

A FEW MEMORIES OF BOB VOLLMER

My bulletin board as I can fully remember begins back in grade school. These activities I am sure had a solid impact on my adult life. Our recess grounds were practically an engineering lab. The may-pole wasn't exactly what one would think. The tall pole had ten vertical chains suspended from the top wheel and a metal ring at the bottom. One chain was wrapped around the others several times. Then Newton's second law of accelerated motion would be used. One student was put on the wrapped chains ring and the rest of us rotate and at the same time vigorously pull outward at the same time. As we rotated, the guy on the wrapped chain would swing out faster and faster until he was practically horizontal. He had to hang on or fly into a new world. We were also educated in hydraulics; Our school was one of the first schools to have flush toilets. Since the depression was in full swing, our system was simple but workable. One sewer line connected the boys side with the girls side separated by a partition. When we thought a girl might be on the thrown one of us boys would come down hard in the stool with a plumber's friend and produce an eruption on the girls side. If you heard a scream then the shot was successful. When it was my turn to be the executioner, I got caught. I think someone set me up.

Since the time was during the depression everything was tight. I remember many people begging for food. The RR box cars were jammed with men going from town to town looking for work. To survive one had to learn many trades. I lived close to the public library and had access to much constructive knowledge. I ate a lot of Quaker Oat Meal in order to have a round box to wind coils for building radios. I made most of my condensers and batteries. The nearby railroads furnished my knowledge on battery building. The RR's built many batteries in the rural areas for their signals. They were great teachers. Even their tracks were educational in thermal expansion. On cool mornings us kids would sit on a track joint (pants down naturally) and wait for the sun to come up and warm the tracks. When the tracks expanded with the heat the cracks would close up and pinch ones bottom. Who jumped up first was chicken.

Radio building was essential. If one didn't have money to buy one you had to make one. Station WLW was called the big one with 50000 watts output and could be received very easy. Some time a cast iron skillet on a stove would resonate on the WLW channel and play music or whatever. A friend of mine at the other end of town also made radios. We communicated with each other with our radios using a spark transmitter and Morse code. We didn't realize the signals were disrupting all radio signals between our transmitters. My dad was also unhappy because me couldn't hear Amos and Andy. I didn't know the disturbance existed until Federal Communication Authorities had zeroed in at our house knocked at the door. Mother answered the door and what a surprise. That part of my electronics came to a halt. However the electricity kept flowing. My folks were in the Wholesale Grocery and Warehousing business and the buildings were across the side street from our house. With hard times around, burglaries were common. There was a break-in about every month. I built a burglar alarm system that sounded the alarm in our house across the street. The intruders were usually after cigarettes. A few cases of cigarettes on the black market was worth a fortune. The alarm system was set sensitive enough that at times the intruders could be seen crawling through an opening. Dad would usually wait for the police to show up before flushing them out. I recall two robbers escaping out a side

door blazing away at the police as they ran and cut across our front lawn. One policer was stationed behind the motor of the police car and a bullet meant for him took the radiator cap off the car. Another cop bore down on one of them with a double-barrel shot gun which ended his flight. I witnessed several gun fights. In one robbery, Dad stationed me at the front of the office on main street. He put his 45 revolver in my hands and said "shoot anybody that comes through that door." All robberies didn't end up in our favor. On one particular night the alarm sounded and Mom called the police station. This time only one officer showed up. Dad and the officer entered the building. The intruders had pulled the main power switch and everything was dark. Dad didn't have a gun but he did grab my Boy Scout hatchet on the way out of the house. The two heard a commotion on the upper floor and ran up the stairway. When they got to the top, all hell broke loose. Dad was shot. The bullet went through his arm because his arm was raised and ready to swing my scout hatchet. Otherwise the bullet would have hit his chest. Dad kept going and wrestled the gun from this guy and emptied the remaining bullets into his chest. However this robber was wearing a bullet proof vest and wasn't hurt too badly. At this time the cop confronting the other robber wasn't doing very well. The other robber had a gun pointed to the cop's head and told Dad to give up or he would pull the trigger. Dad was bleeding badly and he and the cop were marched down the stairs and outside the building. I was with Mom and she shouted across the street and asked where they were taking my Dad. They told her to shut her _____ mouth or they would blow his head off. They marched Dad up to a RR track and escaped. Not long after this, the two robbers were caught because the one Dad fought needed some medical attention. There was a trial. The robbers had a one-armed attorney from Bedford. They got 20 years. I remember the trial.

Seemed like something all of the time. Another incident when Dad was gone, an intruder tried to get into our house. He had already entered the back screen door with a hooked wire that unlatched the door. He was trying to open the door leading to the kitchen and I snapped on the light. Mom was standing on the inside aiming Dad's 45 at this guy. She was shaking like a leaf. When he saw the gun he made a quick retreat.

