

*A HISTORY*  
*OF*  
*EASTERN AIRCRAFT*  
*DIVISION*

*GENERAL MOTORS CORPORATION*



*EASTERN AIRCRAFT DIVISION*

LINDEN, N. J.    TRENTON, N. J.    BLOOMFIELD, N. J.  
TARRYTOWN, N. Y.    BALTIMORE, MD.

1944

# TARRYTOWN

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TARRYTOWN, N. Y., was well known to Chevrolet dealers in the great metropolitan areas of Boston, New York and Philadelphia before the war. In the late 20's and early 30's they had traveled to this town on the east bank of the Hudson River to pick up new cars and trucks from the huge Chevrolet plant. Bodies for the cars were produced in quantity at the adjacent plant of the Fisher Body Division of General Motors.

During the last few months of 1941, government curtailment orders felt throughout the entire automotive industry slowed up production in Tarrytown. Finally the Federal Government ordered all automobile production halted, with the exception of trucks used by the Army, Navy and other government agencies. The Fisher Body plant, facing the future without a government contract, (Chevrolet was to continue producing trucks) waited with bated breath for a decision.

It came one morning early in January when Fisher Body employes read with astonishment in the papers that they had become an integral part of a new General Motors Division — Eastern Aircraft. Within the space of a few days the new Eastern Aircraft plant learned that it would be expected to provide wings, cabins, motor mounts and several other assemblies for

the Navy's deadly carrier-based Avenger torpedo bomber, one of two planes Eastern had agreed to produce.

Then came the task of preparing for the new job.

A program of dismantling automotive equipment was put into effect almost immediately. Plant engineering, which in the beginning consisted of precisely three experienced men, directed the removal of every piece of machinery not usable in aircraft production — every one of the hundreds of jigs and fixtures employed to construct automobile bodies, tagged them for identification, had rust-resistant grease applied and stored them in an empty North Tarrytown building. Yet forty per cent of the old stuff was eventually used on the aircraft job.

Meanwhile new employes were hired, and training schools were set up anywhere and everywhere throughout the plant. A factory which normally employed some 1,300 persons had 2,890 on its payroll by the end of 1942; 4,026 by the middle of 1943, and more than 9,000 early in 1944.

Top supervision visited the Grumman Aircraft Engineering Corporation on Long Island to study the construction of the Avenger assemblies which Tarrytown was to build.

Foremen were sent to an aircraft school in Yonkers, N. Y., for grounding in the fundamentals of airplane construction. A 400-hour welding course leading to a Navy certificate was organized at a local trade school.

Three thousand four hundred forty-three employes were given in-plant courses of various types designed to acquaint them with the intricacies of building airplanes.

While men were badly needed, by far the most important new source of labor at Tarrytown was women. Early in 1943 more than 2,900 women had been put on the payroll, as compared to a peacetime total of 120. A qualified number of these were selected to take the junior engineering course at Rutgers University.

With a skeleton plant layout pretty well completed and some employes trained, the first set of wings was completed and shipped to the Trenton plant for final assembly in an Avenger torpedo bomber on October 1, 1942. But miracles had to be performed before Tarrytown could feed Trenton a steady diet of assemblies.

During the spring of 1942, orders were placed for 375 new pieces of machinery and 2,155 new tools. Men scoured the country for firms which could deliver these items in time to get the productive machine rolling. Large hydraulic presses were badly needed, and Tarrytown searched the nation from coast to coast before one of these was found and installed in December of 1942.

Engineering data was spotty and unreliable for many months. Eventually, in order to bring some order out of chaos, a "PK" (fastened temporarily with Parker-Kalon screws) section of the plane was secured from Grumman so that Tarrytown engineers could go ahead with some specifications to work on. At one time six different sets of specifications were being used; but as time went on this was corrected.

Then Tarrytown learned that the original estimate of its monthly schedule had been upped beyond the capacity of the plant. Luckily the adjoining Tarrytown, N. Y., plant of Chevrolet, which had been manufacturing trucks and ambulances for the Army, found that cut-backs in its contracts would allow Eastern to take over some of its floor space. Later the whole Chevrolet plant was taken over by Eastern when the Army discontinued Chevrolet's production.

Tarrytown settled down to the job of upping monthly production figures and ironing out production bugs as 1943 opened. Constant improvements were made in operations. Time was cut here and there through new methods.

Then, with its available manpower and floor space, Tarrytown was able to take on 176 more assemblies from the Trenton plant during this first half of 1943.

By April of the year Tarrytown had installed a wing conveyor line — an example of automotive technique applied to aircraft production — which increased productive efficiency. It is believed to be one of the longest of its type in the nation, stretching 1,223 feet on the delivery line, and 1,345 feet on the return line.

During the late summer of the year, Tarrytown incorporated a major design change into the Avenger's wings. Fifty-calibre machine guns had to be installed, and monthly schedules still maintained. After six weeks of heart-breaking difficulties the job was done, and once again Tarrytown rolled smoothly. In peacetime this would have meant shutting down to incorporate a major design change in an automobile.

Through the months the plant on the Hudson surmounted many problems, yet kept abreast of its portion of the Avenger's requirements.