

## **Ned H. Danforth**

**By David Budd**

This history is presented on "Honorary Member" Ned H Danforth, founder and owner of the Tropical Bait Co. / Danforth Manufacturing Co., of Indianapolis, Indiana. Ned H. Danforth was born July 14, 1905 in Wisconsin. During his early years he developed a love for fishing and tinkering with an engineering skill. In 1932 Ned was employed by Brinks, Inc. and was transferred to Indianapolis, Indiana. Shortly thereafter, Ned left Brinks to go to work for International Harvester as "Product Complaint Analyst II." He worked there until he retired in 1971. He and his wife then moved to the Hayward area of Wisconsin.

In 1935 while living at 717 S. Emerson Ave, Ned began making baits. Ned had four daughters and a son who helped "Dad" in the business of manufacturing baits. Ned also enlisted the aid of his good friend John "The Baptist" Worthington to field test his products and help with manufacturing when necessary. John states that Ned developed a rotating work station for the kids to sit at and assemble, paint, and package baits. The table was like a large revolving poker table/lazy Susan.

The first bait Ned tried to develop was called the Fire Fly, a 1-1/2 to 1-3/4 inch bait made of balsa wood with a Plexiglas panel in the bottom that would hold a live lighting bug. The bait caught fish but did not withstand being hit by fish and leaked. The bait was never marketed, and to my knowledge none of these prototypes are known to have survived.

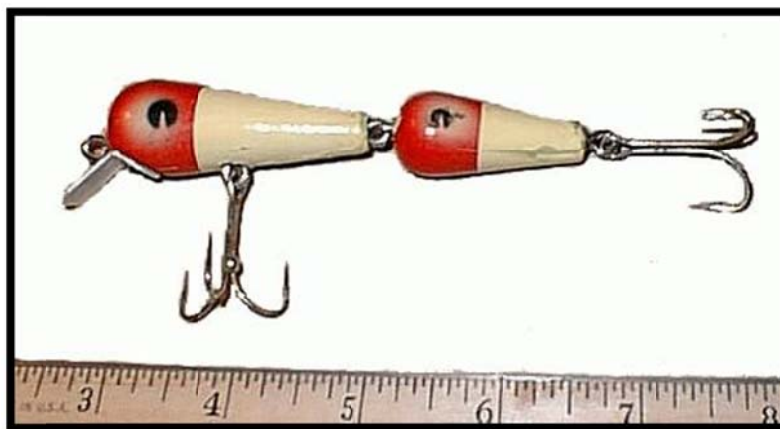
Ned's next endeavor was the highly successful "Packman" baits, as we collectors call them. Their true names: "The Stormy Petrel" is a large 5/8

inch round bait made of South American Coresa wood which creates a storm of bubbles when worked through the water. The fly rod version of this bait is called the "Bugeyed Babbler," and was made of cork. The success of these baits caused Ned to form the Tropical Bait Co., named from the source of the material used in the bait.



**Stormy Petrel**

Other successful baits were the Double-Header, Grumpy, Little Grumpy, Flying Fish, flocked Fuzzy Duck, metal Revenuer (for the IRS) and an unknown. Other baits were a hair frog, a hula popper and thirty five different types of terminal tackle including rubber worms.



**Double-Header**

Ned attended the first Indianapolis sport show after World War II in 1945 introducing his company's products. He got a commitment from Sears and Roebuck to carry his products. This arrangement did not work, and Ned

reorganized his company to Danforth Manufacturing and continued to market fishing tackle and an extended tiller handle for outboards that is still marketed today. The company also tried to market dyed-black frog skins to imitate leaches for fishing Leach Lake, Wisconsin. Danforth Manufacturing went out of business in 1958/1959. Much of the information in this article was provided by Ned's and my good friend John "The Baptist" Worthington who lives in Terre Haute, Indiana.

**Honorary Member - 1993**