

CHAPTER IX



Leaving my wife and two children, which included my newborn daughter, behind as I headed east was very difficult for me but family disruptions during the war seemed to be par for the course and I really had little choice in the matter. I at least found some comfort in the knowledge that our folks were nearby and that Virginia had the additional company of her sister Doris staying with her. I'm sure the separation was just as uncomfortable for them as for me.

For many years, prior to my arrival in Allentown, I had suffered from frequent severe sinus attacks. During my high school days they were sometimes so bad that I would have to stay home. Two weeks after arriving in Allentown and facing below zero temperatures with snow and ice all around I had the mother of all sinus attacks which lasted three days and then suddenly cleared up. I have never had any attacks since then and doctors have told me it was due to the change in climate. Evidently the sudden change to cold dry weather turned out to be the cure for my condition.

The TBY3 Torpedo Bomber was not a Vultee design. It was designed by Chance Vought Aircraft Company for the Navy, but they were so busy building their Corsair fighter planes that they could not produce the TBY3 so the Navy put the job out for bid by other aircraft companies. There were several bidders and Vultee won the contract but had no facilities or factory where

they could begin building the plane. The Mack Motor Truck Company had just completed a new plant in Allentown and had not yet moved their production equipment into the building so the Navy confiscated the building and made it available for building the TB3. That is how Vultee managed to get involved in Allentown

There were actually two separate buildings, a two story wood administration building and the concrete factory with a 200 ft. long sidewalk connecting the two buildings. My office was on the second floor of the administration building. The building had two wings and the architects had designed the second wing as a mirror image of the first, thus saving the cost of extra design time and duplicate drawings. The only problem with this was that everything in one wing was just the opposite from things in the other wing and that included the restrooms. One day I had been sitting through a two hour meeting in the other wing from the one where my office was located. As the meeting broke up I had to take a leak real bad and headed down the hall for the men's room not thinking that I was not in my own wing. Without taking the time to check the sign on the door to the restroom I rushed in, unzipped my pants and began looking for the nearest urinal. I noticed the design of the urinal was different than what I was used to but did not have time to figure things out before there was a lot of feminine screaming behind me. I had already started my stream running and could not shut it off so I just stood there red faced and finished the task. I then turned around and apologized to the ladies who, by this time, were laughing and giggling their heads off. Every female face in that restroom was indelibly imprinted in my mind and whenever I would pass one of the gals in the hall they would smile and give me a knowing look. Word soon spread through the building and for a week or more I was the laughing stock of the work force.

For about the first three months we spent our time getting the plant ready for production, installing

machine tools, conveyor lines, stock bins, etc. We began letting contracts out to other firms to build sub-assemblies for us and one contract went to Bud Manufacturing that built railroad passenger cars. They began building fuselage assemblies for us. Another company began building wing assemblies and so it went leaving us primarily as a final assembly and test flight facility.

War time housing and lodging were very scarce in Allentown and so Vultee had set up a housing department to locate rooms and houses for the employees who were not regular residents of the area. Anyone with a spare bedroom could register with that department and the company would soon find someone to occupy it. That is how I ended up in the rooming house run by a strange little old lady named Bertha Shaneberger and her woman friend Edith Schmaltz.

The rooming house was a three story brick building with the bedrooms on the second and third floors. The first floor contained a sitting room, kitchen, dining room, bath and laundry room. The second floor had six rooms, all occupied by Vultee employees. Bertha, her boy friend, Edith and her husband, who was dying of consumption, occupied the third floor. Bertha was a great cook and we had plenty to eat for both breakfast and dinner. My room was quite large and only contained a single-wide bed, a closet, small table with a lamp and a lounge chair.

One night I came home from work and found another bed in my room and was informed another Vultee employee would be sharing the room with me. He showed up the next night with a big wooden box the size of a steamer trunk. His name was Milan Momchilovich and he was a big fellow weighing in at about 300 pounds with a heavy accent. His box was full of Communist literature, books by Lenin and Trotsky and the Communist manifesto. When I asked him what it was all about he said he was a student of political science and was studying up on the Communist type of govern-

ment. I have no idea of how he managed to pass the security checks to allow him to work in a defense plant. He had one habit that drove me nuts. Every night at 9:00 p.m. he would go down to the corner drug store and buy a quart of ice cream which he would completely consume before going to bed and never offered me any. I guess he had to eat the whole thing because we did not have a freezer in our room and it would melt if he didn't eat it all.

He and I started taking flying lessons at a little grass strip airport in Foglesville about three miles from Allentown and we organized a flying club at the plant. We soon had 22 people, both men and women in the club, all learning to fly. The planes used for instruction were J2 and J3 Piper cubs that were powered by either 50 or 65 horse power engines. The Sunday morning that I made my first solo flight was in the Spring and the field was covered with clover blossoms. I had no sooner taken off than I realized I had an unwanted passenger in the plane with me a huge Bumble Bee that kept buzzing around my head. I was so intent on flying the plane by myself that I gave him little heed and as I was turning on final for my first solo landing he must have figured it was time to get the hell out of there and flew out the window. That landing was one of the most perfect I ever made in my many subsequent years of flying.

Because of the war we were restricted as to where we could fly and had to stay away from the Atlantic Coast. I decided to join the Civil Air Patrol in order to get more legal range for my flying. Among our various CAP activities was mock bombings of hidden targets with paper sacks of white flour. Phil Neuwieller, who owned the Neuweiller Brewery, was amongst our members and on one of our practice bombing missions he filled his flour sacks with heavy rocks so they would fall more accurately.

A target had been hidden near a farm house some distance from town and when we located it Phil let

go with one of his weighted flour bags which missed the target and crashed through the slate tile roof of the farm house and ended up on the farmer's dining room floor. The farmer was going to sue Phil for damages but the matter was settled out of court by Phil donating six cases of beer to the farmer's future well being. After that, no one was permitted to add weight to their allotted sacks of flour.



Our first house on Walnut Grove Avenue in Rosemead.



Our house at Summit lawn in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Convair Flying Club Officers



William Fath, president; Pauline Saylor, secretary; William Barker, treasurer; and Joh Yoder, vice president, who were elected to head the Convair Flying club at a meeting last night at the Hotel Traylor.

William Fath, new president of the Convair Flying club last night outlined a program to enroll in the club the almost 1,200 employees at the Consolidated-Vultee plant in Allentown who have had some flying time.

Named to a committee to institute the drive were A. M. Wach, Derwin G. Beishaw and Rachel Conover. The club since its founding early in May has had at least 20 flights.

Members of the club include 13 club members around the flying time of an enlarged membership a committee was named to draw up a schedule of

available hours for the use of the planes. Two planes are in use at the present time at the Allentown-Bethlehem airport.

Named to the various committees were: Blanche Zanner, Rachel Fisher and Walter Kruger; Jack Sties and Charles Goodrich; Thomas Palulich and Gerold Loevy, advisory and schedules and contracts.

Bigoury Thayer was asked to investigate the possibility of holding a ground course during the winter months.

THE MORNING CALL - Allentown



Richy in Allentown dressed for the winter.



Our family in Allentown before Jimmy was born.