

We Enter the War

RCA, with its two networks, was under anti-trust order to separate them, and dispose of one not later than December 31, 1941. They had found a prospective purchaser (later to be known as ABC) but the separation of common facilities and personnel into two units which would immediately start competing with each other involved many technical, legal and accounting details. We had been working nights, Saturdays and Sundays and my office was the headquarters. Sunday, December 7, it was deemed necessary to work the entire day but I begged off until after the lunch hour as I wanted to go to church with my wife and we had guests invited to dinner after. The rest of the squad agreed they would come to my office, bringing some coffee and sandwiches for their lunch, and I would join them when I could. In Englewood, as soon as we had finished dessert I excused myself, got into my car and started for Wall Street, and soon my car radio was giving me the incredible news that our naval base at Pearl Harbor had been bombed and largely destroyed! Bursting into my office with this news, the broadcasting men dashed out and off to their posts, leaving their papers and unfinished lunch. The Declaration of War quickly followed and America, closing ranks, was in.

As the nation's industry converted into a full war economy and production, security measures became tense. Soldiers were stationed at bridges, tunnels, power stations, etc., to prevent Axis sabotage. All aliens were required to register, and this our German maid, Lydia, had duly done. One night when I came home from work, Miriam told me Lydia had had a chance to go skiing with some friends in Vermont and, feeling that she had been working hard and was emotionally torn by the war, she had sent her off on a little holiday. I knew that, in addition to registering, a German had to have a special permit to travel—and it happened. A few nights later, about midnight, I was awakened by a call from Whitehall Junction—Lydia, "I am arrested." I asked her to put the arresting officer on the phone. It was the FBI. At the junction on the way home, Lydia had gone to the snack-bar for a cup of coffee and her accent had been detected; her arrest was for travelling without the permit; the nearest Federal woman's detention was at the Canadian border and they would take her there; the proper procedure would be

to take it up with the Federal Attorney in New York. This I did the first thing in the morning, the Federal Attorney, John Sonnett, being a former partner of mine. He telephoned the detention station and secured the agreement that Lydia would be sent down, without escort, on my promise to meet her at Grand Central Station and personally take her to the FBI office in Newark. While I was meeting Lydia in New York, FBI agents came and searched our Englewood home. When Lydia arrived she was a frightened girl; she had been driven all night through a blinding snowstorm to the Canadian border and she thought she was being kidnapped; then they told her of the dire things which would happen if she did not complete her journey to New York and go with me to the Newark FBI. At Newark the FBI proceeded to give her a sort of third-degree and she got to a point where she was so frightened that her lips would move but no words came. At this point the Newark Federal Attorney, whom I knew slightly, came into the session, saying the New York Federal Attorney had asked him to look into the matter. He took over the questioning and then in a very nice way explained the law and the reasons why a country at war must take these precautions. He then took me into his private office and showed me the FBI report on the search of my house. It said that in the house where the alien resided they had found a very powerful short-wave radio set, some expensive and high-powered photographic equipment, including a dark-room laboratory where films could be developed, and that in the alien's room there was a box of small colored pictures, including one of Fujiyama. Fortunately, my friend thought this report very funny. We then went back to the interrogation room and the Federal Attorney announced his decision: Charges would be held in suspense and she would be paroled in my charge: "What Mr. Parlin says you can do, you can do; and what he says you cannot do, you must not do." On the way out he said to me in an aside: "Maids are hard to get these days so thank me for getting you one for the duration." But this was not to be, because a nice German widower with a small daughter to raise fell in love with Lydia and we had to let her go—with Miriam's and my blessings.

During those war years Miriam insisted on living up to all rationing and other restrictions to the exact letter. I have always worked hard but never as long hours as during those war years when

all the young men on our staff were away in the Armed Forces. Those summers I saw little of the family at Silver Bay. When the war ended, George was with the Army in Italy, Steward was in Navy Training School, and the others of the generation were too young. With what relief the Nation, mission accomplished, turned to civilian life and economy!