

ONE



## THE MAKING OF AN OIL MAN DOUGLAS EARLE QUARLES SR.

### EARLY LIFE AND INFLUENCES

Douglas Earle Quarles, the founder of the Quarles Petroleum Company, was born on a farm in Caroline County, Virginia, in 1900. He was the oldest of four children born to George Graham Quarles (Graham) and Mary Lydia Luck. Earle's father and his father's brother Douglas operated a sawmill on the farm on the bank of the North Anna River. The farm and the mill had been in the Quarles family since before the Civil War, but in the early 1900s, when it ceased to be profitable, Graham moved his family twenty-five miles down the road to Ashland, where he took a job as an engineer with the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad. He was assigned to a work train that went to sites between Washington and Richmond to do general track maintenance. Graham was a steady worker and he imparted a strong work ethic to his son, Earle.

As a youngster Earle enjoyed basketball and football and eventually earned a spot on the Ashland High School varsity teams.



*Mary Lydia and Graham Quarles.*

## 2 FOUNDERS AND KEEPERS



*The Ashland School, where Earle and Gladys Quarles went to high school and Doug Quarles attended kindergarten.*

When Ashland played Fredericksburg High, the boys traveled by R F & P train to Fredericksburg and stayed overnight with their opponents' families. Earle was sometimes hosted by the Freeman family, who lived above their grocery store in the center of town. Unfortunately for Ashland, they nearly always lost to Fredericksburg when they played on Fredericksburg's home court, which in those

days was in a warehouse capped by low rafters. The Fredericksburg players had become adept at shooting through the rafters, but the Ashland players usually hit them, and missed their shot.

As a youngster Earle also developed an interest in automobile mechanics while working at a livery stable in Ashland that was owned by his maternal uncles Jim and Pollis Luck. Jim and Pollis, along with their brother Charlie, owned a number of businesses throughout Central Virginia over the years, and they often took Earle under their wing and into their employ. Earle was in this way influenced by his uncles and imbued with the Luck family entrepreneurial spirit and business acumen.

Jim Luck in particular was a man of vision, and in 1915 he predicted that the new "horseless carriages" would supplant the horse and buggy as the major mode of transportation. He therefore ordered a Ford Model T from Detroit to supplement the livery stable's horse-drawn carriages. When it was delivered by train—unassembled—Jim challenged Earle and his friend Sumter Priddy to put the contraption together. In short order it was in one piece and Earle was cranking it up and, at age fifteen, teaching himself to drive. Thereafter, it was Earle's job to drive customers—mostly traveling salesmen, then called "drummers"—from farm to farm to peddle their wares, including such items as pots and pans and Singer sewing machines.

In 1917 Earle graduated from Ashland High and began attending business classes at Smithdeal Massey Business College while working as a fireman for the R F & P Railroad. Soon the United States was engaged in World War I and many young men were drafted, yet Earle avoided conscription by taking a job that sup-



*The Quarles Sawmill on the North Anna River in Caroline County, Virginia, was in operation from before the Civil War until the early 1900s.*

