

# SAGA OF THE LIBERTY BELL

by Lester David

**S**USPENDED from its original timbers hewn from a slippery elm, the treasured bronze symbol of freedom now stands like a motionless sentinel, facing the hall where it rang out the news of American independence.

Once it hung in the steeple of that square brick building a few hundred meters away — Independence Hall — where it pealed joyously on July 8, 1776, when the US Declaration of Independence was first read in public.

For almost a century after that, it marked all the great moments in American history. In 1781, it rang when the British surrendered at Yorktown. It tolled mournfully with muffled clapper at the deaths of presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. It heralded the inaugurations of 11 presidents.

It is the Liberty Bell Housed since 1976 in a shiny plate-glass pavilion at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the bell startles visitors by its surprisingly small size. Weighing just over a ton, Liberty is only 1.58 meters high and measures 3.6 meters around the lip, the widest part.

It is dwarfed by other famous bells. The Czar Kolokol in the Kremlin, the world's largest, is 5.7 meters and weighs 180 tons, with a circumference of 18.3 meters. The Burma Bell on Minguon is a 100-ton giant; a bell near Beijing, China, is 53 tons; and "Big Ben" atop the Houses of Parliament in London weighs 13.5 tons.

Still another surprise is that, contrary to popular belief, the bell was not born in America. Although it is now inextricably linked with the American fight for independence, the bell was in the colonies, and being used, al-

most a quarter of a century before the Revolutionary War.

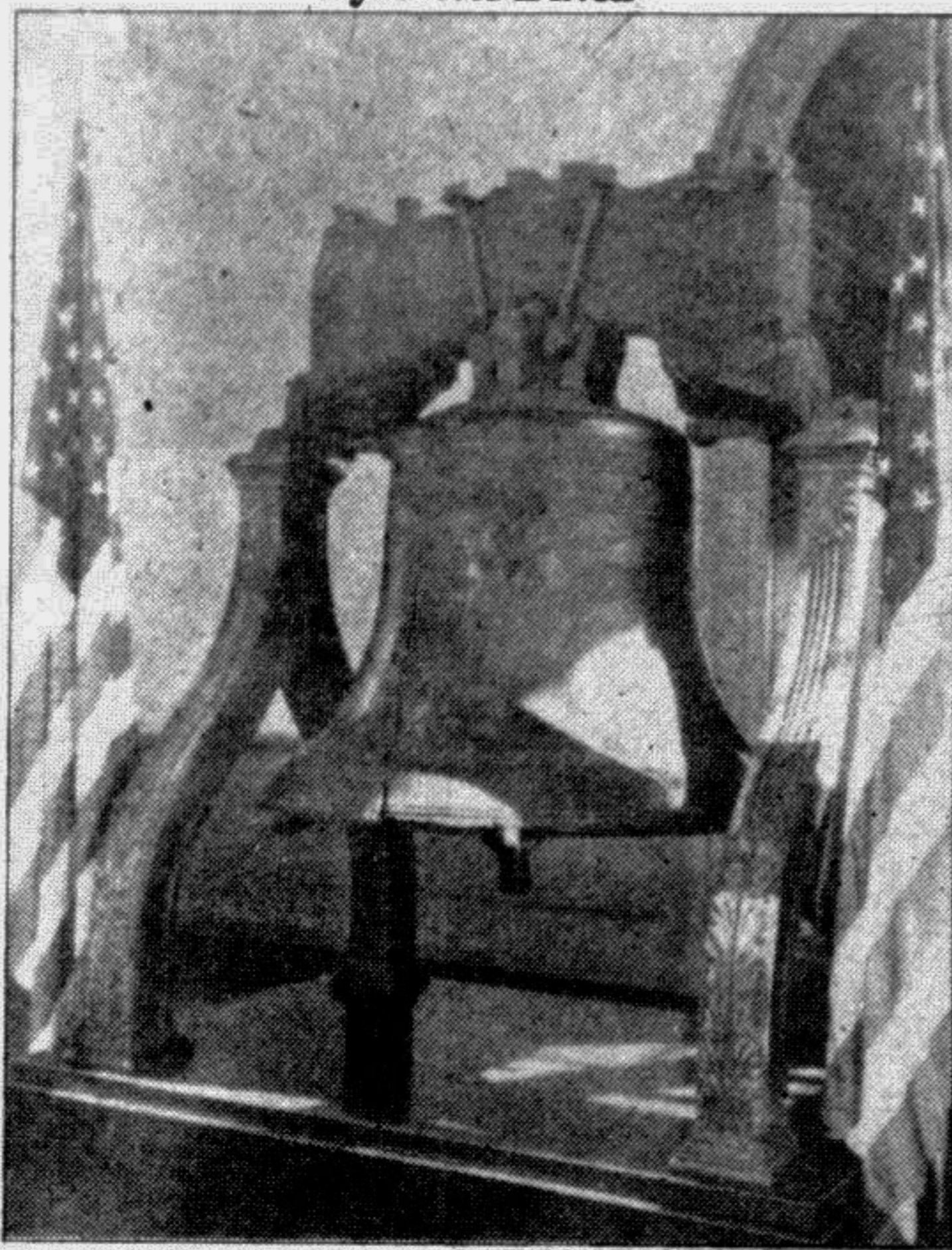
And what's more, it wasn't made in North America at all, but cast in Britain and shipped ocean.

