

# A Gear Man's Journey

A M E M O I R

By  
James J. Cervinka

with Scott A. Newton

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USA

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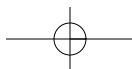
APEX Media Solutions, Inc.

5240 Belmont Road  
Downers Grove, IL 60515  
USA

[www.ApexMediaSolutions.com](http://www.ApexMediaSolutions.com)

To all the people who helped  
make Arrow Gear a success

## A Gear Man's Journey - A Memoir



Foreward

# Foreword

By Scott A. Newton

In the early fall of 2010, I was in James J. Cervinka's office at Arrow Gear Company in Downers Grove, Illinois. Having worked as a communication and marketing service provider for Arrow Gear since 1985, I had known Mr. Cervinka for most of my professional career. However, in recent years, as I had stopped by his office to talk about various projects, the conversation would often transition from the topic of Arrow Gear projects to any number of stories drawn from his rich archive of experiences, spanning a lifetime of over 90 years.

During this particular meeting, I recall thinking that this man has lived an extraordinary life. Even more than that, because he has impacted the lives of so many, the accounts of his experiences ought to be documented. I had a strong impression that his stories would be interesting to quite a number of people, and his business philosophies would provide some valuable insights as well.

Soon after, I approached Mr. Cervinka with the idea of collaborating on a book about his life. He agreed, and so we began the task of recording his memories. Subsequently, I conducted many hours of interviews during the remainder of that fall and into the early winter of 2011 as Mr. Cervinka reminisced about his life - from his early years as a boy on through to the present day.

By the early months of 2012 we had completed the main drafts and editing of the book and had begun the process of selecting

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the photographs that would be included. But as 2012 continued, Mr. Cervinka was coming into the office less and less due to health problems. Then on July 12, 2012, I learned that he had passed away - his long journey finally ending.

Looking back on what I learned from our sessions and the resulting text, what I find so compelling about Mr. Cervinka's story is that it offers an insight into America from another era. He grew up during the Great Depression. He served in the Navy during World War II. Then, in 1947, he and his partner, Frank E. Pielsticker started a gear manufacturing business. Their modest two-man operation was first located in a small industrial building in Worth, Illinois. They didn't have much money, they didn't have indoor plumbing, and they didn't even have heat, but they had something much more valuable - they had a vision - a vision of taking risks, working hard and securing their part of the American Dream.

What is also remarkable about his story is how that humble beginning unfolded into a very long journey. In the decades since Arrow Gear started, countless manufacturers across the country have shut their doors, unable to compete with foreign competition. But Arrow has continued to succeed, due in part to a tradition of entrepreneurialism and a willingness to invest in the innovation necessary to remain competitive - not just domestically, but also in the global market.

Today, Arrow Gear is among the most technically advanced gear companies in the world, producing high precision gears for a diverse range of customers. Notably, Arrow's products can be found in the most advanced aerospace systems that our civilization has developed.

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After Mr. Pielsticker passed away in 1987, Mr. Cervinka continued as Arrow Gear's CEO and Chairman of the Board to the very end of his life. At 92 years of age, his passion for the craft of making the finest quality gears remained as intact as ever. This is most certainly very unique. Of the many businesses started by veterans returning from the Second World War, it is obvious that there aren't too many individuals left in their 90s who are still involved in businesses that have remained successful. In fact, I would have to suspect that he might have been among the very last of those who shared this background and experience.

But still, there is more to this story than two men who started a successful business. Specifically, it is the impact that their venture has had on the lives of literally thousands and thousands of people.

In the more than 60 years of the company's operation, approximately 2,000 people have been employed by Arrow Gear. These wages supported families - paying for housing, food, cars, education, and other necessities of life. But the impact goes even further as we consider the many vendors who have profited by supplying products and services to the company over the years. Arrow Gear has not only fueled its local economy for decades, but has also contributed to our national economy - and all this from what was once a fledgling two-man operation.