*The interior would have looked like this.*



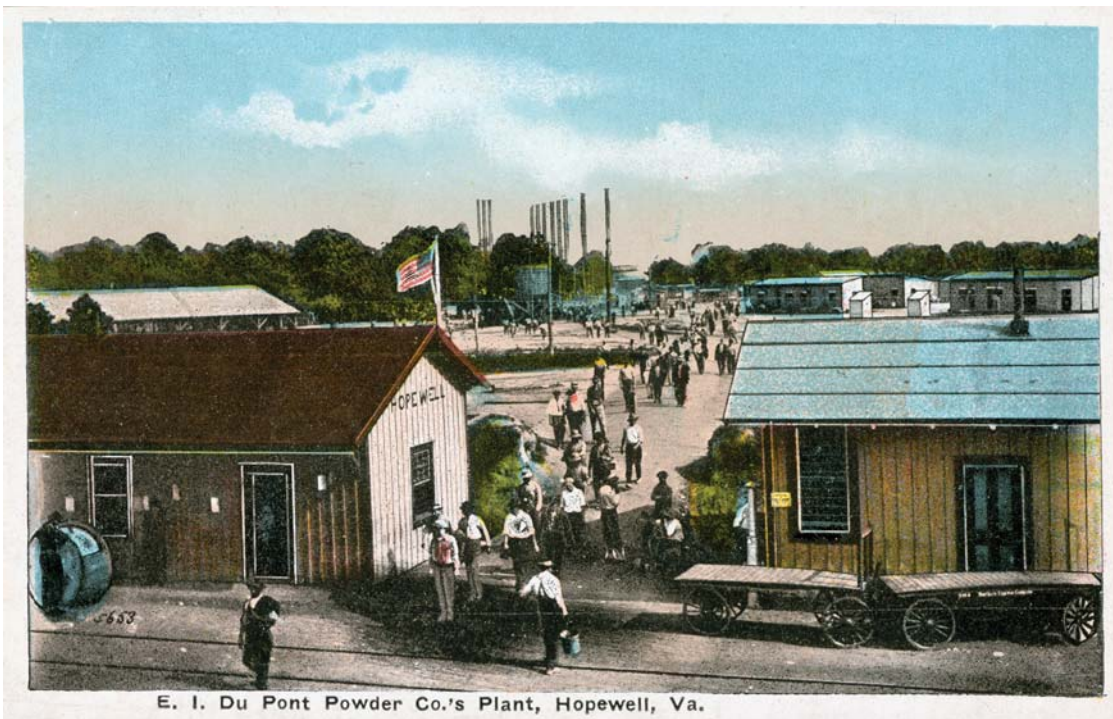
*Earle Quarles assembled and drove a Ford Model T like this one for his uncles' livery stable.*



*The Luck Livery Stable. Charles Luck is standing with hands on hips.*



*The DuPont Guncotton Plant at Hopewell, where Earle was employed in 1918, had a workforce of 28,000 during World War I.*



**E. I. Du Pont Powder Co.'s Plant, Hopewell, Va.**

ported the war effort in a civilian capacity. In 1918 the DuPont Company expanded the workforce at its guncotton plant on the James River at Hopewell to 28,000 workers, and Earle was among them. When the war was over, DuPont abandoned the plant and laid off the entire workforce. Earle had some career decisions to make. Automobiles were becoming ever more popular, and he decided that he would like to try to make a living servicing them. Work of this type was scarce in the Ashland area, so in 1920 he headed off to Flint, Michigan, along with a friend, Bill Taylor, and



*Bill Taylor (center left) and Earle Quarles (center right) with friends and dressed for a night on the town in Flint, Michigan, 1920.*



*The Flint Motor Company, where Earle trained as an auto mechanic.*

*Gladys and Earle Quarles pose next to their Hudson automobile in 1923.*



his cousin Charlie Luck Jr., for they had heard there were jobs on the Buick assembly line there. Upon arriving in Flint, Earle actually landed a job as an apprentice in auto mechanics. He excelled at it and within a year was headed back to Virginia to ply the trade.





*Gladys Quarles with six-month-old Doug at the family's Grove Avenue home in Lynchburg.*

He landed a job as a mechanic in Richmond and soon became known for his ability to tune the valves of an auto while the engine was running. Earle did this by setting the engine on a slow idle and sliding a box-end wrench over the rocker-arm nut to loosen it up. He then slipped the feeler gauge in between the arm and the valve stem to close the valve. Finally he slid the gauge out smoothly.

Within a year Earle was offered a better job as a shop foreman for the Virginia Highway Department in Lynchburg. Thus gainfully employed and with a bright future assured, he proposed to Gladys Taylor, whom he had known since his school days. She was the sister of his friend Bill Taylor, with whom he had traveled to Flint. Gladys and Earle were married in September of 1921. In 1922 they welcomed their first child, Gladys Joan, into the world. Tragically, at a very young age Joan suffocated when the pipe on the woodstove that heated the room where she slept came loose. On February 7, 1924, the couple was blessed with a second child, Douglas Earle Jr.

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When Doug was a young boy, Earle worked for Jim Luck again. By this time the Luck Livery Stable had evolved into an automobile dealership and Earle had a job repairing the used cars that had been traded in, preparing them for resale. Luck insisted that they be restored to perfect condition and Earle was at first hard-pressed to understand why. His uncle's exceedingly high standard required an investment in labor and parts that negated any profit that might be made on the resale. When he questioned his uncle, Luck explained: "If we sell a young man a used car and it turns out to be a good value and to serve him well, when he's ready for a new car, he'll come to us." Earle always remembered that lesson and credited his Uncle Jim with teaching him a great deal over the

years about fairness and customer service, values he himself came to embrace when he himself became a business owner.

