

## CHAPTER VIII



**M**y employment at California Consumers was a seasonal job and I was beginning to wonder what I would be doing next when I received call from the job placement office at PJC. I was told to call U.S. Electric Motors in Los Angeles for an interview appointment and was told they were looking for a time study engineer. I did not know what that was but got an appointment and showed up at the plant which was located on Slauson Avenue near South Main Street. After filling out a job application I was interviewed by the personnel office and hired on the spot. Bud, in the meantime had gone to work for Curtis Color Camera Co. in Hollywood and this meant doing something about transportation.

We sold the Chevy Coupe and he bought a 1937 Nash Lafayette and I bought a 1936 Oldsmobile Coupe. My boss at U.S. Motors was an Englishman named Harvey Langton who had such an accent that I could hardly understand him but we quickly developed a good relationship. Harvey gave me one week of training in taking time studies and then sent me out on the shop floor to take time studies and set piece rates on various production tasks. I soon found out there was a lot more to be learned about this time study business and enrolled in night school at UCLA where I took a course in Industrial Engineering. My salary at U.S Motors was \$80.00 a month. I guess I did pretty good because in no time at

all my title was changed to Industrial Engineer but without any increase in salary.

After about six months on the job I was given the task of developing a layout for a new plant that U.S. Motors was going to build in Millford Connecticut. It was my first experience in plant layout but they liked what I came up with and used it in building the new factory.

After completing my course at UCLA I enrolled in a night course in industrial management at Cal Tech. During all this time Virginia and I were making our arrangements to get married. We set the date for August 3, 1940, and were married by Reverend Wright in the Alhambra Lutheran Church. Wright was later killed in a Jeep accident overseas while he was in the service as a Chaplain during W.W.II. We chose the Lutheran Church because we liked Rev. Wright and it was the church that Grandma Bahn belonged to and Rev. Wright was a friend of the family.

Since we were both working and could not get any time off, our honeymoon consisted of one weekend. We spent the night in the San Clemente Hotel and then drove back home the next day by way of the Ortega Highway and Lake Elsinore. We stopped at the lookout point above Lake Elsinore to take pictures and while there a bee stung Virginia on her back which made her quite uncomfortable and sort of spoiled the rest of the trip home for her.

Upon our return we set up housekeeping in the Alhambra Bungalow Courts on Atlantic Boulevard, next door to the church in which we had just been married. The Court consisted of six little bungalows with three on each side of the center palm lined walkway. Ours was a middle unit and the rent was \$50 per month. It had a bedroom, a combination living/dining room and a kitchen with the bathroom off the kitchen. You had to go through the kitchen to get to the bathroom, the door of which opened onto the kitchen. Not the best of arrangements and probably designed to save on the cost

of plumbing installations.

One of our assignments at Cal Tech was to design labor saving devices and I came up with a rivet sorting gadget for salvaging rivets that had fallen on the floor of the numerous aircraft plants that were building war planes for England and France. At the conclusion of the course executives from various industrial plants were invited to visit and review our projects which we had to demonstrate for them. Among the visiting executives were: Harvey Firestone of Firestone Tire and Rubber Co., William Lear of Lear Industries, a man for the Ford Motor Company and Ray Parkhurst of Vultee Aircraft Company. Parkhurst was exceedingly interested in my project and offered me a job on the spot at Vultee. At his request I went down to Vultee the next day, was interviewed and hired all in the time of about 45 minutes. My starting salary was \$250 a month, three times what I was getting at U.S. Motors. That afternoon I gave notice to U.S. Motors where they immediately offered to double my salary to \$160 per month but that was still far short of the Vultee position and I resigned on the spot from U.S. Motors.

Virginia was earning \$152 a month from her Bank of America job and I insisted that she quit and become a home maker. I was not going to have my wife working as long as I could support the both of us. We had got along quite well with our combined salaries while I was at U.S. Motors and we were living in the Bungalow Court. We were able to go out for a steak dinner and a movie after every payday and also ate well at home on our combined income of \$232. We began looking for a larger space to live in and found a nice little two bedroom house, with a large lot and several fruit trees, on Walnut Grove Avenue in Rosemead for \$75 a month. That is where we started raising a family. We had not been married too long before I got Virginia pregnant in the spring of 1940. We had planned on having children but not quite that soon. The grandparents on both sides were ecstatic and we were excited. Virginia

and I were going to become a family.