In the end, what I find most compelling about the story of James J. Cervinka and Arrow Gear is that in it we see a model of the post war manufacturing sector which made the United States the world's unrivalled superpower. In addition, in Arrow Gear we see the example of how to solve the financial crisis our country

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is now facing. Taking the risks to invest in manufacturing, creating good paying domestic jobs, and establishing an economic engine for our nation is what America needs today.

This is Mr. Cervinka's story as he told it to me.



ONE - The Early Years

ONE

## The Early Years

Looking back at my earliest days, the memories of my parents are somewhat sketchy now, but then it has been a very long time. My father's name was the same as mine - James. His middle name was Otto. There aren't many people who know that. Anyway, he was born in the city of Chicago. As for his father, my grandfather, I really don't know too much about him. However, he had his own business. I don't know how it all came about, but he owned a saloon. I feel that showed a lot of foresight on his part - going into a business where there would be such a demand. That's about all I know of my grandfather except that I was told he died from swallowing a chicken bone. Can you imagine something like that?

I don't have too much information about what my father did for a living in those early days of my life other than that he owned a business that made folding beds for hotels. I would have to guess that he started out small and was trying to build up his business; that was until the Great Depression. The Depression wiped him out as it did so many business owners. After the Depression, and for the rest of his life, he managed a furniture store.

As for my mother, I don't remember too much about her from those days, but I do remember that she was always there. She was always there to care for me when I was sick or to bandage a scraped knee. Her name was Anna.

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One of her great joys was cooking and she was a fantastic cook. She would enter cooking contests and won several that were sponsored by the Chicago Tribune. She was very proud of that. As a matter of fact, I compiled a collection of all her recipes and I put them together and gave them to all my children a few years back. This collection is also included at the end of this book.

My mother was a plump woman, and I would say she enjoyed life. My father and she never seemed to have any serious arguments - at least not that I was aware of. In addition to her cooking, her great passion was to go to see the Chicago Cubs play.

We lived in a western suburb of Chicago called Riverside. And getting to the Cubs Park from Riverside first involved about a  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile walk to the street car. Then there was the street car ride into the city, then the elevated train to the near north side of Chicago, and then to Wrigley Field. I guess I couldn't understand the depth of her passion for the Cubs. But I'm sure she'd still be a Cubs fan to this day. Those Cubs fans can be quite passionate.

I did not have any siblings - I was an only child - and I suppose I regret that. I guess I put that down to the fact that times were tough in those days and people didn't have a lot of children. Back then, there weren't the government programs to help if you couldn't afford to feed and clothe your children. I was born April 19th, 1920. One distinction about me is that I still have my first social security card, and it was among the first social security cards that were issued.

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I was actually born in Oak Park, and soon after that, my parents moved to Riverside. This is really something that I treasure from my upbringing, and I attribute it to any success I've had in my life. Riverside was an upbeat suburb, and it was populated mostly with relatively affluent people - probably people with above-average intelligence. As a result, I was associated with their children who were probably somewhat above average. Unknowingly, I acquired their language, habits and mannerisms. There were good teachers in the community schools, and while I didn't recognize it at the time, as I grew older and lived in different parts of the country, I came to see what a tremendous advantage there was in getting a start like I did in Riverside.

A couple of times a year I drive by the old place. It's still there. I can see that I had to walk about a mile to school. All the neighborhood kids had bicycles; they certainly weren't driven to school by their parents as is done today. The elementary school that I went to in Riverside is still there. One of the more memorable locations was the bakery. It's still there in town. They had the best éclairs you've ever had in your life.

One memory I have is from when I was probably six years old. I was down with some infection. And I remember the doctor coming to the house to see me every day in his car during my illness. And for whatever reason, I remember he drove a Willy's Knight with a two cycle engine. I must have had some interest in mechanical things even at that age to remember a detail like that. Another car I remember from those early days was called a Moon. But who could forget the name of a car called a Moon.

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Yes, Riverside was a delightful place to live. The river crossed through the town and there was a hill that we would always go to with our sleds in the winter. And when the river was frozen, we would ice skate on it and play hockey after school.