On the brighter side of this era was some humor. Every summer a circus, carnival, or a tent show would come to town. The John Lawrence Tent Show usually rented our cow pasture for their productions. I was one of their entertainers. It was probably a little corny but it worked. I was a song and dance man or better called a song and dance BOY. I still remember most of the words from one of my songs, It was called "Somebody Lied." I was glad that episode faded away.

As I started growing up the electronic fever kept alive. I also became interested in the rivers and also became an Eagle Scout. The Wholesale business had a few trucks and once in awhile I would help out and drive trucks to Evansville, Indianapolis, and other places. Prohibition was repealed and the country began to grow back to normal. I studied electronics more and more. Finally I received a 1st Class Radio and Telephone License. I thought about finding a job in a broadcasting station and went to Los Angeles where there were several of them. I went down the telephone book yellow pages and one by one got the same answer, sorry but will keep you on the list. What they meant was that I was just too darn young. At the end of broadcasting stations in the yellow pages was listed burglar alarm companies. Being a scissor bill from the Midwest I hadn't heard of A.D.T. or any other professional security company. At the first alarm company that I applied, they asked me several questions and my answers

were probably somewhat confusing. They decided to try me out expecting to learn something that they didn't know. I lasted two weeks and was fired. However in two weeks with two paychecks I could eat. That was also long enough to reevaluate my situation and go forward. My next job allowed me to be more independent. I decided to go back home and start up my own business.

After I got back home things were changing. I installed several Burglar alarm systems and then A.D.T. in Indianapolis found out about me and asked me to join their organization. Evidently it was a good choice. I became a trouble shooter and was dispatched to various cities where they had problems. While in Detroit I became interested in speedboat races. I decided to build a boat good enough to qualify for the Golden Cup Race and compete with the best. including Guy Lombardo's Tempo One. By this time the A.D.T. folks sent me to Saginaw, Michigan. The world was about to get into a World War. I received my draft card and waited. While waiting for Uncle Sam, I was sent to Lansing where I foiled a sabotage attempt at the Oldsmobile Plant. They were tooling up for war machines for the axis. The fire alarm circuit was disrupted and I was able to zero in on the break before the event happening. I was mentioned in the Associated Press but my supervisor in Detroit got a new car. Shortly after that I worked on the electric eyes around the prison walls at Jackson, Michigan. When I landed back in Saginaw, December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked. I didn't wait for the draft and enlisted in all branches of service. I took the oath for the Navy and the Marines about the same time. Both branches called me for duty at the same time. This was a problem but after the hearing all went well. I had just bought a new red Chevrolet with white side wall tires. I left the car with Mother for safekeeping and went off to War.

After boot camp I was assigned to the Navy 22nd Seabee Battalion. My sea bag was sent to Guadalcanal and I went the other direction to the Aleutians. One of my first assignments was almost a disaster. A buddy of mine, Freemont Null from Princeton, Indiana, and I had to check something on an adjoining island. We headed out in a small row boat equipped with an outboard motor. When we were about half way across the stretch a severe storm set in and we were having trouble fighting the waves. Our boat had to head straight into the waves to prevent capsizing. The waves were becoming larger than the boat. Our work was cut out for us as we headed back to our base. All the sudden we weren't getting anywhere and the boat began to slide sideways. The motor had sheared a pin. Luckily the boat was equipped with oars. We were desperately in the "Hail Mary" situation. I had Freemont headed into the waves WITH ONE OAR while I took my rifle and gouged a nail out of one of the oar locks. I raised the motor, drove the nail through the pin locking shaft, bent it over with the butt of my rifle, and we back in business. I think it was just plain luck. After the War I drove by Princeton to visit Freemont but it was too late. He had passed away.

My next duty was on ATTU, an island about 650 miles north of Paramachero, Japan. This area is supposed to have the world's worst weather. I was on the gun crew on a mountain behind our unit, while the others were building a runway for fighter planes, to land, refuel, reload, and bomb Japan. They didn't like for us being there and tried to blow us out. They failed. The weather was as miserable as the Japanese. On one occasion when the USS Casco came into Massacre Bay, I went down the mountain to get our mail. On the way back as I had but one more step to take me over the steep slope, I began to feel dizzy and all I could see was snow. Snow was slapping me in the face and I was tumbling over and over. It was an avalanche. When it hit the bottom the sound was sickening. I