She had two siblings, a brother named Dick and sister named Doris. Dick and Bud became close friends and Doris and I really loved each other as brother and sister. On the morning of November 26, 1941 Virginia went into labor and I rushed her to the Queen of Angeles Hospital in Los Angeles where, a short time later, she delivered a little baby boy who, at the time looked like a Jap to me. We named him Richard William Harker after her brother Dick and myself. He soon became known as "Richy" and was a cute little baby boy with large expressive eyes and a continual smile on his face.

The next day I passed out cigars at work and I remember Ken Lehman, the machine shop foreman at Vultee, saying, "So you put the plumbing on the outside." The photo department at Vultee sent a photographer to our house in Rosemead a couple of weeks later to take a picture of Virginia and me with Richy which was printed in the internal house organ called "The Vul-tair."

I brought Virginia and my new son home from the hospital on Saturday, December 6, 1941 and the next morning, while listening to the radio, we heard President Roosevelt announce the bombing of Pearl Harbor. We were now involved in W.W.II as a participant rather than the arsenal of defense for Europe. There were a lot of phone calls back and forth that day between family and friends and we all thought we would make short work of the Japs. Our only experience with them had been the cheap imports of toys and gadgets they manufactured and we assumed the same would be true of their ships and military machines. We were very wrong!

Bud and Dick were soon drafted into the service. Dick went into the Signal Corps. as he had been working for the telephone Company and Bud went into the photo unit of the 8th Air Force as a photographer. I received a deferment due to my employment in a critical

defense industry. The war brought many changes to our way of living such as rationing of gas and food, blackouts, restricted travel and fear of bombings. So much has been written about the war and those days that I will not go into it any further here. I will however mention a few things of possible interest.

Nylon stockings became unavailable and the gals took to painting their legs with a tan makeup to look like hosiery. One job I enjoyed was using an eyebrow pencil to draw a seam down the back of Virginia's legs to increase the illusion. She kept the bottle of makeup in an under-the-sink cabinet in the bathroom and one afternoon while she was busy in the kitchen, Richy crawled into the bathroom, got the makeup and smeared it all over himself and the bathroom floor. This happened just before I got home so I took a picture of him sitting amidst the mess he had created.

When the appropriate time came we got a little toilet seat with a duck on the front of it that sat on top of the regular toilet seat to assist in his toilet training. I never knew how far little boys could shoot their pee until one evening while I was in the bedroom and Richy was on his ducky seat he let loose with a stream that cleared the duck's head and shot all the way into our bedroom. I called Virginia to see what he had done and we both had a good laugh. Richy evidently thought we liked what he had done and mistook our laughter for applause and thereafter would try his damndest to shoot his pee into the bedroom. We finally convinced him that we did not like it and he stopped doing it.

At the time I went to work for Vultee, they were just getting started on changing their manufacturing methods and were preparing to install a conveyor system on the assembly lines. As a result I got in on the ground floor as a member of a team that revolutionized aircraft manufacturing in the United States. One of my jobs was to set the speed of the conveyor lines, always increasing the speed and never the opposite. This subjected me to a lot of booing and catcalls from the men

and girls working on the assembly lines, but I had cut my teeth on this sort of thing at U.S. Motors so it did not bother me too much.

We were building BT13s and BT15 basic trainers for the Air Force which were two place low wing all metal planes. One of the conveniences installed in these planes was a relief tube for the comfort of the pilots. One day I was taking a time study on one of the girls installing this device when she suddenly said to me, "Everyone has heard of Rosie the Riveter, well I'm Rosie of the Piss Tube." It was a rubber hose with a funnel on the end of it and I tried to convince her it was a speaking tube to assist communications between the instructor and the student but she wouldn't buy that.

In 1942 I was offered a position teaching adult night classes at Cal Tech in Production Control. I accepted and the job paid me \$10 per night for 3 nights a week. Some of the fellows in my classes later became executives in the aerospace industry. It was there that I met Trevor Gardner who later became Assistant Secretary of Defense in Washington and he and I started moonlighting, doing consulting work for several small firms that had acquired defense contracts and were in over their heads. Our clients included Day and Night Water Heaters, Plomb Tool Company and Rheem Manufacturing.

One night I was running a time study to set the pay rate on an operation that consisted of testing the airtight seal on 50 caliber ammunition boxes by immersing them under water. Ralph Horn, the old man doing the operation, had been my tennis coach at Alhambra High School and had given me a bad time on more than one occasion. The temptation to get even with him was overwhelming, but I really felt sorry for him and set a rate of pay that would properly reward him for the effort he put forth. When the study was all over I told him who I was and he said he thought I looked a little familiar but could not recall where he had seen me before. I guess he had seen so many kids in

his lifetime of teaching and coaching that we all began to look alike.