Also in town, there was a vacant lot where we played baseball in the summer and football in the fall. Every spring we would set the grass afire and it burned out all the dead grass and weeds, making way for nice, fresh green grass. It wasn't until years later that I realized the same thing happened naturally throughout the great plains of this country. Wild fires would burn off the weeds and this helped support the herds of animals. And here were these little kids doing the same thing just trying to improve the quality of our baseball field.

## **The Depression**

Of course, I was growing up during the Depression, and unless you lived through it, you can't really know how bad things were. My father would talk about selling apples - and there was no joke about that. After he went broke, I don't remember what he did in those years, but I do remember that he used to have to walk about a mile every day to get transportation to get to whatever he was doing.

I don't know how he kept our family afloat. One of the things that make me cry is a letter of his that I have saved through all these years. It is a copy of a letter he wrote once to the fellow who held the mortgage on his house. The reason it made me cry was because it consisted of my Dad practically begging to be given some flexibility with paying his mortgage. Those years were not a time for false pride.

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Aside from these memories, I do remember that he was one heck of a good father. We'd throw the football together. And if I promised to do a good job with my assigned chores, he'd let me mow the lawn. I soon found that this wasn't the greatest reward you could have because mowing the lawn with the old push mower was some pretty hard work.

At any rate, despite the hardships of the Depression, I had a pretty good childhood.

One thing I remember about the Depression was eating a cut of meat called ham ends. Ham ends were the actual end of the ham that was kind of misshapen. You could buy ham ends of pork for 10 cents per pound. My mother used to bread the ham ends and it made the most delicious sandwich you've ever had. As a matter of fact, when I was first in the Navy, I went to Cornell University to the training school. For the train ride, my mother offered to fix me a couple of ham end sandwiches. I declined her offer, explaining that they would have food on the train. Well, they had food on the train - two slices of stale bread and one piece of cheese. For my next trip, I asked my mother to prepare half a dozen of the sandwiches feeling that I could easily sell them to my fellow passengers.

### Holes in My Shoes

Well, I'll tell you how poor we were when I was growing up as a young child. I was thinking the other day about my mother buying me a pair of shoes when I was in about the eighth grade. They had been purchased in the summer. By late fall there was a hole in the sole. They didn't make shoes very well in those days. So every morning for a couple of months I had to take pieces of

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heavy cardboard and stick them in the soles of my shoes so my stockings wouldn't go through. That sounds rather unusual now, but at the time it was more common than not.

When the soles finally got bad enough, and we had a dime to spare, we went to Woolworth's and my mother purchased these replacement soles that you would glue to the bottom of your shoes. In this way, when there were holes in the soles of your shoes, you could patch them yourself instead of going to a shoe maker. However, there was a problem with the sole replacements. After a while, the glue came loose. And when I walked, there was a slap, slap, slap as the replacement soles hit the pavement. I'm guessing that I wasn't the only one who experienced this problem.

### **The Trick to Having Warm Underwear**

In our house, we had a coal furnace in the basement - fueled with the cheapest coal we could find, as this was the Depression after all. Every now and then, the coal would be delivered and dumped in the yard next to the house. Early on, my job was to open the small door in the basement and shovel the coal into the coal bin. I would also go in and shovel out the ashes and put some sticks in to get the furnace fired up again.

Houses back then weren't insulated like they are today, and because coal cost money, my parents kept the furnace just warm enough to keep us from freezing to death. This could make getting dressed in the morning rather unpleasant. But I found a way to improve on that morning routine. I found that the warmest spot in the house was the register located just above the furnace. So, here I would take a chair, and spread my

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underwear on it and leave it over the register. This made it a lot easier to get dressed on those freezing mornings.

### **The Bowling Shoes**

I remember one time; I was searching around in the basement to see what I could find - as kids will do. To my surprise, I found a pair of the strangest looking shoes. They came up above the ankle and I had no idea what they were. So I decided to ask my father about the funny looking shoes. "Those were my bowling shoes," he said.

"Bowling? I didn't know you did any bowling." I replied.

