



REMINISCING WITH BIG NICK

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by Nick Rezich

The Howard Story – Part One

"It's a Wasp Monocoupe!"

"No . . . it's a . . . aha?"

"Wow! Look at it go! What is it?"

"It's Benny Howard's new Mulligan!"

These are just some of the comments you would have heard had you been in the grandstands on opening day of the 1935 National Air Races at Cleveland, Ohio.

Benny O. Howard had just won the Bendix Race beating Roscoe Turner by 24 seconds . . . roaring to victory in his newest creation, "Mr. Mulligan." The new Howard racer was not the typical Howard design of the past—the sleek, low wing type—but, instead, a high wing, strut-braced monoplane. After taking the laurels (and cash) for the trans-continental Bendix Race, Benny entered Mr. Mulligan in the Thompson Trophy race against the powerful little low-wing pylon racers.

For the Thompson he selected his ol' racing buddy, Harold Neumann

of Kansas City, to handle the chores. Harold was no newcomer to the Howard designs as he had been flying the "Ike," "Mike" and "Pete." Harold qualified the Mulligan at a speed of 247 mph, which made him a threat to the other qualifiers and a potential winner.

Before the Thompson got underway Harold warmed up by winning the Greve Trophy in Benny Howard's "Mike" . . . making it two out of three for Benny. Winning the Thompson would give him a clean sweep of the major events at the Nationals.

The favorite in the big one, the Thompson, was the colorful Roscoe Turner, but everybody was pulling for the Mulligan and Benny. Steve Wittman was in the line up with his powerful D-12 powered Bonzo and Harold knew that Witt was going to be a hard man to beat in addition to Turner. Then there were the jitterbugs of Roger Don Rae, Joe Jacobson, Lee Miles and Marion McKeen—each of which posed a threat.

Well, ol' Harold nailed down

second place with that big brute and played a waiting game . . . "who is going to blow his engine first; Turner in the lead or Witt right behind him nibbling on his flippers?" He throttled back just enough to keep Roscoe in sight . . . and then it happened. Bang!! Roscoe blows his engine and leaves the race.

The crowd goes wild and when they come around again the dean of air show announcers past and present, Jack Storey, booms over the P.A.—

"Neumann, the leader! Can he keep it?"

The crowd is on its feet as Witt nibbles at Harold's tail. Harold knows Witt is there even though he can't see him from inside that cabin. He inches on just a bit more power to hold the lead . . . but unknown to Harold, Witt is having problems with the D-12 and is running with reduced power. Well, BELIEVE-YOU-ME, Harold was going around those pylons so close, I swear you couldn't put a .050 feeler gauge



Mr. Mulligan on the day of its first flight. Few fairings had been applied at this point. The exhaust system visible in this shot is different from what appears on later photographs of the racer.

PHOTOS COURTESY DON PRATT

between Mulligan and the pylon! Harold goes on to win the coveted Thompson Trophy Race and it is a clean sweep of the Nationals for Benny Howard.

Benny went to the Nationals for one reason—to win as much money as he could. The money was to be used to open a factory to produce America’s fastest 300 h.p., four-place cabin monoplane. Benny was already into the design with Gordon Israel, the co-designer and co-pilot of the Mulligan for the Bendix win. Benny left Cleveland with a hat full of money, but before he left, he called Chicago and said go full bore on the new airplane.

Before we go on about the Howards, I would like to clear our engine here. The December 1973 issue of the AOPA Pilot carried an article about Benny Howard’s DGAs. It was written by my good friend and popular EAAer, Peter Bowers of Fly Baby fame. In my opinion, Pete Bowers is the foremost aviation historian and the most accurate writer in the aviation media, however, his researchers or the printers zinged him this time. I don’t know what happened but the facts got a bit screwed up on a couple of points. I hope I’m not nit picking, but I find my version different than his...anyway, I was dere, Charlie!

Pete states that the Mulligan was built in a store in Chicago—not so! It was built in Kansas City. Ask the man who helped build it, EAA Warbird



PHOTOS COURTESY DON PRATT

Mr. Mulligan in racing trim.

member Eddie Fisher, or EAA/IAC member Harold Neumann, pilot of the Mulligan. He also states that Harold was co-pilot on the victorious Bendix flight—not so! It was co-designer Gordon Israel. He states that the factory opened in 1937—not so! It was 1936. (The Howard Aircraft Corporation was formed in 1937.) He also says the Howard airplane was not meant to be a seaplane—no, no, no!! The production airplane was certified as a seaplane (see photo). The first seaplane went to Canada as CF-BET—all white trimmed in red. The highlight of the Chicago Air Show held in the International Amphitheater was a Howard on floats sitting in a pond of water. I should know . . . I waxed it every night.

