

TIMELINE (#9) CHRYSLER MISSILE EXPERIENCES

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following is an excerpt from Wikipedia (under "Chrysler"):

*"In April 1950, the U.S. Army established the Ordnance Guided Missile Center (OGMC) at Redstone Arsenal, adjacent to Huntsville, Alabama. To form OGMC, over 1,000 civilian and military personnel were transferred from Fort Bliss, Texas. Included was a group of German scientists and engineers led by Werhner von Braun; this group had been brought to America under Project Paperclip. OGMC designed the Army's first short-range ballistic missile, the PGM-11 Redstone, based on the WWII German V-2 missile. **CHRYSLER** established the **MISSILE DIVISION** to serve as the Redstone prime contractor, setting up an engineering operation in Huntsville and for production obtaining use from the U.S. Navy of a large plant in Warren, Michigan. The Redstone was in active service from 1958 to 1964; it was also the first missile to test-launch a live nuclear weapon, first detonated in a 1958 test in the South Pacific.*

Working together, the Missile Division and von Braun's team greatly increased the capability of the Redstone, resulting in the PGM-19 Jupiter, a medium-range ballistic missile. In May 1959, a Jupiter missiles launched two small monkeys into space in a nose cone on a Jupiter; this was America's first successful flight and recovery of live space payloads. Responsibility for deploying Jupiter missiles was transferred from the Army to the Air Force; armed with nuclear warheads, they were first deployed in Italy and Turkey during the early 1960s."

STORY

1. Chrysler Corporation Missile Division (CCMD) facility was essentially a huge building on the northwest corner of 11 Mile Road and Van Dyke St in Warren, Michigan.
2. The building faces east toward Van Dyke, a large, busy street. (The same Van Dyke proceeds about 6 miles farther south past Milton St, where I lived prior to 1947). To advertise their other product, automobiles, the company required that only Chrysler products could park in the front row of the CCMD parking lot facing Van Dyke. These were choice parking spaces that required a special permit to use.
3. By this time, I had moved my few belongings from our student's rented house in Ypsilanti to my parents small, rented, second floor apartment on Hoffman St, not far from the Dupuie home on Frazho Rd.
4. On Tuesday, 5/20/58, I interviewed for an engineering job in the Structures Dept.
5. On Thursday, 6/12/58, my dad helped me buy a used, 2-toned, 1957 Ford sedan in Detroit for \$700.

6. On Saturday, 6/14/58, at 5:30pm, I graduated from the University of Michigan at Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor. We had a large party for family and friends at our rented house in Ypsilanti, about 8 miles away.

7. On Monday, 6/16/58, at 8:15am, I started work at CCMD. I was assigned to the Jupiter Missile Program and not the Redstone Missile Program.

8. As it happened, my cousin Bobby Kowalski and a very attractive young woman named Barbara Dupuie worked at CCMD at that time.

a. Later, I saw Bobby several times as he passed my workplace and stopped to talk to me. This was the last job he held in Michigan before he changed jobs and moved to Florida.

b. For about half of my stay at CCMD, I didn't know Barbara. I met her while bowling on the CCMD mixed bowling league, and we had our first date on 10/26/58. I worked in the Structures Dept in the very front of the building and she worked in a Materials Lab near the rear of the building. While at work, we met only once or twice, briefly, for a soft drink at one of the dispensers. However, there were several other times when I "inadvertently" walked past her workplace so I could watch her through the glass panel dividers.



FIRST DAY AT CHRYSLER MISSILE

9. Barbara told me that, at some point, the famous Wernher von Braun and his entourage toured the facility. The only instruction she and her co-workers received was to "look busy." Everyone was agog when the "great man" and his team walked by. I would have been, too.

10. Our facility had been converted from, essentially, a factory and amenities were in short supply. There was only one huge men's restroom (on the second floor). There were no dividers between and urinals or the toilets (probably 25 in number). The sinks were huge circular ones operated by foot. Because of the lack of privacy, few people (myself included) were anxious to use this restroom. By the end of the day, the floor was littered with many read and discarded copies of the day's newspaper.

11. In February, 1959, after working there for about 7.5 months, the inevitable day came when some government contract was cut back or lost and people had to be laid-off.

a. Our secretary, although a very nice person, was considered "the angel of death." When she came by and said that our supervisor, D.M. Boria, wanted to see you in his office at 2pm, you knew you were doomed. As she came down the aisle, you hoped that she would pass your desk. Although many of us tried to run, we couldn't hide and she eventually found all of us.

b. At 2pm that day, there wasn't enough room in Mr. Boria's compact office and we spilled into the aisleway. The first words he said were (and this is an exact quote): "You all know why you're here." He never said we were laid-off, terminated, gotten rid of or any other euphemism. He did mention that there were job transfer forms nearby. However, he held little hope that anyone would get transferred to another Chrysler division. I don't remember if the company gave us 2 weeks' notice or 2 weeks' pay in lieu of notice.

c. At least 20% of our department was laid-off then. More layoffs were to come. I found out later that more than 1000 people had been laid-off that week at CCMD.