"Well," he explained, "that was when I was younger and before I was married. After you came along, other things were of higher priority with your mother." He said he usually bowled about three to four times a week, which was pretty frequent. From him, I learned that he bowled on a team with Andy Varipapa. Andy Varipapa was a famous professional and trick bowler back then.

Before too long, I had taken up bowling myself. I didn't think that it looked like that hard of a game to handle. But after working at it for a couple of years, my father told me that he had bowled four 300 games. That's like having four hole-in-ones in golf. I was quite impressed.

### **Fixing Mom's Washing Machine**

Early on I felt that I wanted to be an engineer. I was aware that I was mechanically inclined. When I was seven or eight, I remember my mother had a washing machine. It was a large copper tub that rocked back and forth, driven by a motor. The

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whole thing sat on a frame made of wood. The tub was driven by a leather belt that was about 3/8ths of an inch wide. Frequently, the leather belt would break and my father would repair it. However, one time this belt broke when my father was not around, and my mother really needed the washer to be working. So I said, "I'll fix it."

So I found a nail, bent it into a "U" shape and drilled a little hole into the leather belt. I then put the bent nail through the belt and bent it closed. To my mother's surprise, the washer had been repaired. Thereafter, I was the one who was called upon to repair the washing machine.

### **Early Mechanical Ability**

I have to believe that much of my mechanical ability, or at least my willingness to tackle a mechanical challenge, came from my father. Before the Depression, when my father had a car, I remember that the valves in the engine would have to be ground about every 25,000 miles. This was a job that he would take on himself, with me assisting. I remember helping him take the engine apart, removing the heads and taking out the valves. We'd grind them ourselves with a grinding material. Then we'd bolt the head back on and torque it down to the required foot pounds, and it would be good for another 25,000 miles.

Another early indication of my mechanical ability occurred when I was probably in the sixth grade. I saw a fellow who had motor on his bicycle. I was intrigued by this and bought a motor that could be attached to my bike. Of course the motor didn't run, so I had to repair it first, which I did, and then I mounted it to my bicycle. A while after this success, I decided a motorcycle would be most certainly better than a bicycle, so I bought a motorcycle



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that was somewhat of a wreck. It didn't run, so I fixed it up with the intention of selling it, which I did. I did that with about 8 or 10 motorcycles during my high school years. There was one bike that I should have kept. It was a four-cylinder Indian Police Special. Oh boy, that was a bike! I wish I had it today - it would certainly be worth thousands.

People will often speak of those who influenced them in life. While it's difficult to pick a single individual who influenced me with my mechanical aptitude, I did have two uncles who were tool and die makers when I was young. But back then, I really didn't know what that meant.

I guess I was somehow born to be a mechanic. Thinking back on my younger days, initial signs of my mechanical interest and ability began to appear quite naturally. I always had a bunch of wagon wheels hanging around. I'd nail pieces of 2x4s together, in one way or another, to make different kinds of wagons.

I progressed past wagons by purchasing a Smith Motor Wheel. For people who don't know what those were, the Smith Motor Wheel was a motorized wheel used to power bicycles, scooters - or flyers. Flyers were a small, two-seat, low-slung buckboard with steering and four wheels. The Smith Motor Wheel had a basic motor in about a 20 inch wheel.

You could attach this to the side of a wagon or bicycle. On a bicycle, it was installed next to the rear wheel. I thought the idea of having a motor on my bicycle wasn't the worst thing in the world. So I bought my first Smith Motor Wheel for about ten dollars. Of course, it wasn't running, so I went around and asked people how to repair it. That was fun as I recall.

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I eventually got the motor running and initially installed it on my bicycle. Then later, I decided to put that motor on a wagon. I built a chair in the wagon, which of course had conventional wagon wheels. I suppose I scrounged them up somewhere in the neighborhood to outfit my rig. Well those wheels were never meant to go about fifteen miles per hour, which I quickly learned.