Earle had his first opportunity as a business owner in the mid-1920s, when his uncle Charlie Luck won a contract grading streets for the City of Richmond and he went to work as his uncle's steam shovel operator. The wages were good and he eventually saved enough money to invest in two dump trucks, which he planned to hire out to Charlie's projects and others. Earle was also able to purchase a home in a new development in North Richmond. Indeed, his business prospects were good and the Quarles family was comfortably ensconced in their new home—but not for long. In October of 1929 the stock market crashed and Quarles lost his home when the bank that held the mortgage closed. Charlie Luck's contract with Richmond came to an end, and Earle had to get rid of the dump trucks. He took a job as a steam shovel operator, first on a federally sponsored project and then with the Virginia Highway Department. Throughout the 1930s the Quarles family moved from town to town across Virginia—fifteen in all—to



Earle's branch of the Quarles family came to America in 1609 from England as part of the Virginia Company of London, which sponsored the Jamestown settlement. On a recent trip to England, Doug Quarles located the site of the village where his ancestors had originated, now on the Holcomb Hall estate in Devon. A manor house and eight other buildings remain there, and a historic sign identifies

the settlement as Quarles Village. Historians of Quarles claim that the residents abandoned the village around 1665, when some among them were afflicted by the black plague. They reportedly migrated to Ufford, England, and the Netherlands.

*Doug Quarles beside the sign marking the now deserted village of Quarles in Devon, England.*



live near the construction projects to which Earle was assigned. Doug's memories of that period, which comprised his formative years of six through sixteen, bring that bygone era to life.

### THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Doug's earliest recollections are of Criglersville, in western Virginia near Graves Mountain where his father's shovel cleared silt



*American artist Grandma Moses painted scenes from rural life in the Shenandoah Valley, including this one depicting the cooking of apple butter over an open fire, an activity Doug remembered from his youth. Apple Butter Making, 1948.*

from the creek that ran through the town in order to stem the flooding. The Quarleses lived in an apartment over a grocery store owned by a family named Ayler. Before long they moved on to Colleen, a small town on Route 29, west of Charlottesville, where they lived with the town's doctor. Doug did not attend school in Colleen, but rather was home-schooled by his mother. The next stop was New Castle, west of Roanoke and Covington, where there was a drugstore with a bowling alley and Doug had a job setting the pins. The family with whom the Quarleses resided in New Castle produced apple butter in a big iron kettle over an open fire in the yard. It had to be stirred nonstop, and Doug recalled that he was sometimes called on to mind the pot.

In 1932 the Quarles family moved back to Ashland and lived in a house on Railroad Avenue that was just one-half block from Earle's parents' home. Earle worked as a mechanic with the Vir-



ginia Highway Department, responding to calls regarding vehicle breakdowns in a truck rigged with welding and cutting equipment and other tools. Every job comes with unique occupational hazards and this one was no exception. On one occasion, while he was repairing a two-cycle engine with the less-than-welcome assistance of the disabled automobile's owner, the owner lost his grip on the crank and it flew forward and hit Earle square in the mouth, knocking out all of his front teeth.



