

Planned return 9-11
Oliver H. Williamson

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DEL MAR TERRACE

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 POST OFFICE BOX 713
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Februaury 4, 1968.

Dear Mr. Mc Mullen :

Your "Farragut's Engine, Not Coldbrick's, Used In Ferry " in last sunday's SOUTHWEST delighted me no end. Brought back memories of 55 years ago when I was a boy of 8 years.

Never did I dream that I would see the name "WOLFF & ZWICKER" in print in this modern day. For Johnas Wloff was my uncle by marriage. He was the husband of my mother's older sister Harriet. Hans Zwickler was Johanas Wolff's uncle. Uncle Johanas was a hero to me. His den was hung with medals he had won for first place in the Velodrome races in Germany before he and his uncle had come to Portland, Oregon to establish the Wolff & Zwickler Iron works on the banks of the Willamette river in the mid 1890's.

The engines for the torpedo boats were not made in Germany but they were made by Germans in Oregon. In those days the thought of a purchase for machinery for a naval vessel outside the United States would have been unthinkable.

A sad event occurred with the building of these torpedo boats in the Columbia river area. One of the two suffered a boiler explosion on a trial run down the river to Astoria. There were several deaths. ~~was the~~ It was caused ~~the~~ owner of the boiler factory who was given the sub contract to build the boilers. He got panicky when the steam pressure started to drop a little on the trial and he shut down the feed pump to raise the ~~gauge~~ pressure to impress the observers from the naval department. When he put the feed pump back to work the boilers exploded. He was one of the fatalities.

My uncle Johanas jumped over the side and swam over a mile to the shore at Tongue Point where he borrowed a bicycle from a rancher and rode like he did in the Velodrome races in Germany to Astoria where he got a physician to come with him in a fish boat to where the dead and dying were drifting downstream.

It was the last time the United States Navy has let a contract for the construction of a vessel on the Columbia river.

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All of this happened a few years before my birth but it was still topic A at the family get-togethers when I was just learning there was no Santa Claus.

The sad event of the explosion was the finish of Wolff & Zwickler. His uncle never came back but uncle Johanas started anew with his Phoenix Iron Works. As a hobby he built motorboat engines and for eight long years held the world's speedboat championship. Before the days of Gar Wood, Guy Lombardo, etc.

I was always invited to spend the week ends at the home of my aunt and uncle. The big races were held on sundays. Throngs swarmed the decks of the five bridges across the Willamette at Portland to see my uncle Johanas's world's champion "OREGON WOLF" roar up and down the river.

Few in the crowd knew that uncle Johanas had sat up all night before down in the basement stirring TNT into his gasoline.

Johanas Wolff sat in the stern and did nothing but run the engine. He had a daredevil young Frenchman at the tiller. A youth of unlimited nerve named Orth Matiot. Orth met his end ten or more years ago in Lake Washington. He had held on to the competitive trail for more than three decades and was still a front runner.

Inevitable disaster came because Orth would not accept the planing hull. He held on to the displacement hull. Just put in more power and kept driving harder until one of his displacement hulls disintegrated at a regatta.

If any of this is of interest I would be delighted to fill you in on a series of sidelights (so numerous they would be boring in this communication) please call collect to 755 2156.

Sincerely,

Oliver H. Williamson