As I look back, I remember this as one of the first signs of things to come - sparking my interest in the hobby of buying and fixing up cars, planes, boats, and snowmobiles. This of course went hand in hand with the "need for speed" and an interest in racing.

For gear heads like me, I learned later in life that the Smith Motor Wheel used a four-lobe camshaft to lift the exhaust valve. The gearing was 8 to 1, attaching a 20 inch disc wheel directly to the camshaft. The main frame consisted of two "horns" attached to the crankshaft, which held the fender and gas tank. They were only manufactured from 1914 to 1919 and were all painted fire engine red.

Like Henry Ford once said, "You could have any color Ford as long as it was black." Likewise, you could have any color Smith, as long as it was red.

Perhaps the dumbest thing I ever did took place when I was a sophomore in high school. I forget what kind of motor it was, but I had made an arrangement with the blacksmith in town to weld a hub on one end of the motor to hold a propeller I had bought somewhere. Then I cut some braces and mounted them on a three runner sled with wheels. I then attached the engine. I

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used to drive that thing around on the streets in Riverside. I don't know how in the heavens the police let me do that.

The propeller made my vehicle like a plane on wheels. It worked pretty well, but it was as noisy as hell and was certainly not the safest thing. There's this bare propeller flying around. I don't know why it didn't fall apart. I built it long before my technical education, and no engineering studies were involved on the size or the specs of the parts needed to make the sled operate efficiently. Obviously, safety was not my primary concern. I just wanted the thing to run. Looking back, I have no idea why my mother would have allowed me to do such a thing.

### **Mumblety-Peg**

When I was in grade school, there was a game that all of us boys would play. It was called Mumblety-peg. We all wore boots and most of our boots had a pocket for a knife. This was where we carried the knife that was used in the game.

This is how the game was played. First, we would play the game on soft grass or mud, and you'd throw your knife so it would stick into the ground inside of a circle we had made. Depending on where the knives landed, you would draw a smaller circle and repeat the process with the newer, smaller target. You would do this until no one could hit the circle that grew smaller and smaller.

Things are certainly different today, as bringing knives to school is no longer something they encourage children to do. And I don't think you'll find many places that sell boots for children that have a pocket for a knife.

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I was always good at athletics. I was one of the kind who was better than average but never sensational. So I must have received a bit of my father's athletic talent.

Being active in sports as I was, I was a good basketball player. I also ran track, including the 440 yard dash. But as I said earlier, I was always a pretty good athlete but never outstanding. While I didn't get chosen for right field, being a professional athlete didn't appear to be in the cards for me.

In high school I was not too involved in clubs, although I did belong to the German club. What I did, however, was study hard, and as a result, I graduated 10th out of my class of 174. In high school, I wore knickers, socks, tie, and a sweater. That is what boys wore then. Despite the fact that most people were very short on money, there were no torn jeans like kids wear these days.

I graduated high school in 1938. Last year I went back to the homecoming and attended the football game. As one of the more "senior" alumni, they asked me to throw out the first football, which I did. That was kind of a thrill - reminiscent of my days playing tight end for the football team.

### **The Delivery Job**

There weren't many jobs around during those days. But I did deliver the Saturday Evening Post and the Ladies Home Journal. I still have the sack that would go over your shoulder so you could pedal around the neighborhood with your magazines. And I think you got something called Brownie Parts or certificates for all the magazines you sold and you'd get a little money. Then you

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could choose some kind of a prize later on. I did this for maybe a year or two.

What's interesting is that I found that delivery bag not too long ago - it must date back to 1930 or 1932. Well, I gave that bag to my grandson. He is only about six years old now but maybe he'll use it to deliver papers as well someday.

### The Polo Horses

Living in Riverside as I did, I was only about five or six miles from Oakbrook, and Oakbrook was home to the Oakbrook Polo Club. Still to this day, they have polo matches there every summer and horses come from all over the country. Of course, horses have always needed to be taken care of, including being exercised every morning, and meeting this need was how I was introduced to the world of polo.