*Doug Quarles at age five was called "Earle Jr."*



## 12 FOUNDERS AND KEEPERS

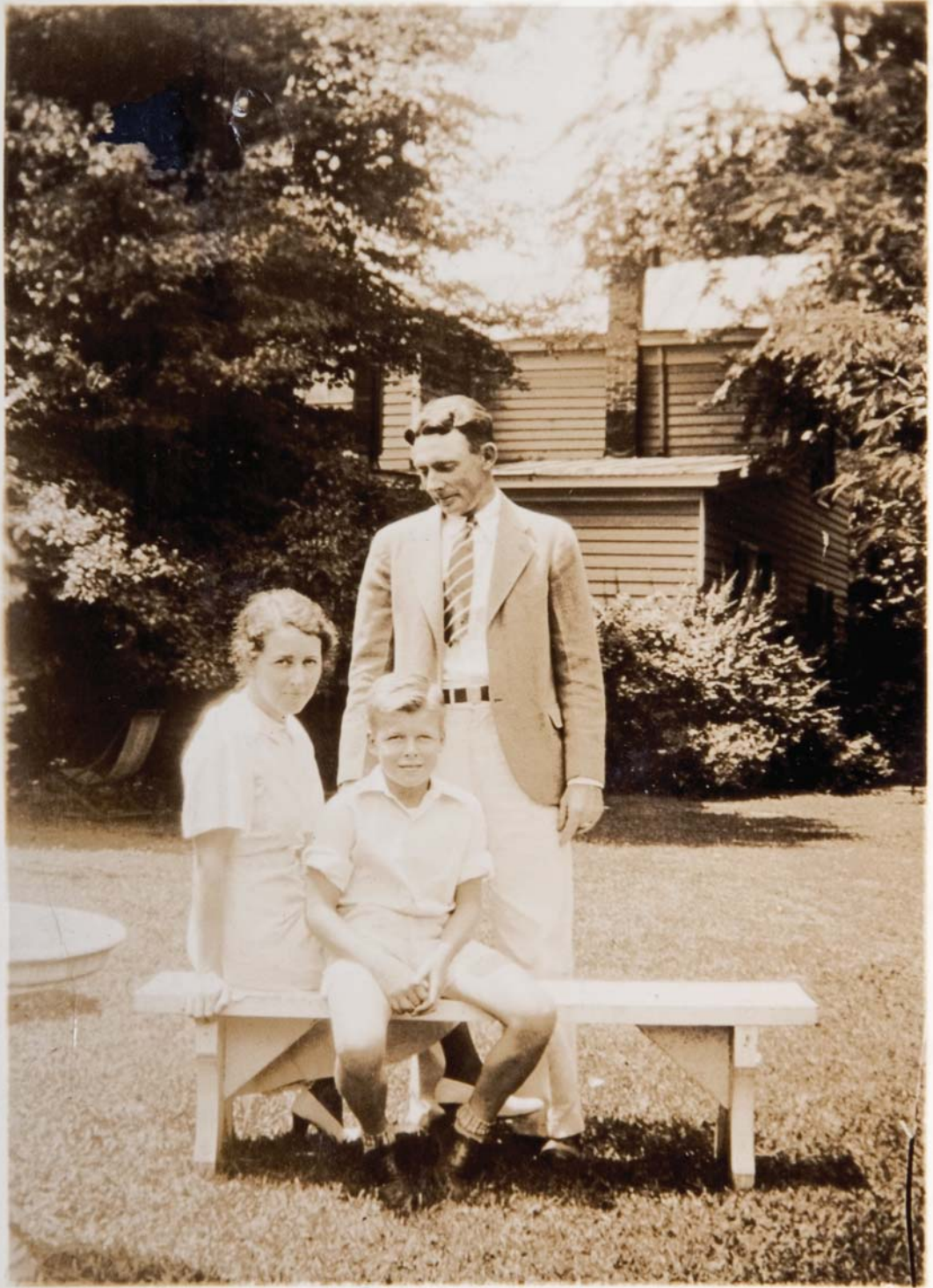
Doug has fond memories of Ashland. These include the fine menagerie he acquired from his grandfather Quarles—two bull dogs and a billy goat, complete with a harness and a wagon. He also remembers long summer days spent climbing the big old trees near the Baptist church with his friend Sumter Priddy Jr., who years later became an influential Virginia lobbyist.

Though Earle was grateful to be employed during the Depression, when so many Americans were not, it was a difficult time for him. He was discouraged at the end of the decade that for all his toil, he had saved only a thousand dollars. Additionally, he was concerned about the physically demanding nature of his work. Earle was beginning to experience problems with his back, and though these were somewhat alleviated by regular visits to a chiropractor, he was aware that he might be forced to make a career change. With this in mind, he took a correspondence course in radio repair. However, in the summer of 1940, an opportunity came along to buy a small oil business in Warrenton and he and Gladys were optimistic that this might be an opportunity to realize a good income without the physical duress of construction work day in and day out.

