

OUR CENTURY

1940

AT A GLANCE



Oscar Vitt endears himself to an umpire.

Indian players rebel against manager

The Indians were the consensus choice to win the American League pennant in 1940, and they more than lived up to expectations on Opening Day. Bob Feller pitched a no-hitter against the White Sox, thanks to a sensational play by second baseman Ray Mack on Taft Wright's grounder for the final out.

Feller again led the league in wins (27), strikeouts (261), complete games (43) and innings pitched (320). He was joined on the All Star team by pitcher Al Milnar, catcher Rollie Hemsley, shortstop Lou Boudreau, Mack and third baseman Ken Keltner.

Yet 1940 turned out to be the most frustrating year in Indians' history. Manager Oscar Vitt didn't get along with sportswriters, General Manager Cy Slapnicka or, most important, his players. Finally, the players couldn't take his criticism anymore. In June, Mel Harder led a delegation representing 21 of the 25 players to President Alva Bradley's office. "We think we've got a good chance to win this pennant, Mr. Bradley," Harder said. "But we'll never win it with Vitt as manager. If we get rid of him, we can win."

Bradley warned them they could touch off a hornet's nest and urged them to reconsider, but the story already had been leaked. Bradley was right: The tag "crybabies" was hung on the team in Cleveland and around the league. Three days later, the players issued a statement: "We the undersigned publicly declare to withdraw all statements referring to the resignation of Oscar Vitt. We feel this action is for the betterment of the Cleveland Indians."

The Indians still managed to build a lead of five games over the Tigers on Aug. 22. Then, they fell apart. The backbreaker was a game at the Stadium, the first of the final series of the season; little-known Floyd Giebell pitched a six-hitter for the Tigers and Rudy York broke up Feller's shutout with a 250-foot home run into the first row just inside the left-field foul pole.

A month later, Bradley announced: "We have decided not to renew Oscar Vitt's contract."

Roosevelt's decision to seek a third term — in violation of a precedent honored since George Washington — cost him many of his supporters. Even United Mine Workers President John L. Lewis called for his defeat.

On Oct. 23, with Republican candidate Wendell Willkie whistle-stopping through Ohio, a motorcade of more than 3,000 cars paraded from University Circle through Lakewood on "No Third Term Day." On Nov. 2, five days before the election, Roosevelt told 23,000 cheering Clevelanders in Public Hall of his accomplishments, and said, "I want that march to continue for four years." He added: "When that term is over, there will be a new president." It was a promise he would break.

Plain Dealer politics writer Walker S. Buel predicted Willkie would win "by an eyelash." Instead, Roosevelt carried 35 of the 48 states, including Ohio. But the Republicans elected Mayor Harold Burton as U.S. senator and John Bricker as governor.

Burton chose Edward Blythin as his successor. In his final address, Burton called for amalgamation of Cleveland and its four largest suburbs — Lakewood, Cleveland Heights, East Cleveland and Shaker Heights.

A gasoline-powered commuter shuttle collided head-on with a freight train in Cuyahoga Falls on July 31. Flames leaped 25 feet into the air; all available ambulances raced to the scene from Akron, Kent and Hudson, but 43 people were dead, many of them headed for jobs in Cleveland.

Officials proudly announced that 1940 was the healthiest year in Cleveland's history. For the first time, not a single resident died of diphtheria, and the incidence of typhoid was the lowest ever. Pneumonia deaths also were down, thanks to "increased use of hospital facilities, new serum and chemotherapy." But syphilis was on the rise among the young.

Fashion writer Oscar A. Bergman advised Plain Dealer readers that a well-dressed man needed nine hats. They included a high silk topper, a derby for daytime town wear with a town suit, a black or midnight blue homburg for semi-formal evening wear, a lighter homburg "for daytime wear ONLY," a wide-brimmed pork pie for sports attire and a variety of fedoras for different occasions. He offered readers an illustrated copy of the complete and correct fall wardrobe if they sent him a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Kicking into gear

War production turns around desperate conditions at home

By Fred McGunagle

It was a far different Cleveland that greeted the decade of the 1940s. It was a far different world.

The bombs that were bringing death and destruction to Europe were bringing good times to Cleveland. Men who a year or two earlier were lucky to get a \$60-a-month WPA job, found work in plants with war contracts; wages averaged 82.7 cents an hour for skilled workers and 61.1 cents for unskilled. Young hobos who once couldn't find either a job or a home now found both in the armed forces.

As the year began, Mayor Harold Burton reported business in Cleve-

land was up 10 percent in 1939 and crime down 20 percent. With the orders pouring in from abroad, Clevelanders once more had money to spend in the stores. Finally, happy days were here again.