Its story begins in Britain where bells were rung traditionally to signal important events. William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, continued the custom in the New World. On the branch of a large tree outside the meeting house of the Pennsylvania colonial assembly in Philadelphia, he hung small bell which convened the assembly and the Courts of Justice, warned of fire, and called the colonists together for the reading of proclamations.

As Pennsylvania grew, construction began on a new and larger State House, the building that before long would be enshrined in history. By 1750, a wooden steeple had been added and the little bell was hung there.

Sadly, its sound was far too soft to be heard throughout the city. The following year, the assembly ordered Isaac Norris, Thomas Leech and Edward Warner, superintendents of the State House, to obtain a larger one. They sent a letter to Robert Charles, the assistant provincial agent for Pennsylvania, in London. "We take the liberty to apply ourselves to thee to get us a good bell of about 2,000 pounds (one ton) weight," the superintendents wrote. They asked that the bell be cast with an inscription from Leviticus 25:10: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all the inhabitants thereof."

That famous inscription, still on the bell, was not meant to denote America's freedom from England. A Charter of Privileges had been granted to



The Liberty Bell, the symbol of the American Revolution, has been rung to mark many important events in American history. The bell, now housed at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was rung in 1776 to announce the public reading of the newly signed Declaration of Independence.

the people of Pennsylvania and Delaware by William Penn, giving the assembly greater legislative powers. The bell was actually intended to commemorate the 50th anniversary of that charter. Following instruction set

forth in the latter, agent Charles selected the White-chapel Bell Foundry of London for the job, and master founder Thomas Lester began work to design and cast the bell.

In mid-summer of 1752, after an 11-week journey

across the Atlantic in unusually rough seas, the bell arrived at the port of Philadelphia. Uncreated in Independence Square, it looked bright and shiny, and surely capable of being heard for miles. A small band of beaming city officials gathered around, waiting to hear it ring out.

The clapper was struck, but disaster followed. At the very first stroke against the metal, a small but only too evident crack appeared at the rim.

Still, all was not lost. Two Philadelphia foundrymen, John Pass and John Stow, were recruited to recast the bell at their foundry on Second Street. A mold was made of the original, which was then broken up and melted down, and Pass and Stow combined the old metal with copper to improve the sound and strength.

For weeks the new bell, the date now changed to 1753 and the names of Pass and Stow replacing the original, founders, was carefully scrutinized and tested.

On March 29, workmen began raising it into the tower, a job that took 19 days. Philadelphians, however, still complained about the tonal quality of the bell. It was brought down for another recasting and raised into the tower again in early June. Metallurgically, it consisted of 70 per cent copper, 25 per cent tin, two per cent lead, 1.7 per cent zinc, 2.5 per cent arsenic, two per cent silver and trace elements of gold, magnesium, nickel and antimony.