And finally and foremost, a fellow on the west coast claims he salvaged the remains of the Mulligan from the New Mexico crash site and is re-

building it. He may have picked up a few scraps of the wings or other parts, but not THE Mulligan...or else there must have been TWO Mulligans because “Sludge” Doyle and Mike Molberg brought back what was left to bring back. I was at the factory when they unloaded it in front of the engineering offices. This was valuable information to the engineers and Benny.

When that blade let go (and it was the complete blade) the engine stayed on the airplane and the airplane did not break up in the air. The vibration was so bad that it knocked Benny cold for a while and it was his wife, “Mike,” who kept the airplane right side up until Benny could recover enough to fly it.

What happened to the Mulligan? It was cut up at the factory and most of the parts, tubing, etc., were made into souvenirs. I was talking to Mr. Earl



PHOTOS COURTESY DON PRAIT

Benny Howard and Mr. Mulligan on the day of the first flight of the racer. Note the lack of fairings and paint.

Harold Neumann in 1933 at the Chicago Air Races.

Ewing, our first plant superintendent, the other day and he informed me that his wife still has the flower pot holder made from the Mulligan. Mrs. Molberg has hers also. To go a bit further, I tried to buy the remains at the time but couldn't—but during the negotiations, I wound up with the wings from Gordon Israel's "Redhead" racer. I hope this clears the air once and for all about the Mulligan. If a Mulligan emerges from the west coast, it will be a replica. O.K, 'nuff said!

Now, where was I? Oh yes, the first Howard.

Benny Howard was flying for United Airlines at "Muni" (they called the Chicago Municipal Airport "Muni" in those days) and living at the Troy Lane Apartments—known as the Troy Lane Hotel. It was located at 63rd and Troy on the south side of Chicago about 3-½ miles from the airport. Remember this location because when we get into the Pylon Club story a little later, we will be talking about the same location.

In order to work on the new airplane and not drive all over town... and to be away from snoopers...Benny rented a store around the corner from the hotel and that is where the first Howard DGA cabin was built.

I was still working for Blue Bird when the finished airplane was trucked out to "Muni" for final assembly and flight test. My first impression of the

airplane when I first saw it assembled was, "WOW!" It looked like it was doing 200 mph just sitting there. It was painted with a metallic blue and bronze and it sported a Wright J-6-7E2 in the nose.

I watched them make all the final adjustments, etc., and made sure I was on hand for the first flight. I asked Benny, "What are you calling this one?" "The 'Flanigan,'" was the answer.

... And that's what I have been calling it ever since.

When it came time to test fly the Flanigan, Benny was in his usual good form. Those of you who knew Benny will remember his favorite maneuver was a chandelle on take-off. After completing his taxi tests, he came roaring down the old southwest runway at Muni and as he approached the old Standard Oil Company hangar, down went the left wing and up went the nose . . . and I mean UP! . . . into a beautiful chandelle.

The first flight looked like he had 1,000 hours in the machine. Benny made a few speed passes coupled with some pylon turns and then an out of sight climb. This was followed by a slow flight circle of the airport and a 3-point landing like it was loaded with nitro.

There was much jubilation, back slapping, etc., after that flight and it was agreed by all that Benny had another winner in the Flanigan.

Now the work of getting the machine certificated and finding a place to build it was underway. Certification was handled by Gordon Israel. For the factory, Benny chose the old Matty Laird factory located in the Clearing industrial district. The address was 5301 W. 65th St.—just two blocks south of Muni. Matty had used this building to construct his last airplane, the Sesquiplane. The factory was opened in 1936 with the same handful of men who built the Flanigan.

All the money Benny won at the 1935 Nationals was put into the certification of Flanigan and the factory. He was still short of working capital and needed more money to get the operation off the ground. The place to get the much-needed money was the coming 1936 National Air Races. The now-famous Mulligan was brought to Chicago for rework in preparation for the Bendix Race. Master mechanic and chief honcho was Roy "Sludge" Doyle. He upped the horsepower of the Mulligan to over 800 and said, "Hell, he can win the Bendix with the flaps down!"

My first working experience with the Mulligan came when it was moved to the old Texaco hangar at Muni. I was not a Howard employee yet, however, I knew Roger Scheon (I may not have that name spelled properly, but it is pronounced "Shane"), the brother of Maxine

Howard, Benny's wife. So, I was allowed to help "Sludge" Doyle. My first job was that of pouring oil along the hangar floor so we could slide the tailskid, which was built into the tail, to maneuver the ship in and out of the hangar. We didn't use good oil—the oil came from Roger Scheon's gas station, which was immediately across the street from the hangar. Oh yes, I had to clean up the hangar floor afterwards!

