp. He had many interests centered around aviation, exploring, inventing. Among other accomplishments, in 1926 he set a record for circumnavigating the globe in 28 days, 14 hours and 36 minutes utilizing air, ground and water transportation. He was a Fellow of the American Geographic Society, Manager of the Detroit Arctic Expedition and Founder of the U.S. Glider Association including sponsor of the Edward S. Evans Trophy.

In the 1920s considerable progress in gliding and soaring was being made in Germany as the Versailles Treaty ending WW I limited power flight. Air-minded but cash-poor Americans looked towards unpowered flight but there were no gliding schools or production gliders available until 1929. Thus, in the spring of 1928 Evans sent his two sons to the Wassekuppe to learn about gliding. Their observations encouraged Evans to organize glider



Edward S. Evans (right) presenting the Evans Trophy for American Championship Flights in 1941 to John Robinson for his distance (290mi.), and altitude (14,250ft.) flights.

programs in this country. He soon learned about the American Motorless Aviation Corp Glider School operating at Cape Cod, Massachusetts. In 1929 the name was changed to the National Glider Association and became a non-profit organization with Evans as president. See further details in Paul Schweizer's book, *Wings Like Eagles*. Financial difficulties resulting from the Great Depression caused the dissolution of the Association in October of 1931 and the Soaring Society of America was founded in 1932.

Evans' vision for the future can be seen in the article he wrote for the *Popular Mechanics Magazine* in December 1942 entitled "The Age of Air." Excerpts follow:

"WHO could have envisioned in 1928, when a dozen young men were making the first glider experiments at the University of Michigan, that the crude ship then used was the forerunner of what would ultimately be one of the world's great means of transportation.



I. to r: Ralph S. Barnaby, (then) Maj. Gen. Henry "Hap" Arnold, and Edward S. Evans at the 1941, Elmira, NY, 12th National Soaring Contest.

"These members of the first glider club of America, which was formed under my sponsorship, learned the delight of being pulled into the air with a rubber cord and gliding gently to the ground several hundred yards away. Some of these same young men today are still flying gliders, beautiful ships known as sailplanes, which have established records of distance, altitude and duration that are almost unbelievable.*

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"We thought when we entered the present Mechanical Age that nothing could surpass the opportunities offered at that time. The opportunities of the early 20's fade into insignificance as compared to the opportunities which will come into use during the Air Age."

* The MIT AES (Aeronautical Engineering Society) was formed as a college glider club in 1909. According to college club historian, John Campbell, the University of Michigan glider club was formed sometime around 1930.