For almost a century, it rang frequently. It summoned members of the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly to meetings, and delegates who did not appear within a half hour of the pealing were fined.

The bell tolled upon the death of King George II in 1760 and the accession of George III to the British throne the following year. It was rung when Ben Franklin was sent to England by the assembly to voice colonial grievances. The bell also heralded the closing of the Port of Boston, the start of the Revolutionary War at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts and the convening of the Second Continental Congress to appoint George Washington to command the army. During the war, it was taken to Allentown, Pennsylvania, and hidden beneath the floor of a church.

Nobody really knows for sure when or how the bell cracked again, although it is now generally believed to have

In Windsor, Connecticut, at a large public meeting some days before the 1876 Fourth, the town gratefully accepted the offer of residents of the "Rainbow and Poquonock section of Windsor" to provide a "grand centennial picnic to be held on the Broad Street green." A public invitation was issued to "all inhabitants of Windsor, irrespective of color, age, condition or peculiarity of political and religious opinions." The host citizens busied themselves renting tents and tables and arranging for music, bell ringing, cannon firing and fireworks. Women from many sections of Windsor joined in to prepare food.

A newspaper reported on July 3 that everybody in Windsor was going to pray that night for good weather. The next morning "the sun rose on a cloudless day" that began with cannon fire on Plymouth Meadow and an hour of bell ringing. Broad Street green and all surrounding buildings were decorated with flags, banners, flowers, and red, white and blue drapery. The several "main events" of the day varied from "a grand cavalcade of fantastics, representing all the characters, hideous and otherwise, that ever existed" to a parade of huge decorated carriages — one large enough to hold 66 passengers — carrying citizens including 50 young women representing the state and military war veterans. Each event was preceded by music, much of which was vocal, with the audience joining in.

After the official programme, an enormous picnic meal was served in a tent seating a thousand.

For over a century following 1776, fireworks were a major part of every Glorious Fourth celebration. Only gradually did the population become aware of how many persons inexperienced in handling fireworks were being killed and injured and how many fires were being started. Nevertheless, the move for "a safe and sane Fourth" did not gain much headway until the *Chicago Tribune* began to collect statistics and demand a safer way of celebrating. It took a few years for the campaign to be effective, but it did succeed. The loss of life by fireworks fell from 466 in 1903 to 215 in 1909; there were, however, nearly 5,000 injured by fireworks in that period, the majority by giant firecrackers. In 1903, Springfield, Massachusetts, forbade the sale of fireworks entirely, with the result that there were no deaths, injuries or fires on the Fourth.

Some old-timers complained that they longed for the "old, freewheeling, exciting, 24 hours of nonstop noise and fire," but nobody paid any attention. Thanks to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, Americans had the right to complain if they chose, and their fellow citizens had a right to ignore those complaints if they considered that the right thing to do. Happy Birthday, America!

Peggy Robbins has been writing about America's cultural and military heritage for more than 30 years.

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## Development Assistance

Continued from page 10

In 1976, reflect USAID's long involvement in the development of agricultural research capabilities. Over the past 15 years, USAID projects have trained hundreds of scientists to develop more productive crop varieties and cultivation practices. Near-landless men and women have learned to raise fish in abandoned ponds, and USAID projects are training agricultural extension workers and even family planning workers in homestead gardening techniques. These workers have transferred this technology to landless women.

Rural finance and financial sector reform programmes emphasize policy reforms aimed at savings mobilization, changes in the interest rate structure, loan administration reform including an effective system to encourage prompt repayment of loans, and institutional strengthening of participating banks.

USAID funds have financed irrigation pumps, feasibility studies, training, rural roads construction and agro-climatic monitoring. Road maintenance projects have improved access to rural areas, thereby contributing to the overall socio-economic improvement of those areas.