*Railroad Avenue.*



*Gladys, Earle, and Doug Quarles in the backyard of Earle's parents' Railroad Avenue home (opposite).*

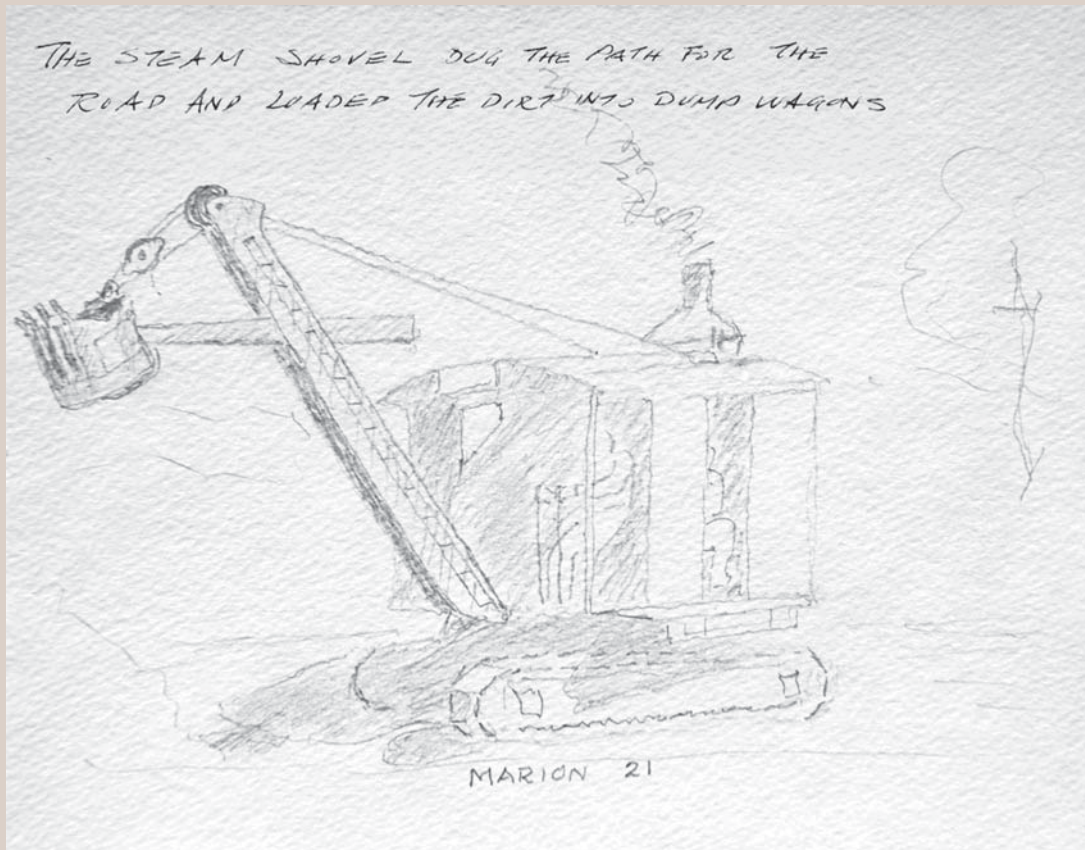


1935

During the 1930s, when Earle Quarles worked as a steam shovel operator, many new roads were being constructed in Virginia. The dirt roads that had been suitable for horses and carriages by then proved to be impassable for the automobiles that were commonplace. Dirt roads were straightened and paved to create more modern byways, and until 1936 or so, by which

time dump trucks were common, much of the work was performed by convicts using mule-drawn dump wagons.

First the steam shovel operator dug a path for the new road, then the fill was loaded into a mule-drawn wagon by convicts using hand shovels. For heavy loads a snatch team of three extra mules was hooked up to help pull. The

