



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of STANLEY HILLER, JR.

Born around 1924



Written by MAN Staff (1961); Transcribed & Edited by SS (07/2003), Reformatted by JS (09/2009)

Career:

- At age 12, started a very successful business manufacturing miniature racing cars
- By age 15 had a staff of 300 and a yearly gross just under one million dollars
- Early 1940s: Formed the Hiller Aircraft Company
- Early 1940s: Developed his first crude helicopter for the Navy
- 1944: Received the Fawcett Award for “major contribution to the scientific advancement of aviation”
- 1945: Founded United Helicopters Incorporated
- 1948: First made a helicopter called the Commute then the 360, which received CAA certification
- 1951: Selected one of the nation’s 10 outstanding young men by the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce
- 1958: Received the National Defense Transportation Association award

The following biography was published in the Model Airplane News 1961 Annual.

At an age when most boys are thinking of BB guns and baseball, Stanley Hiller Jr. was already a successful young businessman. When in 1936 he was 12, he established a \$100,000-a-year business of manufacturing miniature racing cars.

Actually, Hiller’s interest in mechanics goes back even further than that. When he was 6, he built a model railway system in the backyard of his parents’ Berkeley home.

A few years later, he made an automobile out of soapboxes and an old washing machine motor.

Then, at age 12, he salvaged an old model airplane motor and built it into a 19-inch long racing car, which would travel up to 60 miles an hour and make an angry whine. Other Berkeley boys immediately wanted such cars too, so young Stanley borrowed some money from his father and established Hiller Industries.

The following year, when Hiller was 13, Hiller and his father invented a die-casting machine that enabled the company to manufacture its own parts instead of subletting contracts for them. With this advance, the company was also able to turn out aluminum frying pans and water pistols that shot 50 feet.

The war in Europe brought the company a flood of contracts for the manufacture of magnesium bombs and more than 1,000 parts for fighter planes. Stanley, now 15, had a staff of 300 and a yearly gross of just under a million dollars.

Hiller became interested in the possibilities of helicopter flight in 1940.

In 1942, when Hiller was a University of California freshman, he took blueprints for a helicopter to a professor and asked for an opinion. He was told flatly the gadget would never fly.

But Hiller was not deterred. He quit school, sold Hiller Industries for a profit, formed the Hiller Aircraft Company, and approached the armed forces for contracts.

The Army refused, but the Navy gave him an experimental contract, and he developed his first crude helicopter.

From 1943 to 1945, Stanley developed his helicopters with the aid of Henry Kaiser. After the war the two parted, Kaiser to build automobiles and Hiller to found United Helicopters Incorporated.

Hiller took his helicopter plans to several large San Francisco brokerage houses, and because of his reputation, they called in several clients. But the clients all had objections, for they thought the project would never get off the ground.

After trying to raise financing in Los Angeles and on Wall Street, Hiller finally found a small East Bay securities firm that advertised and raised \$800,000 to start the project.

Within a month, Hiller moved his operations from Berkeley to the Mid-Peninsula and produced the helicopter he had been planning. It was called the Commuter.

The successor to the Commuter was the 360, which received CAA certification in 1948. This machine gave the company its start toward becoming one of the major helicopter manufacturers in the United States.

Hiller has been the recipient of a number of national awards for his work. In 1944, he received the Fawcett Award for "major contribution to scientific advancement of aviation." In 1951, the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce selected him as one of the nation's 10 outstanding young men. In 1958, he received the National Defense Transportation Association award.

President Stanley Hiller, in the company's annual report released last week, announced that the company's sales were up 23% in 1959 and he predicted that the company's commercial helicopter business would increase 75% in 1960.

And yet, the company states in a 1960 reference manual, the total rate of growth over the past decade or so in the helicopter field is short of what some people had predicted.

The report says, "Early predictions...had helicopters in commuter garages and in hunting lodges.

“These stories are still prevalent,” the report says, “but they are not originated by helicopter manufacturers who have been in the business for years and have grown wise about their markets.”

These early reports “did the industry some degree of harm, because the public was primed for something that didn’t come off. These unrealistic stories still continue from some sources inside and outside the industry.”

But the Hiller people nevertheless are optimistic about the helicopter market. They predict it will increase tenfold in the next decade.

There are four major obstacles retarding the helicopter’s growth, the firm states. All of them will be removed.

The obstacles are: lack of performance and mission limitations, high operating costs and lack of reliability for the performance available, high purchase price for the performance available and lack of “helicopter education.”

In the performance field, Hiller points out that the maximum ceiling for helicopters has been about 3,000 feet. This ceiling has been raised to 10,000 feet and next year it will be 20,000 feet. Besides, “our newest 12E helicopter will carry nearly 70% more payload than the same sized models produced in 1957.”

As to high operating costs, the company says that these too are being lowered. Hiller points out that on the newest models major overhaul is not necessary until after 1,000 flight hours have been logged, against an old overhaul period of 6,000 hours.

As to the high purchase price, Hiller points out that as in many other fields, “number of units produced is the major factor in helicopter cost.”

In the first year of sales of the 12E model, “success has permitted us to drop the price significantly, which in itself has contributed to the demand for another production increase.”

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AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