Upgrading Bangladesh's capability to obtain, analyze and disseminate data on the local environment relating to agriculture, meteorology, forestry, fisheries and eco-systems is another important USAID objective. The Space Research and Remote Sensing Organization (SPARRSO) was created in part through USAID funding and has proven itself a key asset for predicting and tracking cyclones and other weather hazards.

**Rural Industries/Employment:** Unemployment and underemployment in rural Bangladesh can be addressed by increasing off-farm employment through rural industries.

The Enterprise Development projects, initiated in 1986, assists the Micro-Industries Development Assistance Society (MIDAS) in providing small loans to private entrepreneurs for setting up innovative and export-oriented industrial enterprises. Funding also supports the recently initiated Women's Enterprise Development project, MIDAS, initially a project of the Asia Foundation, is developing into a development finance institution with its own resources as well as support from other donors.

Other USAID projects are intended to support, and ex-

pand efforts to develop the Bangladesh private sector and increase employment by expanding the size and number of private enterprises, especially those employing labour-intensive technologies.

**Energy:** New requirements brought on by Bangladesh's population expansion are gradually depleting traditional energy sources and damaging the environment. USAID is assisting the Bangladesh Government in developing new energy sources and improving the management of existing activities. US assistance helps improve the generation and distribution of electricity and provides for research on energy policy and maintenance studies on existing generating units. During the 1970s, USAID financed the installation of a 50 MW generating unit at the Karnaphuli Power Station at Kapital.

Since 1976, when only 3% of the rural areas of Bangladesh had electricity, USAID has made a long term \$34.0 million loan and \$142.779 million grant available for the Rural Electrification Board (REB) to provide electrification at reasonable rates in rural Bangladesh. Under the programme, approximately 610,000 domestic connections have been provided and 8775 irrigation pumps and 29,000 small commercial and industrial units have been electrified in the 17 Palli Bidyut Samity (PBSs), now reaching 40% of the rural population. By the year 2000, most of rural Bangladesh will have access to electricity.

**Disaster Relief:** USAID funded relief and rehabilitation efforts during the post-war recovery period, after the 1974 floods, in support of the Arakanese Refugees Relief efforts, for the 1985 cyclone victims and 1987 and 1988 flood victims. Most recently, for the 1991 cyclone, USAID provided \$4,662,000 for disaster grants to NGOs and the purchase of ORS and water purification tablets.

**Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs):** Assistance through PVOs to implement rural development, health, and women in development activities started in 1972 with the relief and reconstruction phase of US assistance and has been expanding since then. The Private Rural Initiatives Project, an on-going USAID initiative, is aimed at supporting US and Bangladeshi PVOs to improve their management and strategic planning capacity by obtaining technical assistance, funding support organizations and networks.

## Glorious Fourth

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A great fireworks display was viewed by more than 10,000.

Glorious Fourth celebrations throughout the nation largely embraced the same general events — parades, gun salutes, bands, speeches, patriotic songs, ball games, dinners and picnics, and fireworks displays — but from time to time and place to place, unusual features were enjoyed. In rural areas, watermelon-eating and pie-eating contests, potato-sack races and greased-pig-catching competitions were popular. In some towns, children paraded on decorated bicycles and adults raced bicycles; in a few areas of the West, rodeo exhibitions and competitions were the big attraction. In all communities it was considered a great honour to be chosen as the main speaker of the day; each year, Daniel Webster left whatever duties he was occupied with at the time in Washington, DC, and hurried back to his home town, Salisbury, New Hampshire, to deliver a two-hour oration.