But the terrible decade of the 1930s had taken a toll. For the first time ever in a census, Cleveland's population fell — to 978,366, or 22,000 less than in 1930. Immigration virtually had stopped, and births had dropped from more than 20,000 a year in the 1920s to as low as 14,000 in 1936. Still, Cleveland remained the Sixth City, and the suburbs rose by 37,000 to 338,884, with more than half of them in the cities of Lakewood, Cleveland Heights and East Cleveland. Cuyahoga County had a record 1,217,250 people.



PLAIN DEALER FILE

The unthinkable happened in 1940: France fell to Hitler's forces. In this Associated Press, censor-approved photo, civilians flee Dunkirk June 13, 1940.



PLAIN DEALER FILE

The caption for this World War II photo read: "Adept at riveting as well as easy on the eyes, these are two of the hundreds of women and girls employed at the Goodyear Aircraft Co. in Akron." Martina Bonner, left, and Marjorie Parker were attached to the wing assembly department.

LOOKING AT A YEAR



Winston Churchill and Neville Chamberlain in 1940.

March 7: The new British luxury liner Queen Elizabeth arrives in New York, completing its maiden voyage.

May 10: Winston Churchill becomes British prime minister, succeeding Neville Chamberlain.

May 10: Nazi troops invade the Netherlands and Belgium. Eighteen days later, the countries surrender.

June 14: German troops parade through Paris. Four days later, speaking via radio from London, Gen. Charles DeGaulle urges the French to resist surrender.

June 28: Republicans nominate Wendell Willkie to oppose President



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Barbara Green, then 24 and a student at Kent State College, operates a machine that tests the hardness of bayonets at the American Fork and Hoe Bayonet Plant in Ashtabula.

Northern Ohio remained the heart of the iron and steel industry, which employed 140,000 of the area's 545,000 workers. Of those, 395,000 were men and 150,000 women; 174,000 were employed in manufacturing, including 31,000 women. Cleveland was the auto parts center of the nation, No. 1 in the lighting industry and No. 2 in machine tools. Thirteen clearing-house banks had assets of more than \$1 billion.

Across the Atlantic, Germany quickly occupied Denmark and Norway, and swept through the Netherlands and Belgium. Italy joined Germany, invading France from the south and Egypt from its colony in Libya. Stalin took advantage of the turmoil to annex Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia; Japan seized most of China.

In May, the unthinkable happened: France fell. The British managed to evacuate nearly all of their troops across the English Channel from Dunkirk but, beginning in September, were subjected to nightly air raids. The Royal Air Force fought back desperately. "Never," said Britain's new prime minister, Winston Churchill, "have so many owed so much to so few."

President Roosevelt agreed to lend Britain 50 old U.S. destroyers in re-



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Eleanore Derbin, of Fleet Ave., worked at the Hi Speed at St. Clair Ave. and E. 44th St. in 1942.

turn for the right to build military bases in the Caribbean. Two weeks later, he signed the Selective Service Act, establishing the first peacetime draft. In a lottery, the number "158" was pulled out of a fish bowl and 51 Cleveland-area men found themselves facing a sudden career change.

In December, the election behind him, Roosevelt went on nationwide radio to announce a dramatic step-up of war production. The Plain Dealer reported: "In blazing and wrathful defiance of the Axis power, which he predicted will not win the war, President Roosevelt tonight proclaimed the United States must become 'the great arsenal of democracy.'" The story also noted: "With dramatic pauses the president emphasized that the American fleet is on guard in the Pacific."

The government's National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics opened an \$8.4 million research laboratory west of Cleveland Airport (now the NASA Lewis Research Center). Contracts poured in to Cleveland factories from the United States and Britain. At year end, the Chamber of Commerce reported that factories had added more than 1 million square feet of manufacturing space and local industry had spent \$35 million on plant expansion in 1940, up \$12 million from 1939.

The chamber's executive vice president, Walter Beam, declared: "Defense orders, of which nearly \$200 million have already been placed with Greater Cleveland industry, have led the rise in industrial activity and will continue to be the pacemaker during the new year."

Jack & Heintz Inc., which already had received \$6 million in contracts for its new Bedford Township plant, gave Christmas bonuses to its employees: Each was handed a \$100 bill, a \$60 watch and a \$2,500 life insurance policy. On Christmas morning, The Plain Dealer reported that holiday sales were up 10 percent and declared, "Cleveland will celebrate its most prosperous Christmas in a decade today." London got a Christmas present, too; the German bombers stayed home for a night.

One week later, The Plain Dealer reported: "Cleveland turned itself into one long, ecstatic Euclid Ave. parade at midnight, with singing pedestrians locking arms and spilling over the sidewalks, motorists leaning on the horn buttons and two small dogs in the back of a sedan yapping furiously. . . . It was the biggest blowout to greet a New Year since the delirious decade of the 1920s."

Joyously, the revelers counted off the final seconds and then roared out a cheer of welcome: It was 1941.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.