couldn't move. Then another wave came over and made the same sound. I tried to move but couldn't. I began to worry. One arm was pinned behind my back and the other arm was almost behind my head. My left leg was cramped behind the other leg. It was hard to breathe. With my right arm I was able to pack the snow in a cone shape above my face. I thought the end was near. I started to shout for help and decided to save the energy because no one would hear me. I had to decide which way was up and try digging in that direction. This was determined by dropping a fist full of snow over my face and knowing which way it fell, this maneuver being similar to a plumb-bob. Next I had to free my left arm. One hand full of snow at a time, packing it against whatever. It was robbing Peter to pay Paul. After about three hours I had both arms loose and progress was much faster. I began to find more faith but still couldn't see the light. In about three more hours I was out but couldn't walk. I crawled around the mountain to the nearest Quonset hut. I reached up, opened the door and fell in. The fellows in that warm Quonset were in their long, quarter inch thick underwear playing cards. One of them said shut that _____ door. I couldn't and all the sudden they knew something was wrong. They got me on a stretcher and took me to the field hospital. After a few days I was sent back up the mountain. I have no idea what happened to the mail. I had time to say my prayers during this episode. After the runway was completed another outfit arrived to relieve us. We were sent back to the States for rest and recuperation.

My next tour of duty took me to the south Pacific: Home for the next 64 days was aboard the USAT Cape Perpetua. Our first landing was a snap. The Navy big guns blew the island to pieces. There was nothing left but smoke. The next island was in the Philippines. We had just gone through a typhoon and it was still raining. The island was typical jungle. Mosquitos, centipedes, rain and mud was plentiful. After a couple days food was brought ashore. As it turned out the food supply got mixed up and all we ate for a few days was stewed figs. My job was to run communication lines through the jungles to connect various military units together. I had to be alert because of Japanese snipers in the area. On one occasion, I had to run a high-voltage line through this area by contacting coconut trees. There were no power poles. It was pouring down rain and I was soaked. While finishing up a connection I told my helper to wait two minutes and then throw the switch to make the line hot. He evidently didn't know what two minutes meant and ran to the switch and threw it in BAM. I was wet, the tree was soaked, and my gaffs were socked in solid. I couldn't let go. I was frying. The only thing that saved me was that my knees were shaking so badly that it shook my gaffs out of the tree. My body weight then pulled me down to ground. I was skinned up somewhat but not cooked.

My tasks were mostly on land but once I was dispatched to sea for an emergency aboard the USS Heron. Her main generator was badly in need of repairs. After making a few adjustments the commutator still needed an overhaul. I had to find a large lathe to cut it down. The only vessel in the area was a Navy floating drydock somewhere over the horizon. That is the skipper thought it was there. A big hole was cut through the ship's deck and the armature was loaded on a ship-to-shore boat and away we went looking for the floating drydock. There were three of us in the boat with a hand compass. The dock was sighted. It was the largest vessel I had ever seen. Before we were identified there must have been a hundred guns pointing at us. The hands aboard the dock were very efficient. In about an hour the armature was loaded on our ship-to-shore boat and away we went looking for the USS Heron. After the

generator was put together, I was beginning to worry. After looking at that big hole in the deck I thought that if the generator didn't work, my career would be over. However everything went smoothly.

After the two "A" bombs were dropped, the War was practically over. I almost reenlisted, The Navy was looking for a few volunteers for duty in the ANTARCTICA. I gave it a thought and decided to go home. I had already missed three Christmases and was about to miss another. Since my brother wouldn't be coming back home, I thought it best to be with Mother and Dad. My brother was a casualty in the TARAHA landing.

It was December 11, 1945 when I got home. I decided to drive down town and look up old friends. I asked Mom where my car was and she said "what car." I was set back a little but thought what the heck, it was just Mom. After all about four years anything could happen. I stayed around home for a while working on my speedboat and building conveyors for the family warehouse. The only change in the warehouse was my uncle Henry removing a tear gas gun out of the office safe. I had built the device myself before the war started. If a unauthorized person opened the safe, the gun would automatically shoot tear gas in all directions. Uncle Henry was uneasy about the device and got rid of it. Being afraid to use the safe, at the end of the day he, instead of using the safe, he would hide the money in a candy barrel. February 6, 1947, came around and I decided to get married. Her name was Helen and she was very talented. She was an academic wizard. We went on an extended honeymoon and while at Sequoia National Park my funds were dwindling and started working again. We first settled in San Gabriel. A friend of mine drove my truck and speed boat out as he wanted to see California anyway. We moved to Palm Springs where I started to tune up my boat in the Salton Sea which was in the vicinity. Also there was plenty of work available in the mountains and on the desert. While adjusting the carburetor on my speedboat in the Salton Sea, and going as fast as it would travel (about 100 MPH), the bottom started to open up. Water began flooding the boat and I headed for shore. I didn't make it to shore. I just blew it. That was the end of my speedboat dream. Later on I tried to salvage the wreck but it was too far gone. I still have the trailer and the prop is hanging in my basement at home.