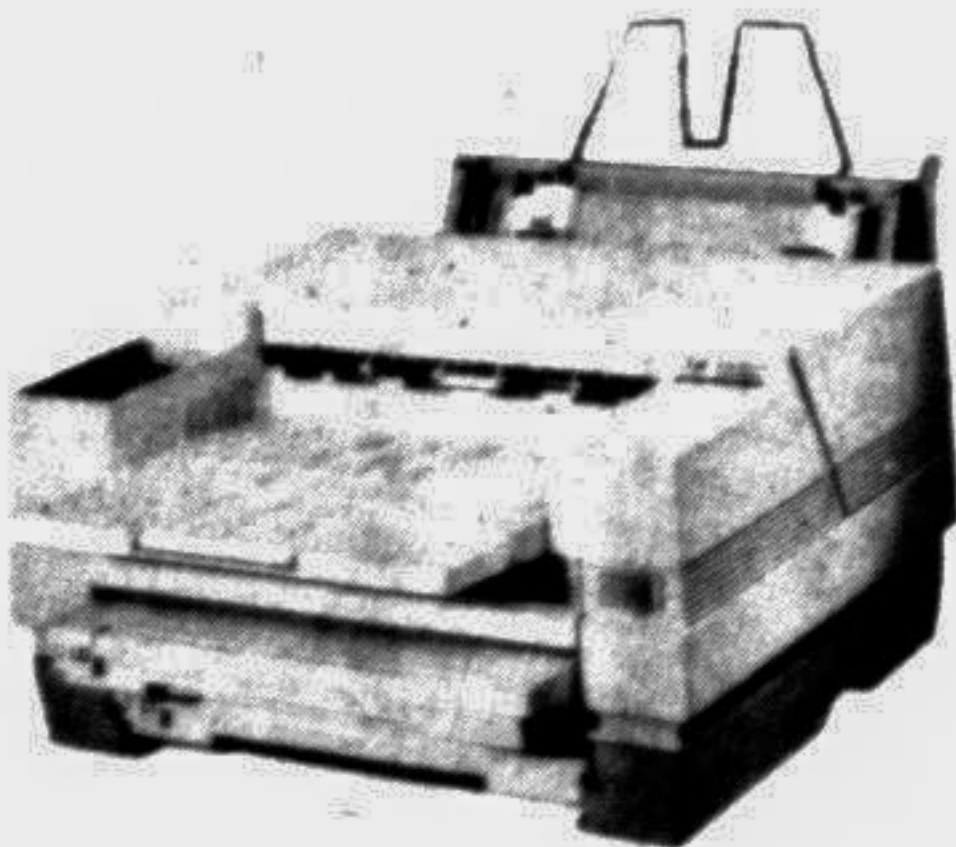
The town of Litzitz, in eastern Pennsylvania, developed a particularly beautiful manner of observing the Fourth. Each

winter the residents made thousands of tallow candles in tin molds and saved them until the following July to illumine Litzitz Spring Park on the evening of the Fourth after the afternoon Baby Parade. In that parade many young children, all dressed in patriotic costumes, rode around the park on small, decorated floats. As darkness approached, boys lit the candles, many of which were set afloat, and songs and speeches and "playing in the Park in candlelight" continued into the night.

On July 4, 1826, exactly 50 years after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, both Thomas Jefferson, the chief designer of the document, and John Adams, the man who was so confident that it would forever be celebrated, died. (Jefferson, at his Virginia home, Monticello, died a few hours before Adams, in Quincy, Massachusetts. Adams was reported to have exclaimed just before he died, "Thomas Jefferson still survives!") The deaths of these survivor of the signers, said a Boston resident, turned the patriotic observance "into a sad time of mourning as well as of