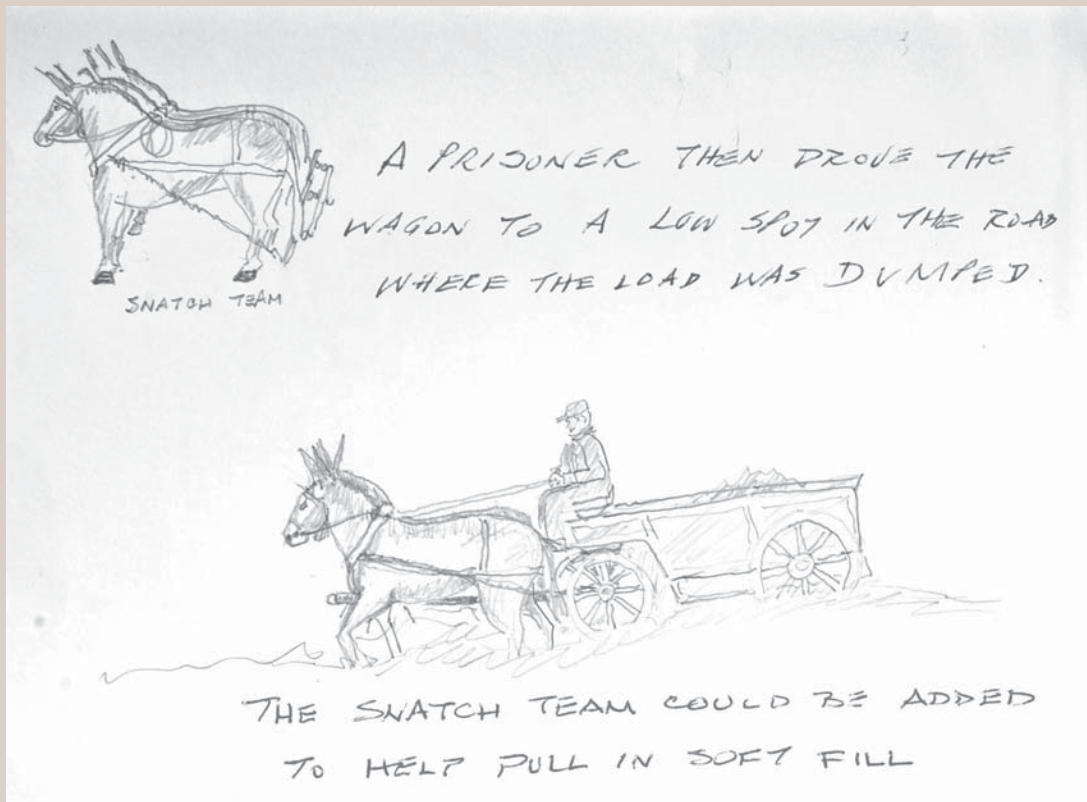




foreman got the wagon moving by calling to the mules by name and cracking his long whip. A prisoner then drove the wagon to a low spot, where the fill was dumped. The weight of the mules and the wagon, coming and going, packed down the dirt, and the prisoners smoothed out the high spots with hand shovels. The roadbed was thus prepared to be covered

with the layers of crushed stones and tar to seal it.

The convicts and mules lived in a camp near the project. They pulled up stakes and moved to another camp farther along the road's path after the several months it took to complete a five-miles-or-so stretch of road.



Drawings by Doug Quarles.