Virginia and I had sold my Oldsmobile and bought a 1941 Fluid Drive Dodge which was sort of the forerunner of today's automatic shift cars. You could drive it without shifting. It just moved when you stepped on the gas. By 1942 we had reached the point where we needed two cars so I bought a 1930 Willys Knight Coupe to use for going to and from Vultee which was located in Downey. It had a sleeve-in-valve "L" head engine that required pouring boiling water over it in the winter before it would start. As our financial situation improved we bought our first home later that year, a three bedroom house on Charriet Street in Rosemead.

By late summer of 1943 I had Virginia pregnant again. Her sister Doris had enlisted in the Waves and met an Army Captain named Thomas J. Ferguson who she married. When he was shipped off to the Aleutian Islands Doris came to live with us and was there when I found out I was going to be transferred to Allentown Pennsylvania to train and guide Pennsylvania Dutch people in building the Vultee TBV3 Torpedo Bomber for the Navy. I was scheduled to leave in late December and Virginia was too far into her pregnancy to go with me so she and Doris stayed in Rosemead.

I boarded a United DC3 at the old Burbank Airport on the night of December 28 for a long cold cross country flight to my destination via New York. It was snowing when I got there and I was freezing. The plane had no heater so they gave all of us wool blankets and served us cold box lunches. The day after New Years I checked in on my new job and got a place to stay in a rooming house where some of the other tenants were really weird, along with the two old ladies that owned the place. I went through the blizzard and ice storm of winter 1944 which was a new experience for me and one I won't forget.

On the night of May 24, 1944 while I was speak-

ing at a seminar on war production in Boston, I received a note from the hotel manager that I had a daughter born a few hours earlier out in California. As soon as I got back to the plant in Allentown the next day I began making plans to get out to California. The Company arranged for me to fly out to San Diego the following week in a B24 Bomber that they had converted into an executive airplane. It was furnished like a club car inside with big bay windows where the side gun turrets had been removed. It was a much more comfortable trip than the previous one in the opposite direction and upon landing in San Diego I picked up a Company car and headed for our house in Rosemead.

It was there that I met my new daughter whom we had named Harriet Ellen Harker having decided on that name ahead of time in the event the baby turned out to be female.

Vultee had given me two weeks leave to spend with my family and I made the most of it. I went to the plant in Downey and again passed out cigars and was told that I now had a "gentleman's pair." When the time came to return to Allentown Virginia's doctor decided she needed to rest up some more and advised against her and the two children going back with me. So I took the Dodge and drove back by myself in the record time of four days. I drove day and night and would pull off the road to take cat naps. A very dangerous thing to do and something I would never try again, but I had milked my visit in California for all it was worth and was running short on time.

I left before daylight on a Thursday morning at 4:00 a.m. and when I reached the Arizona border a customs officer asked where I was headed and if I would give a young Marine, who had been wounded, a ride as far as his home town of Oklahoma City. I agreed to do so and in the ensuing conversations with the boy found out a grenade hanging on his belt had accidentally exploded during a skirmish killing his two companions and knocking all his innards askew. That night in a

motel room where we stayed he showed me his right side which was black and blue from his arm pit to his right knee. He had just been released from the Naval Hospital in Long Beach where he had spent three months recovering.

Gas rationing was in effect and the rationing board only gave me enough gas coupons to get me to Allentown. They cut it quite thin on the basis of the number of miles I had to drive with not a gallon to spare. I had exactly ten "A" coupons, each of which was good for 10 gallons. In New Mexico I stopped at a roadside diner for some breakfast and the lady running the place asked where I was going and when I told her and showed her a picture I had of my new baby daughter she asked how much gas they had rationed to me and when she found out she reached under the counter and brought out a cigar box full of "T" coupons, each of which was good for 20 gallons and gave me a full sheet of them. She told me they were trucker's coupons and truckers had more than they needed and gave them to her to use as she pleased. When I got to Allentown I disconnected the odometer and had all the gas I needed for a year.

On the morning of the second day I had the car radio on and heard war correspondent Floyd Owens describing the crossing of the English Channel on the way to Dunkirk. It was "D Day" and he was on board one of the boats. You could hear a lot of noise and gunfire amidst the static of his transmission which was by short wave radio. It was quite exciting to say the least. I drove through big thunder storms in Missouri with lightening cracking all around me and arrived in Allentown late Sunday night and reported back to work the next morning.



My '36 Olds at Muroc Dry Lake.



Virginia and my wedding.