

# Fishing Reels to Atom Bombs

Clarence Gayle had a grudge against Japan, so he went into action

KENTUCKY PROFILES  
By Rena Niles

IT'S A LONG way from fine fishing reels to parts for atomic bombs—but George W. Gayle & Son, Frankfort, bridged the gap without even realizing it.

From the front, 514 Logan Street, Frankfort, looks like any other comfortable bungalow on that tree-studded street. But if you follow the path leading between the house and the fishpond in which the neighborhood children play, you run smack into a war plant—and an important one, too.

For the last two years, the Gayle plant has been making gadgets for the Clinton Engineer Works, the correlating concern in charge of the Oak Ridge, Tenn., atomic-bomb plant. Officials of the Frankfort plant thought they were making parts for radar, among other things. And they still don't know exactly what they turned out, because of the strictest sort of Government secrecy. The plant has produced about 30,000 parts of 20 different types; but all were made from secret drawings which had to be returned promptly upon completion of each job.

And, as soon as the Oak Ridge contract is completed, it will be back to making fishing reels again.

George W. Gayle, whose name is well known to all fishermen as a maker of fine fishing reels, has long been dead; but his son, Clarence Gayle, carries on in his place.

AT THE age of 79, tall, hatchet-faced Clarence Gayle has retained his sense of humor, his indomitable energy, his ability to make-do. From his tiny shop, opening onto a narrow alley, \$250,000 worth of war implements have come within the last two years. Last Christmas he received a congratulatory telegram from General H. H. Arnold, Air Forces chief.

Clarence Gayle had a personal stake in the winning of the war: one son, Lt. Col. Coburn Gayle, is in Italy; two grandsons are in the service, and a third has retired recently. But, more than that, he had an old-time grievance against the Japs—a grievance shared by many another American businessman and manufacturer.

In the early 1930's, a Jap-made fishing reel began to appear on the American market. (It should be noted that while Clarence Gayle takes special pride in his fine hand-made reels, which sold for \$100 to \$300, he also manufactured a smaller, machine-made product which retailed for 50 cents.) The hand-made reels were slow in the making; but the little plant at the rear of 514 Logan could turn out 100,000 of the 50-cent reels in a year. It could, and it did; and Clarence Gayle had a fine business until the Japs decided to pay him the compliment of imitating his product. Their



Courier-Journal Photo by Joe Reister.

CLARENCE GAYLE, still active at 79, inspects a piece of work before his lathe. His little Frankfort plant has turned out 30,000 parts for the Oak Ridge bomb plant.

reels bore the mark of "George W. Gayle & Son" on both reel and bolt. Their reels also retailed for 50 cents. But the price to the dealer was considerably lower, for the Japs paid Jap wages, and could undersell Clarence Gayle with a wide margin of profit.

THUS, on May 30, 1943, Clarence Gayle entered the war against his old-time enemy when he got his first contract for making part of the firing mechanism on floating bombs for the F. H. Lawson Company in Cincinnati. He quickly went about the business of enlarging his factory with a two-car garage, a shanty and a chicken coop. He begged, borrowed and bought the necessary tools. (Many of his former tools could be converted to war production, including a lathe made in 1883, which had belonged to his father and which he calls "as modern as tomorrow.")

He tapped the local market for labor; hired carpenters, painters, farmers, housewives. Today he employs 22 men and six women. One of the men is 79, Clarence Gayle's own age. Another, a mere youngster of 67, rides his bicycle to work (a retired mail-carrier, he has doubtless tired of walking). Among the women are a grandmother and two pretty high school girls. The oldest employee in years of service is also one of the youngest in age—Mrs. Mary S. Bryan, who started working for Clarence Gayle 20 years ago when she was just 15. As Mr. Gayle puts it: "Mary has been my legs for a long time. Nowadays, she is also my eyes, and sometimes my brain."

But the driving spirit behind the enterprise is Clarence Gayle himself. A skilled craftsman, a self-taught engineer and a self-made man, he has little patience for careless workers, profound respect for fine tools, a driving desire

for perfection, no use for unions. "My men make union wages and don't pay union dues," he says. An organizer, once firmly "invited out," never returned.

Clarence Gayle's entire life has centered on the block in which he now lives. Born on Capitol Avenue, half a block away, he chased rabbits where the Capitol now stands; married the girl across the street; moved diagonally onto Logan Street. In the course of his business he has traveled far and wide in these United States, but so far as actual living goes, one city square has held it all.

He has spent many happy hours on the Kentucky River; for he is a fisherman as well as a maker of fishing reels. He is also an expert swimmer and a maker of boats—not for sale, but for his own delight and the pleasure of his family and friends. He has made canoes, skiffs, seasleds, even a houseboat.

THE seasleds—four of them—were all named for his wife, Emma Kavanaugh Gayle, and each carried a flag made from the petticoats she had worn under her wedding dress. They were the Emma K. I, Emma K. II, Emma K. III and Emma K. IV.

"How odd," a woman once remarked, upon being told that all these boats were named for Mr. Gayle's wife, "that Mr. Gayle should have had four wives, and all named Emma K.!"

Clarence Gayle's long and active career points a moral: Six years ago he suffered a heart attack and was told that he must give up all activity. Within a few months he was on his feet again. Soon he was in a canoe, going down the Kentucky River with one of his daughter's friends paddling at the stern. And then, when the war came, he really went to work. He has been going strong ever since, with no intention of quitting.