Being on hand during the test flights was breath taking. Every flight was an air show. On one flight, Benny took off from the north/south runway, which was the shortest at Muni—around 4,500 feet long, holding it down going south toward the Texaco hangar. When he got to the ramp, he pulled it up into the famous Benny Howard chandelle and I swear it was a 60-degree climb! That climb continued that way to about 12 or 14 thousand feet. I had never seen an airplane climb like that from take-off. He ran many altitude tests

because that was his secret—altitude.

The low-level tests were something else . . . these you had to see and hear to believe. The harmonics between the prop and exhaust sounded like the present day jets—it was more like a purr than roar. I will never forget that sound or sight. A day didn't pass that I did not bug "Sludge," Gordon or Benny for a ride during the testing. But with the tanks in the back there was no way. Time was short and every flight was of importance. Benny said he would fly everybody in it after the races. I lived for that day...which never came.

The final shakedown flight was from Chicago to New York. We gassed and oiled Mulligan to race weight, Mike and Benny strapped themselves into the seats, the engine barked to life and they were off. As they taxied out for take-off, I was wondering how it would get off and if he would pull his chandelle on take-off.

Well, the take-off was no different than the others as far as getting off



This is Maxine "Mike" Howard leaving the Chicago hospital enroute to Palm Springs, California, for recuperation and rest (following the Mr. Mulligan accident). That is Gordon Israel with her. The other lady, I think, is the hostess from Palm Springs. Note that "Mike" is flying a TWA DC-2... husband Benny flew for United! I took this photo at "Muni."



This is the original Howard DGA-8, the "Flanigan." The picture was taken the evening of the first test flight.



This is the "Flanigan" after it went through the factory certification. The photo was taken by me at "Muni"...The ship was later sold to Mexico along with two others. Notice the only changes from original to licensed airplane are a new fin and rudder, exhaust outlet on the left side instead of the right, rounded rear window and nav light on the fin instead of the rudder.



This is the first Howard seaplane. Photos taken at the factory fly-away hangar in Chicago. Note the high gear. This was a double door (left and right) model. Also, it was equipped with three fuel tanks.



The Howard Flight Test area sometime in the late 1930s.

and climb were concerned, however, Benny did leave off the chandelle. It was less than 3 hours when Benny called and said he had made it in just under 2 ½ hours with no problems. (That's about 630 nautical miles, with a ground speed averaging 252 knots!—Editor)

Again, everyone was jubilant...all but one, that is. "Sludge" looked like he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. "Sludge" was clutching a notice in his hand that read, "Tests indicate propeller should be restricted to 500 or 550 h.p.," I don't recall which. This really disturbed "Sludge." He knew he had over 800 horses jumping up and down under that Mulligan cowl. There was no other propeller available—nor was there any money if one were available. Yet, he knew he couldn't turn Benny and Mike loose with that prop. Many frantic phone calls were made, and still no prop. Race time was around the corner and a decision had to be made. As I remember it, someone at Smith said it was O.K. I don't know who made the final decision to fly the race with the Smith propeller, but I do know who accepted the responsibility when that prop failed over New Mexico while Benny and Mike were leading the Bendix by a huge margin.

When the Mulligan was destroyed in the ensuing crash, Roy "Sludge" Doyle crashed right along with them. When "Sludge" was notified of the crash, he knew what had happened and kept screaming, "I should have never let them go!" Mike and Benny recovered from that crash, but "Sludge"—like the Mulligan—was destroyed for life. From that tragic day in September 1936 until the day he died, "Sludge" carried the cross of guilt and responsibility of that crash. He died with a very heavy and broken heart. He stayed on with the factory taking his early pay in stock instead of cash (because there wasn't any of the latter) until it closed during World War II. A day didn't pass that he didn't



COURTESY MIKE REZICH

This is the economy model with the 225 Jake and Curtiss-Reed prop, no wheel pants and the cheap paint job. Photo taken by an unknown (to me) photographer when the ship was on the west coast for the March 1937 Pan Pacific Air Show at Los Angeles. I have a photo of Benny and "Mike" sitting with the airplane at the show.



NICK REZICH

The same ship after being returned to the factory for new deluxe paint job and new gas tanks. The photo was taken by me at the Chicago factory . . . we were swinging the compass at the time.



COURTESY NICK REZICH

Howard DGA-8 powered by a 320 h.p. Wright. Colors, Stinson Green – Spartan Green. This photo was from company literature.

remind someone that it was his fault for letting Benny fly the airplane. In recent years whenever I flew an air show in the South Bend area, ol' "Sludge" would show up and we would reminisce about the Howard days. Our last visit was during the Polish Air Force air show at Warsaw, Indiana. Before the day was over, he again reminded me that he should

never have let Benny go and that the factory would still be open if it were not for that accident.

