

WALTER HEMPHLING-PERSONNEL MANAGER

as told to Bob Lindsey

I went to Bantam as a common "flunky". I worked my way up through machines to personnel manager which included payroll, first aid, the hospital, police force, and all associated departments. Chet Hemphling did the same thing. He worked first on the assembly line. Then he was put in charge of the assembly line. From there he was moved to chief inspector. When Chet was moved to inspector Ralph Turner was put in charge of the assembly line.

I had no particular schooling to prepare me for anything I did. Really, what happened was, I became ^{Walt Finn} Finn's "fair haired boy". The way that happened was this. Finn wanted Bantam to be like a big happy family. He was afraid that the union would come in and take over. Finn found out that I had been in a dance band and as we talked, I asked him if I could start one. He said, "Go ahead!" I posted a sign outside my office window asking for volunteers. Surprisingly, I received a great response. I bought an old piano, and we had great success and a great time.

Another thing I did was to start an athletic club. We played softball. We bowled and played basketball. At Christmas time, we handed out hams and baskets of groceries. Finn even started a restaurant. In order to supply the restaurant, he bought a farm. He hired Bill Mitchell to run the farm. ^{The Bill Mitchell?}

Finn's idea was a success because we had no union trouble in all those years.

Most people have no idea of the number of different things that we produced in all those years other than the Austins, Bantams, Jeeps, trailers, etc. When Harry Miller came, they got into racing

engines. Miller was an accomplished race driver. He had won some of the major races of that day. Bantam even hired some of the major engine specialists. Offenhizer and De Polo were two that I remember. I remember Bantam building two racers for Gulf Research in Pittsburgh. I helped break in some of the racers. I >drove them around in circles for hours. Miller even built special boat racing engines. I remember Miller always drove a big front wheel drive Cord.

I know some of the different products because of the nature of the job, I was able to go to all of the departments. Before and during the war, the different departments were sealed off by wire gates. Each department wore a different colored tag. The U.S. Government even had an F.B.I. man there to check out the personnel.

Another product most people don't know about is the radial engine we built for the British. The engine drove torpedoes. Our engines were in the torpedoes that defeated the German fleet in the North Sea. We had a huge celebration at the plant after that allied victory. We also received the "VICTORY E" award for wartime efficiency. We made struts by the hundreds for the Republic Dive Bombers.

The British had three inspectors at the factory to inspect the torpedo engines. At the same time, the Russians had three inspectors in the Jeep assembly area. All three Russians could speak English, but only one was allowed to talk to us.

We had to be one of the first plants to initiate the idea of the camper trailer. I took one to Slippery Rock Creek for promotional pictures. I took my own rifles, fishing tackle, lanterns, etc. to make it look like a camping scene.

I have thought and wondered over the years why our plant failed. I can honestly say that I don't know. All the literature on the Jeep, for instance, say that we could not run the number of Jeeps that the government wanted. But no matter what they write, WE DID run the number per day to meet government demands! Our workmanship and our products were improving each year. We had excellent ideas

but they seemed to fade out of existence. I've heard rumors that Roosevelt's relatives were big wheels at Willy's, but no one ever proved it, and I really can't say. I don't know.

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I do think as hind-sight that we should never have gotten involved with the trailers. The little car was the car of the future. We should have continued to make the small car. I was not located in the office where official business transactions were taking place, so I had no inside track on what was happening.

I kept my Bantam running by having two engines. I would run one until it started rattling. I would then replace it with the good one. I would then then take the other one back to the plant and have it reworked on the line. I got so that I could change an engine in a matter of minutes. I would take the rebuilt one back to my garage to wait until I needed it again.

I worked at Bantam until somewhere between 1947 or 48. I left when Finn hired that "little bastard" as plant manager . I can't remember his name. What broke the straw was this. Finn had asked me to go to the farm to do something. I can't remember now what that was. While I was gone the plant manager came looking for me, and, of course, I was gone. When I got back he jumped all over me. I told him that I had been working for Finn at the farm, and maybe he had better check with Finn if he had any questions. He told me he was boss and he didn't need to check with Finn.

Len Smith, a friend of mine, was planning to open a sports store and needed a business manager. I had always, as far back as a kid, wanted to run a sports store. It fit into my plans so I told Len that I would work the store. About three days later, Finn came in and asked why I had quit. I told him, and he said, "Why didn't you come and tell me?" He wanted me to return to Bantam. I told him that I was totally fed up with the man, and I now had a commitment to Len that I couldn't break. Finn stormed out, and people at the plant tell me that the plant manager walked out that

to go home that evening with his tool box over his shoulder.

The sports shop ,which was located on South Main Street, brought another childhood dream into existence. I had always been interested in the ham radio. At one time, I owned the radio transmitter from the KDKA airplane. I even checked with Hikam Field in Pearl Harbor the day the Japs attack. There was a Butler family that had a son over there. I got an answer back the next day that he was o.k. When television came out, RCA wanted a dealer in Butler. I became one of the first RCA dealers in Butler. I was finally scared out of business when K-Mart came to Butler. I couldn't compete with their prices. I can't remember the year.

A funny thing happened to me next. I went to Glade Lake to run the concession at the lake. I no sooner got there than the state decided that the fish had been in the lake so long that their growth was stunted. They drained the pond and killed all the fish. First with no water in the lake, and next with no fish in the water, it almost financially ruined me.

My next employment was with the Butler Area School District. I became the Assistant Superintendent of Maintainence. My boss was Ed Hogan. I had charge of all the custodians as well as the all the electronics in the school district. The Butler School District extends about 74 miles around.

I retired in 1965 from the school district.

I had been a deputy game warden from 1946 until I was retired July 1, 1980.

Geneology: Walter Hempfling born: June 22, 1906

Fathers name: Joseph A. Hempfling

Mothers name: Anna Kirk

Wife's name: Reah Nebel

Married: August 7, 1934