## TWO

# QUARLES OIL FOUNDING AND EARLY YEARS

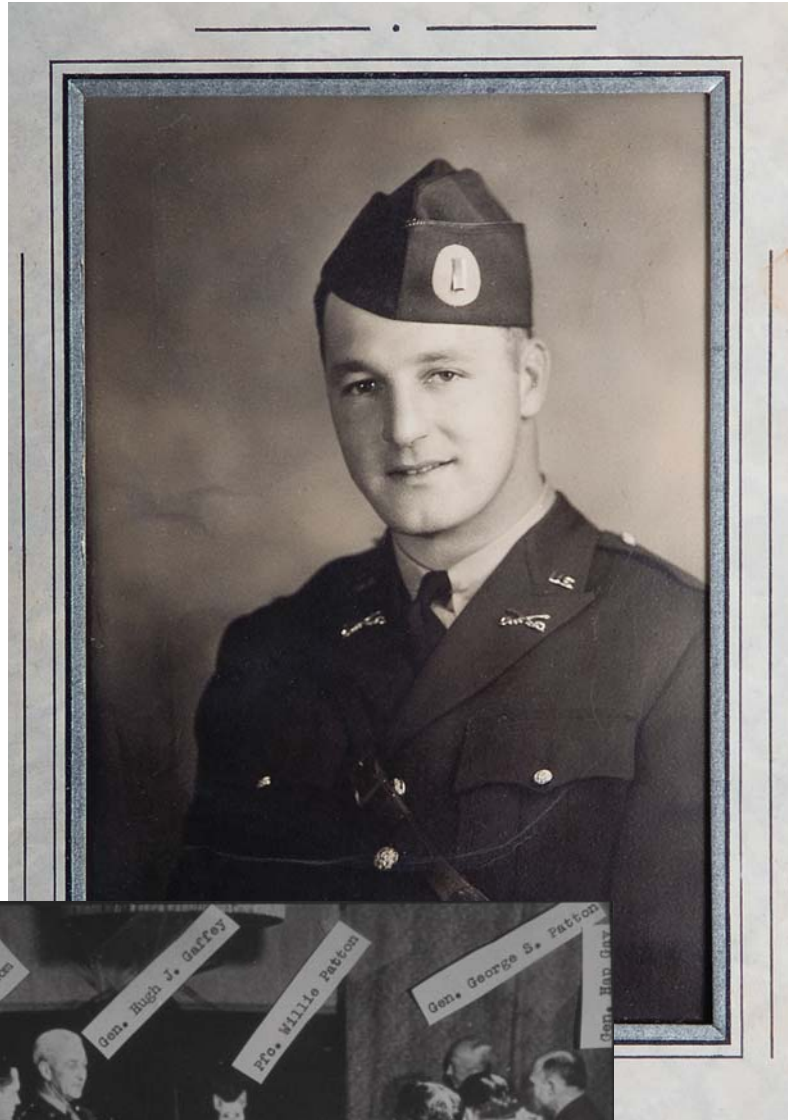


### WARRENTON, 1940

In 1940 Earle learned from his brother-in-law, Ray Taylor, a Shell employee, that a small oil business, the Home Oil Company, was for sale in Warrenton. Ray had been sent by Shell to operate the company until a new owner/operator could be found. The 11,000-gallon-per-month jobbership was owned by three prominent Warrenton businessmen—J. Ford Thompson, a merchant, Charles Stone, a lawyer, and a venerable town physician, Dr. Davis—who upon learning that their truck driver had been stealing from them had become discouraged and decided to sell.

Taylor, convinced that Home Oil presented a good business opportunity, proposed that he and Earle pool their resources to buy it. Earle and Gladys examined the prospect and agreed that Home Oil might well prove to be a successful venture—and one that could provide Earle with a means of supporting his family without having to perform work that would aggravate his ailing back—but they were concerned that the business was too small to generate revenue adequate to support two families. They therefore persuaded Ray to remain in Shell's gainful employ and allow them to purchase Home Oil on their own. Subsequently, on August 16, 1940, Earle paid Shell Oil \$1,000—the whole of his savings, for

Second Lieutenant Ray Taylor before his deployment to Africa, where he served in World War II, eventually under General George Patton.



Ray Taylor seated at General Patton's table.



