

there was more to life than working the entire time for one company and started looking around for other opportunities. This was a time when new technology and markets in the plastics world were exploding. Cellophane as yet had only a limited market. Olin Corp., under license from du Pont, had just become the second producer of cellophane, and their studies forecast a huge future market for plastic film, especially polyethylene which they were also producing from polymer made by others. A joint venture with Mathieson Chemical was being planned, to build a new plant to produce this product using Mathieson's "know-how" and the raw material, ethylene, which they reportedly had. I started work with Olin and one of my first jobs was to get acquainted with Mathieson's raw material position. I was shocked to find out that it was very insecure and the technology very questionable, and so reported back to Olin. Unknown to me at the time, the two company presidents were discussing a merger, which occurred soon after, and I found myself working for the Mathieson end of the business. The joint venture and the new plant were cancelled, the polyethylene project was abandoned and I became unemployed.

For the next six years I worked for two other chemical companies, but at that time I tended to gravitate into problem companies. Perhaps I was the problem, but in any case I started looking for a small business which I could operate myself as the entrepreneur. Again I called on my Princeton connections and Al Howell '34 suggested I talk to his cousin, Cleveland Dodge '43, who had two companies for sale. We agreed to form a 50% partnership for one of the companies, which I was to run. The company, which we later renamed Engineered Yarns Inc., was located in an old mill in Rhode Island, had about 15 employees and was losing money. With backing from the state and banks, we were able to finance a new plant and equipment, and we got busy improving the technology for coating glass yarn with vinyl plastic to be woven into window screening. Eventually Cle sold his interest to me and I became the sole owner, and it turned into a very successful venture.

The fact that glass yarns, which will almost turn to dust when rubbed between your fingers can be coated with plastic and used as a cheap replacement for aluminum wire, made it appear that there must be other applications where

plastic could be combined with other synthetic yarns to produce superior products for industrial uses. We established a small new product development group. The paper makers' belt (or felt, the usual word) provided a good prospective market. These felts are used in the paper making industry to convey the wet pulp and paper through squeeze rolls and dryers and is subject to wear and attack by chemicals. The felts are large and expensive and downtime on a paper machine to change felts is costly. This was the time of the energy crunch, and since drying the paper is an energy using process, the timing was good. We were able to supply improved yarns to most weavers of paper felts in the U. S. and Canada and had a substantial market in Europe. We started an engineered yarns plant in Canada with a Canadian partner. Other products produced were vinyl coated yarns for outdoor furniture, tennis court backdrop screens, etc. We produced Teflon coated yarns for the exterior fabric of the astronaut suits for the moon landing. In 1977 I felt I had been extremely lucky and decided to bow out while business was thriving. The company was sold to one of our customers, The Scapa Group, an English company with weaving mills in this country and Canada.

I have always been interested in local government and while living in Stamford, Conn. headed up a group promoting better government. In Rhode Island I served on the local zoning board and ran unsuccessfully for the town council. Currently I do monitoring of fresh water ponds. My wife Jane has always been active in civic affairs and politics and I have relied heavily on her to do our share.

Both Jane and I still enjoy tennis, skiing, gardening and sailing. One summer we took our boat, teaming up with Mavis and Curly Marsh in their boat, to cruise the Chesapeake Bay. Another summer we dropped in unexpectedly on Justine and Bob Keidel at their beautiful hide-away on Isle au Haut in Penobscot Bay, Maine. Another time we chartered a boat and explored the wild southern coastline of Newfoundland.

In Rhode Island, we live on the edge of a large fresh water pond and I spend my spare time in the woods keeping our large fireplace supplied. We have three children, graduates of Columbia, Princeton and Yale, and four grandchildren ranging in age from 26 years to six months. Rhode Island may not have the best politics, but it is a great place to live.

## BRILLIANT MAVERICK

Robert E. Pflaumer 1911 - 1978

*Editor: Quoting from the Class obit in the Alumni Weekly, "Bob was one of the most brilliant men ever to graduate from Princeton and a true maverick in every sense of the word." He majored in Chemical Engineering, and, as a fellow engineer, I remember particularly his scholastic success and his jocular good humor. From conversations with classmates, his widow, Mary, and with Lewis Rumford '26, a business associate, we have tried to put together this vignette of his life. (Bob Keidel)*



*An experienced safari hunter, Bob brought home many trophies from Africa and India.*

According to the Germantown Academy Senior Class yearbook, Bob was a great physics scholar, astounding his classmates with his encyclopedic knowledge and his voluble quoting therefrom. Crew was his love and he stroked the first boat. At Princeton crew was also his favorite activity. He rowed in the championship freshman boat, and for three years on the varsity. Later, when living in Philadelphia, he became a member of the Bachelor's Barge club and won many rowing trophies with his brother, Wally '34, and two other friends in a four-oared shell calling themselves the Flying Dutchmen, all being of German background. Chan Withington, his roommate reports that he was especially close to two cousins, Art and Bill Pflaumer, chemistry majors at Lehigh while Bob was at Princeton. They formed a chemical company in Philadelphia known as Pflaumer Brothers, which became quite successful and is still in business.

After winning most of the chemistry prizes at graduation, Bob became a Sayre Fellow at the Princeton Graduate College where his performance must have been equally outstanding because he was then named a Rhodes Scholar and spent the next three years at Lincoln College at Oxford. From there he became a Research Associate at the University of London using chemistry to validate the authenticity and period of ancient art.

One statue which came to him was said to be from a very early Roman period. He and his associate were skeptical. Their research informed them of ways such works had been "antiqued" in the past. This involved putting a statue in the ocean to erode it a bit and then burying it in a manure pile. This they did with a dummy, and by selective borings and some chemical analysis were able to prove that the "ancient" Roman work had been subjected to the same treatment. He loved those years in England. Chan tells of seeing him off on the boat for England: "I asked him what he was going to use for money. He lifted up his coat and around his waist he had a money belt full of gold coins which were illegal at the time. I should have known better!"

Back in the United States in 1939, Bob returned to the Germantown section of Philadelphia, where he had grown up. His mother was a distinguished physician active in the Woman's Hospital there. He went to work in the research department of a chemical company by the name of Rohm & Haas, where he spent the war years, becoming in 1945 a divisional sales manager.

Leaving that company in 1948 he joined the American Marietta Corporation, a paint and concrete conglomerate, as Vice-President for Research and Development. Grover Herman was the principal owner and expansion minded. He and Bob became close and he entrusted Bob with responsibility for expansion through acquisitions of similar companies. Over several years Bob acquired a group of first grade firms, and American Marietta became a very substantial company with Grover Herman as chairman and Bob as president. While Bob wanted to pause to digest these acquisitions, Herman wanted to keep going and started merger negotiations with the Glenn L. Martin Company. Their disagreement over this step was severe and in 1961 Bob finally left the company. My friend, Lewis Rumford, headed one of the acquired companies and Bob became his boss. Lewis remembers him as a straight forward, hands-on manager, popular with his new associates, an excellent speaker, grasping situations easily, in all a brilliant person.