

In Memoriam

IT grieves me deeply to report the sudden and completely unexpected death of Dr. Gordon C. Oates, first Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Propulsion and Power*, on November 1, 1986. Gordon was a very special human being, who lived his professional and personal life to the fullest, and had a beneficial effect on everything and everyone he touched. His boundless energies guarantee that his influence will be felt for a long time to come.

Gordon was a Professor in the Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics as well as an Associate Dean of Engineering at the University of Washington. It is possible to catalog Gordon's professional contributions in detail, but I would rather capture the essence of his achievements by concentrating on those he held most dear.

A prognosis of his career ahead was the doctoral research he carried out under the direction of Professor Frank E. Marble at Cal Tech, which was incorporated in the Aerodynamics of Turbines and Compressors Volume of the Princeton High Speed Aerodynamics and Jet Propulsion series. This work demonstrated many of his distinctive qualities, including clarity, intensity, creativity, integrity, curiosity, dedication, rigor, and incomprehensibly high standards. Gordon focused his professional efforts on the fields of propulsion and energy conversion, and authored many technical reports and scholarly papers bearing these intellectual trademarks.

Above and beyond all else, Gordon was the consummate teacher, in the most fundamental and respectful sense of the word. He taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the U.S. Air Force Academy (where he was the first civilian Distinguished Visiting Professor), the Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden, the National Cheng Kung University in Taiwan, and the University of Washington. His numerous students and colleagues are scattered around the world but forever bonded because they share the common experience of the excellent, insightful, exuberant, real learning he provided. His many friends in industry and government, where he often advised or consulted, also remember him warmly for similar reasons.

As a result of his generous use of his teaching abilities, Gordon was awarded both the 1982 University of Washington Outstanding Teaching Award and the 1986 ASEE/AIAA John Leland Atwood Award for aerospace educational achievement. These were highly competitive prizes which he truly deserved and genuinely savored.

Writing is a demanding form of teaching, and Gordon excelled here as well. His bestselling AIAA Education Series book, *Aerothermodynamics of Gas Turbine and Rocket Propulsion*, has been adopted by dozens of colleges, and has become the standard against which introductory propulsion textbooks are measured. His more advanced works, *Aerothermodynamics of Aircraft Engine Components* and *Aircraft Propulsion Systems Technology and Design*, will play a similar role for graduate students and practicing professionals. He was also Editor-in-Chief of both the *Journal of Energy* and the *Journal of Propulsion and Power*, having brought the latter into existence and through the normal early growing pains into sound editorial and financial condition.

In recognition of these and many other professional accomplishments, Gordon had been elected a fellow of the AIAA.

On the personal side, Gordon's life was equally dedicated. He was enormously involved with his family. He and his wife, best friend, and perfect match, Joan, raised four fine children of whom he was extremely proud. His family shared many wonderful times along the way, and provided a lot of warm hospitality for fortunate guests. Every conversation with Gordon clearly revealed his strong interaction with his entire family and concern for their welfare.

Gordon worked as hard as anyone I know, but he played hard too. He respected nature and loved the outdoors, especially athletics. To climb mountains, play rugby, bike, or hike with Gordon was to get caught up in the enthusiasm and fun of successfully meeting new challenges.

Gordon had a wonderful passion for life which could be seen in the great diversity of his interests and friends. He had a great curiosity about many things, not the least of which were history and politics. He had a strong sense of fair play and justice and usually supported the underdog, even when his position was unpopular, and was capable of magnificent outrage and righteous indignation when appropriate. But even as he railed away he always had a twinkle in his eye and a sense of drama in his voice.

His essential humanity was made emphatically clear by a number of charming idiosyncrasies which cannot be forgotten. Amazingly enough, Gordon had a fear of flying which he was happy to share with anyone. He invented an amazing array of tremendously difficult homework problems, each of which had a direct solution and a vital lesson. He was a master story teller who loved to laugh and make others feel good. He would tell the same story, joke, or poem on many different occasions with no loss of anticipation for the listeners. And at the core of the man was a delightful earthiness, irreverence, and spontaneity that made all things seem possible.

A remarkable phenomenon is the large number of people who had a special friendship with Gordon, yet held a common view of him. This is the result of his true concern for others and an unwavering concept of himself. Gordon will be remembered for his love and support of others, his hard work and play, his sense of justice and decency, his joyful sense of humor, his unrelenting optimism, his courage and loyalty, his steadiness and dependability, and his warm human relationships. He set the highest standards for himself, and by his example taught his friends.

The public testimony to the value of Gordon's life was an outpouring of sympathy from family, friends, colleagues, and students who came from near and far to gather at a memorial service at the University of Washington Faculty Club on November 5, 1986. Remembrances may now be sent to the Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics for the Gordon Oates Scholarship Fund.

The private testimony remains with those who were lucky enough to know him.

William H. Heiser
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