The accident really did upset the apple cart for Benny. The factory was open with a few orders for the new DGA, but it needed the money Benny had hoped to win at the 1936 Nationals. With Benny and Mike in the hospital, the factory more or less went into receivership before it formally opened. I think you know what I am trying to say...Benny was broke! Now add the hospital bills to the already broke Howard Aircraft and you have a grim situation. You would think that would be enough problems for Benny—but there were others that were much worse. Mike's legs were not healing properly and this worried Benny more than the factory. Benny recovered first and Mike came along later, after several operations. She was and still is the most beautiful, considerate woman in the world. When she and Benny healed and came by the factory, she was dressed in the sharpest pair of slacks I have seen. She stopped and talked with everyone in the shop . . . and she always had the big smile one never forgets.

Let me tell you a story about Mike and Ben. They were going through the factory and stopped to talk with me while I was putting the final sanding on a yellow Howard. I don't know if I was showing off or just super thrilled with our chat, but while they were still standing there, I proceeded to sand through the fabric along a stringer on this almost completed Howard . . . embarrassed? Boy, you know it!! Mike and Ben smiled and walked on leaving me with a repair job that would have to be invisible upon delivery of the airplane.

Mike knew everyone in the plant by first and last name and would most often call you by your first name or nickname. (By the way, about the time you are reading this, I will be returning from Hammondsport, N.Y. where I will have attended the

enshrinement of Ben O. Howard into the Pioneers of Aviation OX-5 Hall of Fame.)

Benny hired only super craftsmen. You had to be the best in the industry or you didn't work for Howard. After working for Blue Bird, American Airlines, Stinson Aircraft and others, I can truthfully say that when a Howard was delivered it was the best built airplane in the world.

Some of the original super men were: The late Mike Babco, welder supreme. He came from Matty Laird's. Mike also made jigs. The woodworking department was headed up by the late Eric Pearson. He and his Swedes could lay plywood like it was molded plastic. The original assembly was handled by three men from Stinson—Earl Ewing, the late Mike Molberg, and "Lefty" Huff. "Lefty" didn't last long as he did most of his work with his mouth instead of his hands. As it turned out, Earl Ewing, now retired and living in Pennsylvania, was named shop superintendent. Mike Molberg was put in charge of all assembly. The sheet metal department was headed



CAA DGA-8. Note the lower gear and right hand door. This airplane was loaded with radio gear for CAA work. The pilot got lost over Kansas City and cracked it up when it had only a few hours on it. Ship was rebuilt by Howard.



This is a deluxe 9 with controllable prop, 2 doors and deluxe paint. The Stinson in the background was a trade-in for a Howard. The photo was taken by me at the Chicago Fly-away factory area . . . during test flight phase.

up by the dean of tin benders, Eskic Hallquist, who also came from Matty Laird's. He was a gutter man in Chicago and would come out to Matty's to

make cowling on contract. The finishing department was run by an old airmail mechanic, "Red" Gross from Chicago. Inspection was the job "Skippy" Butler nailed down. The interiors were by Frank Kubac, aluminum welding by the super welder, Robert Babb of St. Louis (and now a bartender in Chicago). This guy put heliarc to shame. The plant master mechanic and in charge of the fittings and machine shop was Roy "Sludge" Doyle. The engineering department consisted of Gordon Israel as chief and Ted Linnert. Later came Dr. Walter Brownell, Dr. Niebersauer, Gordon Israel again and, finally, Bill Peerfield. Flight test was handled by Ben O. Howard, Walt Brownell, Fred Novinger, Gordon Israel, Walter Daiber and Tony Mackowicz. Tony was the spin expert. He ran all the early spin tests. Walter Brownell ran the spin tests on the first seaplane. He is the chief pilot for Morton Salt, flying a JetStar today. Tony Mackowicz is living in retirement in Chicago, Ted Linnert is with ALPA in Washington, D.C., and Gordon Israel is in California working as a consultant.

Sales were handled by "Slim" Freitag and Benny's brother, Sam Howard. The last I knew of Sam, he was living in Coral Gables, Florida, and producing the world famous Aquatic Productions. "Slim" is still living in DeKalb, Illinois.

I may be misspelling some names here . . . please forgive me as I am going back 38 years and I couldn't spell then!

For president we had Ben O. Howard, B.D. DeWeese and Dan Peterkin, Jr. The only vice president I can remember was C. "Slim" Freitag.

Next month we will go into the factory and build them . . . how and who. I'll tell you about some special customers like Wallace Beery and others. Keep the letters and cards coming—it really blows my ego!

Until next month, remember, the wing tip that points to the tail in a spin requires opposite rudder for recovery.



These two photos were used in the Howard Aircraft Corporation promotional publication. DGA-11 NC 18208 450 Horse Power Wasp Jr. Colors: Insignia Blue and Yukon Gold