When I was in high school, probably around freshman year, my friend and I got jobs exercising horses at the club. Our work involved exercising about fifteen or twenty horses each day. We soon figured out that we could ride one horse tied tail and halter to about four others and in this way, we could exercise several horses at once. It wasn't as though we were getting paid per horse, but it let us get a bit ahead of the game and it was certainly a lot of fun to have on the job.

During this time, I got to be a pretty good rider. Perhaps because of this, one of the trainers asked me one day if I was interested in doing what was called stick and balling. People outside of the polo world are probably aware that the mallet used by the players is much like a croquet mallet. But what most people

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don't realize is that in polo, you don't hit the ball on the end of the mallet. Instead, you hit it on the side of the mallet. Many times I've come off as being a knowledgeable fellow with such an item of trivia.

At any rate, I'd take three or four horses a day and run them through stick and balling exercises; riding just like the polo players. A polo horse is trained to know that when you go toward the ball, it must go to one side or the other so the player has room to swing the mallet. So, we would exercise them to reinforce this behavior. It was a lot of fun, but as far as I could see at that point, the sport of polo was going to be well beyond my financial position.

But the many hours of my riding carried with it a mark of distinction that only a few shared. My boots were tan riding boots. And from riding as much as I did, the inside calf was worn to a clear color - having worn off the tan dye. That was truly the look of a seasoned horseman. So while I didn't have the wherewithal to be a competitive polo player, I was able to have the look of a veteran.

### **The Banjo**

At one point my mother said, "You've got to learn an instrument." And since we didn't have a piano, I suggested that I could play a guitar. However, I found out that a guitar has a wide neck, which made it difficult for my fingers which were relatively short. Then I saw a banjo. It has a narrower neck and your fingers can more easily reach over the strings. That's really why I became a banjo player. I took some lessons. I used to go into the city on the elevated train for my lessons as there weren't any banjo teachers in Riverside.

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In high school, my major banjo playing accomplishment was when a friend of mine and I played a duet for a program at our school. This was probably during my senior year. In preparation for our performance, we decided that we would need to play something spectacular. So we spent a great deal of time practicing the Intermezzo from Cavalleria rusticana by Pietro Mascagni. Our ambitious selection made for a big, big show - of course.

I continued to play in college too and I sat in once with a group from Chicago. However, my big performance would come later, when I was in the Navy, stationed in San Francisco. Commander Eddie Peabody, the banjo king of the world at that time, was playing. From the stage he said, "I've got some spare banjos here. Anybody who plays the banjo want to play along with me?" So I went up and I played along with him. That was truly memorable and perhaps the pinnacle of my banjo performance career.

Many years later, when I lived in Western Springs, Illinois, they had a village club. Every year we had a sort of Vaudeville program that we put on. I sang and played a few songs in some of those shows - songs that I don't think would be considered acceptable today. Well, I'm not much of a singer, although I've often thought I was. Of course, my voice has grown hoarse as I've gotten older. Having five children, and yelling at them from time to time, which I was prone to do, may have contributed a bit to the wearing out of my voice.

After graduating high school I attended junior college in LaGrange for three years, then almost a whole year in Chicago - taking metallurgy and mechanical engineering - all the while

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working at a manufacturing company. When I was about a half semester from finishing college, my college plans were to be put on hold when I heard from the Navy that they wanted me.

## The Military and World War II

When the war started, I was working as a metallurgist for a gear company. At that time, I was hoping for a position as a pilot for United Airlines. I had all the qualifications that I suspected would coast me along like my friend Lawrence Uhlich, who piloted many flights to Hawaii. I suppose I was envious of all the fun that I imagined that place had to offer. But before I got this opportunity, my deferment ran out as the draft board decided it was my time to serve.

Once drafted into the Navy, I wanted to become an aviation maintenance officer on an aircraft carrier. But upon learning that I had taken an electronics course in college, the Navy sent me to study electronics - specifically to study the new technology of radar. So I was to eventually become an electronics officer on the *U.S.S. Bremerton*.