Heartiest felicitations on the Independence Day of the United States of America

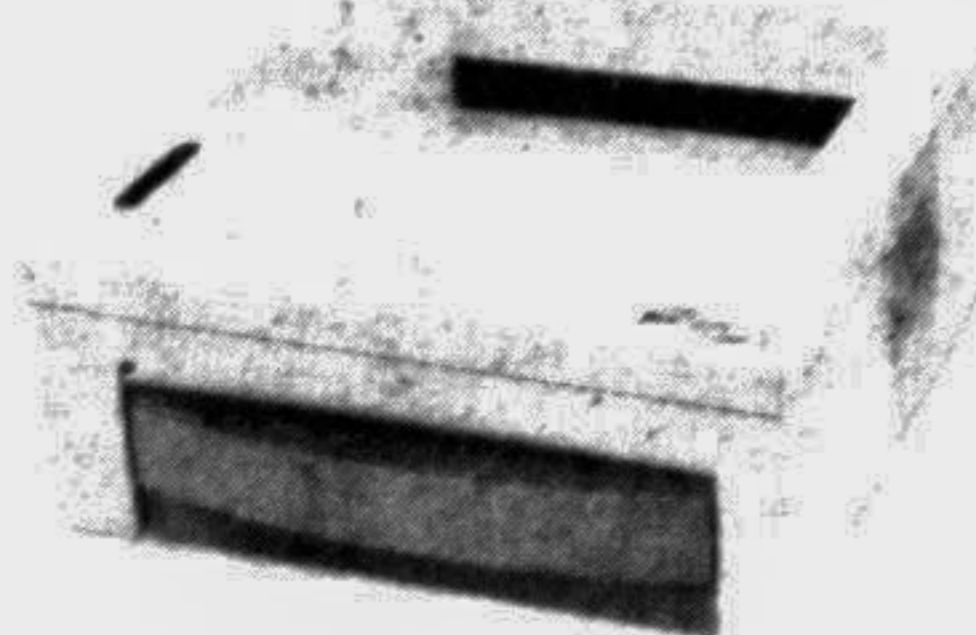
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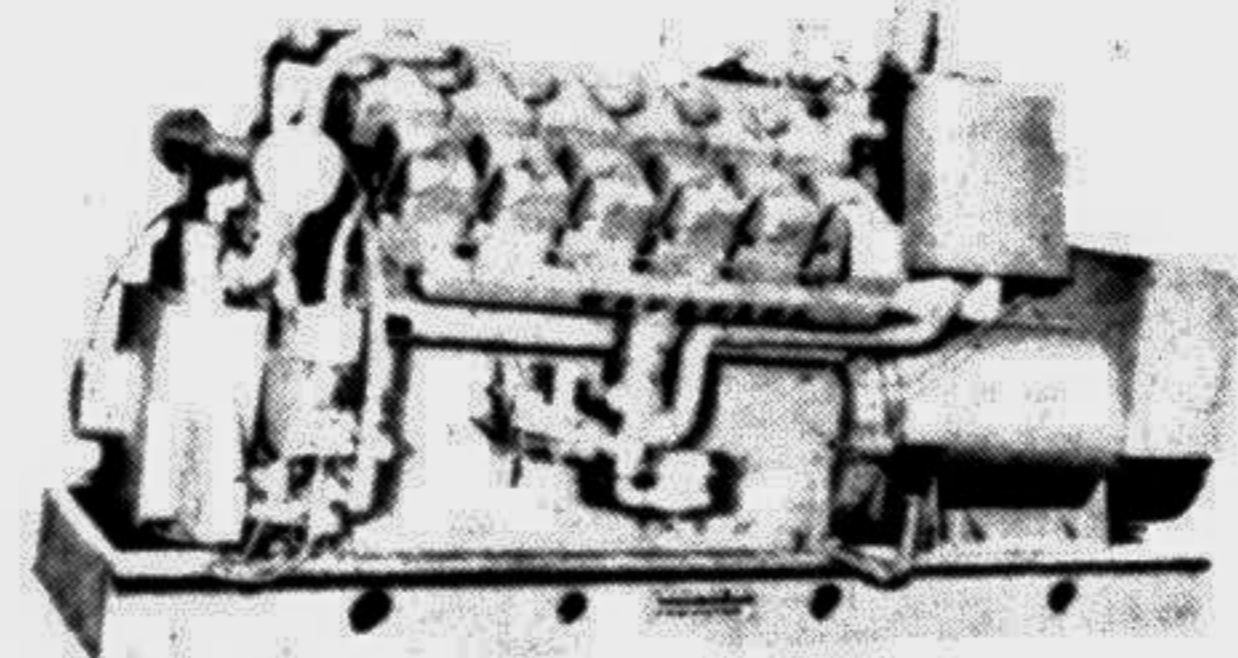
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