After that I pursued another hobby. I took flying lessons and on 9/27/47 got my PILOT license. My solo test flight included a flight over the Salton Sea where I cracked up my speed boat. There was no place to land in case of emergency. It wasn't long before it was SUGGESTED that I resume my education. We moved to Pasadena, where I enrolled at Pasadena City College for refresher courses. I got a job and worked whenever suitable. After Pasadena, I enrolled at the University of California where I studied Metallurgy and Surveying. Eventually I returned to Indiana and enrolled at PURDUE. I bought a lot along the Wabash on the North River Road at the entrance to Happy Hollow. I began building our house. It was about seven weeks before classes started so I had to work fast. It was getting close to the start of the semester and the roof wasn't yet completed. We were living in the kitchen with a tarp for a roof. I went to a Lafayette Bar and hired a couple drunks for help. They said they were carpenters and so they were. They had to be paid every evening but it worked. In about a month the STORK showed up with a baby girl. Before I graduated the STORK showed up again and delivered twin girls. Burping two at a time is quite an ordeal. After school we went back to the coast for a spell but returned, made some investments, and settled down on a farm at Hindostan Falls in Martin County. I was active in flood control projects and worked with the Wabash Valley Association.

I made several appearances before various legislative delegations in Washington, D.C. Funding for reservoir study and construction was the major issue. Connecting the Great Lakes with the Ohio River was also strongly proposed but was finally rejected.

I finally found myself working for the Indiana Department of Conservation, Engineering Division. My first assignment was Project Engineer for the Glendale Dam and reservoir. That project lasted four years. For some unknown reason I stayed on with the Department. My wife Helen and I planned a long vacation with the children. Our family had now consisted of four children. We bought a new car and a new camper and was ready to start touring the West. Suddenly Helen became ill. The illness became very serious and we canceled the vacation. After about a year the situation became critical and the end was in sight. The time came on January 5, 1967. As we had planned for the worst, Eric, our son was ready for the sixth grade and had been enrolled on Howe Military School up near the Michigan border. The three girls were in high school. One was a senior and the twins sophomore. The girls were set on going to Purdue. I managed keeping everything on track and staying with the Department of Natural Resources.

Surveying problems were becoming interesting. Some encroachment situations were quite hazardous. I'll never forget the assignment in Martin County along Chicken House road. A landowner had built some structures over on the Martin State Forest. While surveying the State property, I had to cross over an area guarded by the landowners' two vicious dogs. The dogs were tied to chains that were overlapping. I was previously aware of this situation and had requested assistance that didn't show up. It had begun to rain and I put on my rain suit. The dog owner wouldn't control the animals. He wouldn't even discuss the situation. Weather-wise, it looked like the rain had set in. I wanted to finish the job and looked the dogs over. Since the chains crossed, I had to pick the one that might be managed. I picked the wrong one. I started through the lower opening and the dog jumped up and got a mouth full of rain suit. He was mad and came back for a better bite. This time he got a mouth full of heavy duty pointed range rod. He yelped and headed for his dog house. The land owner didn't utter a word. After that everything went O.K. Another unusual assignment happened at Bass Lake. A group of adjacent land owners objected to a section of chain link fence. The situation was becoming a real problem. I was sent up to investigate. The first thing I saw was "City of CHICAGO" signs attached to our fence. I contacted the leader of that group to discuss the problem. I expected trouble from this fellow but he turned out to be most polite and easy to talk with. He was down-to-earth and harmonically settled. We got along very well and settled the problem. To my surprise I discovered he was Al Capone's lieutenant.

One episode that was unusual actually happened in the office in the old North building. The department mail clerk had just delivered the Engineering Division mail. As he was walking out the door, his wife was waiting for him WITH A REVOLVER. POW-POW, she emptied the gun at him. Every shot missed the mail clerk. The last bullet landed in the ceiling. One shot went through a filing cabinet after just missing Lowell Pruet's ear. The wife laid down on the floor crying, probably because she missed her husband. The bullet holes were there for a long time before being patched up.

On September 30, 1984 another turning point happened in my life. I married a girl that had been working at Yellowwood State Forest. This was Katrina. We went on a honeymoon aboard the famous cruise ship that had lots of TV productions. It was called the "Love Boat." Katrina is wrapped up in flower judging and I am still with the DNR. We have three dogs and four cats that claim ownership of our home.

I think a vacation is in order.

Robert C. Vollmer

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert C. Vollmer". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.