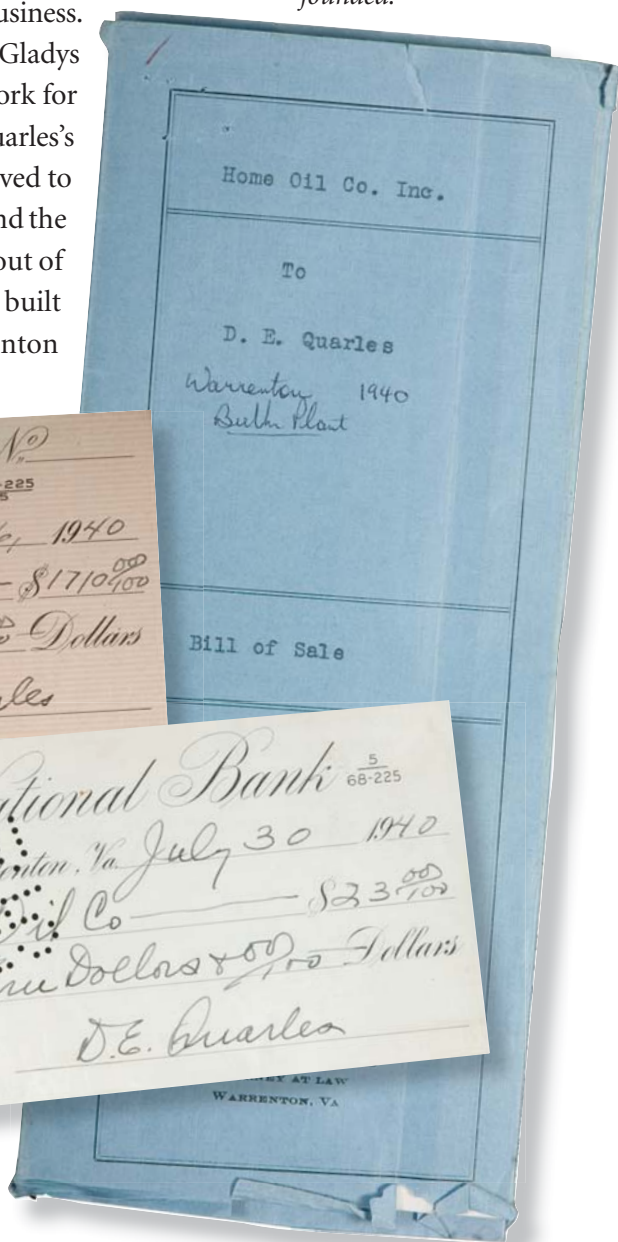
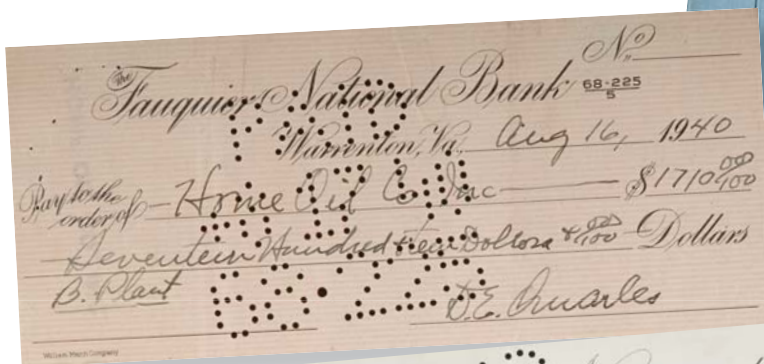
PEVOR HALL- KNUTSFORD, ENGLAND--HEADQUARTERS --THIRD U. S. ARMY  
COMMANDING GENERAL GEORGE S. PATTON, JR. & PERSONAL STAFF.



Home Oil, and Shell loaned him the remainder of the \$1,758 purchase price. Home Oil thereafter became the Quarles Oil Company. Included in the purchase was a 25,000-gallon, three-compartment storage tank in a steel cradle, three two-inch gravity loading arms, and a 5-horsepower electric motor that drove a dual pump. The motor was used to unload petroleum from railroad tank cars and later from the tank trailers. A spur railroad property that stored piping connections; a warehouse located on rented railroad property that stored the pump; and a supply of motor oil came with the deal.

From the start, Quarles Oil was a family business. Earle and Doug made the oil deliveries and Gladys kept the books and did the administrative work for the company, initially from a corner of the Quarles's apartment in Warrenton. The Quarleses moved to a single family home in Warrenton in 1942 and the office was set up there. Quarles Oil was run out of the residence until 1950, when an office was built adjoining the service station on the Warrenton

*The checks tendered by Earle Quarles to purchase Home Oil Company and the Bill of Sale. It was with this purchase that Quarles Oil Company was founded.*



Bypass. Gladys was assisted by Mrs. Ida Briggs of New Baltimore, then by Mrs. Lumford of Warrenton. In 1950 Mrs. McClanahan became office manager. Gladys's contributions to Quarles Oil were vital to its success. She was an excellent bookkeeper who could perform long and complicated calculations in her head—without the aid of a calculator. Kitty Quarles recalled an incident that illustrated this talent, which was undiminished with advancing age. Gladys and Earle, well into their 70s, were reviewing their estate with an accountant and a lawyer when Gladys asked the accountant for the sum of a long column of assets that appeared in the report. “Just a moment while I get the calculator,” he replied, and Gladys—surprised that he deemed this necessary—did the calculation in her head, within

seconds.

Earle's greatest asset was his absolute determination to make the business succeed. At the outset he delivered gasoline, kerosene, and fuel oil to the fifty-plus customers that came with Home Oil and then made sales calls to garner new business. The original delivery truck, a 1935 Ford with a three-compartment 750-gallon tank, was soon replaced by a 1940 International, as Earle was nervous that the Ford's vacuum brakes might not hold. Doug was sixteen at the time of the founding and a student at Warrenton High School. (He was doing a post-graduate year after graduating from Hanley High



FIRST TRUCK SEPT 1940