

REDD FAMILY HERITAGE - The Story of the Purple Periscope - 1996

By Earl W. Redd

For many years Gigi Redd had a purple, sequin-decorated periscope among the toys she kept around the house for use by little visitors. But, do you know where such a nutty thing for a great-grandmother to have come from?

For about 10 or 12 years I worked in the plastics fabrication business in Los Angeles. I was the purchasing agent and bought most of the machinery, equipment, and materials. The company, Leed Insulator Company, was one of the major fabricators in Southern California of plastics for the aircraft, electronics, and other commercial industries. When quantities of plastic parts were needed by these industries, and the quantities were smaller than would merit the use of molded parts, Leed would fabricate the parts on conventional machine shop equipment---lathes, drill presses, routers, sanders, etc.

One of the owners, Ira Sankey, loved to go to auctions to buy surplus materials and equipment. When he would go to the auctions we all knew that often he would come back with some beat-up machine of some sort, some materials that could be used in the fabrication process, desks, filing cabinets, or whatever he thought was a good deal.

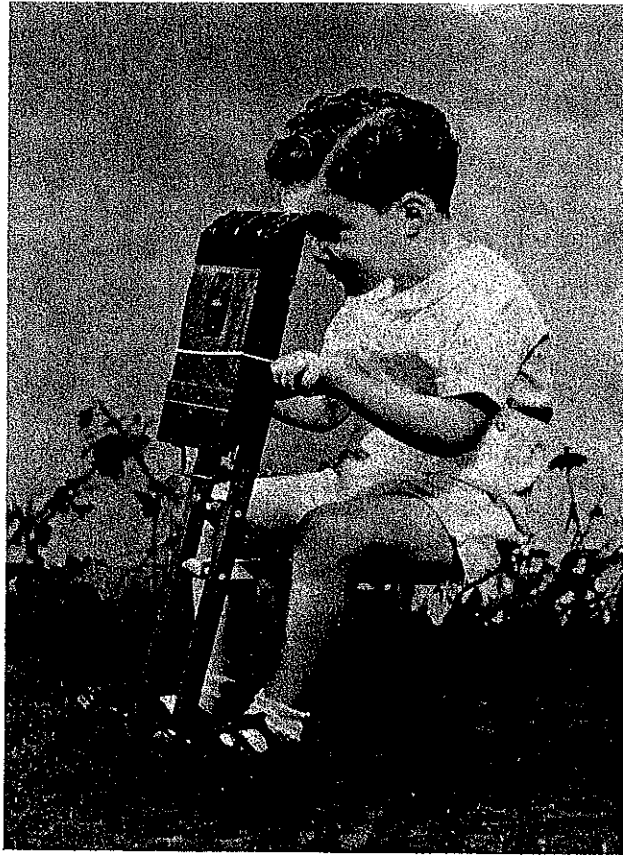
One day he left for an auction and came back to tell us that he had purchased 10,000---yes, ten thousand---surplus military tank periscopes. The periscopes were made of a solid piece of plexiglas (acrylic) about 1-1/2" x 6" x 10", had a stainless steel band around them, and a mounting screw on the stainless band that was used to attach them inside the tank. On each end of the plastic was a mirror attached at a 45 degree angle. When you looked into one mirror, the light traveled through the plexiglas and out the other side. The idea was that the guys in the tank could see out through the periscope while still "safely" inside the tank. Sankey paid \$0.60/each, a total of \$6,000.00.

These periscopes were in boxes of about 25 or 30, were each packed in a waterproof package, and then in a wooden box with all the military names and numbers all over it. They were very heavy. I remember on many, many occasions of having to move them from one place to another when we needed more room for legitimate fabricating areas or for material storage. We used a fork lift to move them. We finally moved them to an outside storage yard that Sankey purchased---basically for the purpose of storing the periscopes. You can figure out about how many of these wooden boxes there were. Sankey tried to sell them, tried to figure out ways to fabricate things out of them, etc., but all it seemed to us was that he only bought them so we could have opportunities to move them around every once in a while!!

Gigi was always interested in things that we were doing and one day I brought one of the periscopes by her house and we had fun looking through it, looking around doors and over tables, and playing around with it. I knew she really liked it, so on one of her birthdays or Christmas or something, I painted the stainless steel part purple, added some glitter, and she was more than thrilled and delighted to be the only (as far as we know) grandmother and/or great-grandmother who had her own periscope---a purple one!!

About the time of the war between Israel and Egypt---I can't remember the date---some Jewish men came and bought most of the ones that were still there. I assume they had tanks in Israel that needed that model of periscope. They paid something like \$10.00 or \$15.00 each for 3 or 4 thousands of them and Sankey had the last laugh!!

I found the picture below in a magazine recently. The article was about military surplus materials and what people bought this surplus material for.



Sales ingenuity reached some kind of apogee with an attempt to adapt tank periscopes to kiddie-cars.