I was not thrilled about electronics and figured that being able to just pass the courses would be as much as I could hope for. Apparently my studying paid off, because out of my Officer's Candidate School class of 210, I finished second. The experience did not lead me to love electronics, but it was an experience nonetheless.

One would think that I would have been a pilot in the military because of my flying experience. The fact is, I passed the tests for being a pilot, and I had the necessary college experience. But to be frank, I wasn't all that excited about being a fighter



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pilot as they didn't have the longevity that I was hoping to have. This was about a year and a half into the war. I was willing to be a transport pilot, but they had all the transport pilots they needed. What they really wanted were fighter pilots. So I chose not to join up as a pilot for this reason. But I guess everything happens for the best. My ship never got bombed and I survived a very dangerous war.

One thing I was proud of in my Officer's Candidate School experience was the final exam in navigation. The exam lasted two hours. The point of the exam was to chart the course for a ship based on the information that was provided. However, my calculations ended up with the ship in Pittsburgh. At first I had to conclude that my calculations were wrong - there's no way a battleship can get to Pittsburgh. But double checks of my calculations came up with the same final location - Pittsburgh.

Unable to find a better answer, I handed in my exam. And wouldn't you know it; I was the only one out of 120 who got it right. The exam was designed to make sure you trusted your knowledge of the calculations - despite the illogical final location.

I was stationed in Boston for a period of time. And as a result, my name is on the duty log book of the legendary sailing ship *Constitution*. Despite its age, the *Constitution* was still an active, commissioned vessel. For this reason, there must be an officer-in-charge on board at all times. I was officer-in-charge for one night, and I even received sea pay for the experience.

I went on about three or four trips out from the east coast on a destroyer to Reykjavik in Iceland. We were escorting merchant

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marines. The North Atlantic in a destroyer was rough because destroyers aren't that big. We had to tie ourselves down to our bunks to avoid being tossed out as we slept.

After my experience on the destroyer, I was finally transferred to the Pacific and was assigned to the cruiser *U.S.S. Bremerton*.

On the cruiser, we spent our time running around the Pacific performing a variety of roles. We weren't in any big battles, thankfully. We did escort a landing force once.

Then, when we were in Shanghai, we heard the news that the war was finally over. We stayed there about a month or less, while the Navy decided what we should do next. I recall that we didn't have enough men aboard to get under way as so many men were being sent home. After a time, we finally got enough men and we went down to Hong Kong and we stayed there about a couple of months. I do remember Hong Kong as being a very interesting place.

When I was in Hong Kong, I had an interesting opportunity presented to me and I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I had pursued it. I met the son of a merchant there. I recall that he had the Hong Kong Coca Cola franchise. He said, "Why don't you stay here Jim. You're a mechanic and we want to start bringing in machine tools for manufacturing. You have the expertise and we have the money." Looking back, what a wonderful experience that could have been - and certainly a much different life for me. Yes, I would have married some wonderful Chinese girl. But I came home instead, and within perhaps six months or so, Frank Pielsticker and I started Arrow Gear.

## ONE - The Early Years

I also wonder what life would have been like had I stayed with the Navy as a career. The captain of the *Bremerton* liked me because I did a good job and I was responsible. He encouraged me to participate in a program where they would send reserve officers to Annapolis. That way I could get "the ring." And you don't get very far in the Navy without the ring and being a regular officer. Maybe I could have one day been known as Admiral Cervinka.

Much of my Navy experience was alright, but there were aspects of the Navy that I didn't like. If I were to go up to my commanding officer and tell him that I had an idea on how to cut our fuel costs in half - laying it all out for him with all the formulas, do you know what he would do? Nothing! The reason for this is that if the idea was good, he didn't want his commanding officer to know that someone under his command might have better ideas than him. On the other hand, if he was to escalate the idea and it didn't work, he'd look like an idiot. That's the way things worked in the military and I didn't think I'd want to have to adapt to that type of environment. Working for yourself, taking the risks and hopefully getting the rewards sounded like a much better situation to me. Looking back, this knowledge had prepared me for the next major chapter of my life; Arrow Gear.