

Without any Trace

Investigating the disappearance of Victor Deissler
Owner & operator of Deissler Machine Company

Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, mother of President John F. Kennedy, was no stranger to family tragedy. When asked about all the sorrow her family had endured, she responded,

*“It has been said, ‘time heals all wounds.’ I do not agree. The wounds remain. In time, the mind, protecting its sanity, covers them with scar tissue and the pain lessens. But it is never gone”.*¹

One finds a great deal of truth and wisdom in Mrs. Kennedy’s response. There are injuries to one’s family that continually resist healing. This is especially so when a family member vanishes. Perhaps the need for closure or resolution perpetuates the hope that someday, a missing loved one will return by some miracle. Eventually, family members are forced to accept the finality of the missing.

Seventy-five years have passed since the night Victor Deissler disappeared. Authorities were unable to resolve the case, which suffered increasing competition from the daily news updates on the war raging in Europe and its impact on the United States. Within the year, the US would be absorbed by World War II.

After approximately three weeks of diminishing evidence in the Deissler case, authorities finally conceded they had reached a “dead end.” The final disposition of the case was simply one more unsolved missing person. As each painful day built upon the next, scar tissue slowly covered the wound of this unsolved mystery until almost all recollection of events passed from conscious memory. Yet, as Mrs. Kennedy noted, the wound remained.

However, no one living in 1941 could have anticipated the impact future technology would play in providing the research tools to examine evidence. This crucial investigative ability was not available to the authorities of the past. By today’s standards, the detective of the early 1940s lacked crucial evidence-gathering technology and the ability to see the relationships between disjointed facts spread over various locations.

¹ <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/35162.html>

Evidence persisting in the form of newspaper articles can now be located, collected, and analyzed with advanced techniques. Armed with this arsenal of technology and information access, it is possible to theorize a plausible motive for Victor's mysterious disappearance. Once a motive is established, logical deduction reconstructs events offering an explanation of what might have happened on a cold, dark, February night in 1941.

The following is therefore based on speculation after reexamination of evidence provided by investigators at the time of Victor's disappearance. In the final analysis, Victor's ingenuity and savvy business sense might have been both his strength and the very thing that led to his demise. What becomes obvious in today's analysis was overlooked by authorities investigating the disappearance of the owner and operator of the Deissler Machine Company.

Greenville, a small borough in western Pennsylvania, had a population of 10,000 in 1941. Centrally located between Cleveland and Pittsburgh, it was known for its manufacturing interests, railroad shops, bridge works, and gristmills — the ideal environment for an enterprising young man to build his future.

Young Victor Deissler demonstrated his ingenuity and business success from the very beginning with a tiny machine shop set up in his garage. From this humble start, he built up his business through innovative ideas that were recognized by Westinghouse Corporation. After entering into a distributor relationship with Westinghouse, he availed himself to training in the compressor and cooling engineering studies provided by the company. While selling refrigerators and compressor equipment, he made a name for himself in the town and was quickly regarded as a community leader. Victor Deissler promoted his business with weekly advertisements in the local *Record Argus* newspaper.

Deissler Machine Company Business

The earliest evidence of the Deissler Machine Shop is found in the October 21, 1926 edition of the *Record Argus*, Greenville's town newspaper. This shop was owned and operated by 27 year old Victor G. Deissler. Little is known about this period of time for the young Deissler family. Their oldest son, Robert, was 5, and they had just added a new baby girl, Dorothy, to the family on March 15th of that year. The U.S. economy was prospering after the Great War's end and Victor took advantage of developing markets to expand his machine shop into a commercial business. He had apparently learned about refrigeration from his association with Westinghouse. He became a distributor for Westinghouse brand refrigerators, so it's clear that his company had an early alliance with the Westinghouse refrigeration division. By June 1, 1927, the business's name changed to "The Deissler Machine Company".

A notable business in the Greenville area, the Deissler Machine Company participated in holiday celebrations and events.



The following photograph was taken on August 27, 1938 of the second annual Deissler Machine Company picnic. Little did they know there would be but 2 more picnics before the company would no longer exist.

Within this photo are Victor Deissler (top row, sixth from the left), his wife Helen Deissler (standing to her husband's right), and their children Robert (top row, third from the left) and Dorothy (bottom row, third from the right). Frank Deissler, Victor's father, stands on the top row, extreme right.



Deissler Machine Company
End Annual Picnic
Riverside Park Aug. 27, 1938

From 1927 until his disappearance in 1941 – fourteen short years – Victor grew his company from a garage machine shop² to one employing 30 people. This is a sizable accomplishment in itself. However, the Deissler Machine Company was expanding its business and in the process of building a larger plant in Osgood, just north of Greenville.

Victor probably never fully realized the potential of his revolutionary business product—the 4 cycle refrigerator compressor—and the lucrative Coca-Cola beverage market. Coupled with his established partnership between Westinghouse Corporation, a giant manufacturing and business conglomerate of the day, and Vendo Company, the creator of the “Red Top” vending dispenser, he developed and produced a cooling unit for the Coca-Cola machine that totally eliminated the need for ice or an attendant.



It is not clear whether or not Victor knew, but Vendo Company would soon be negotiating a contract to supply 5000 “Red Top” vending machines to the United States military. History records that Coca-Cola was deemed essential to support the soldier’s morale. Victor and his company could have been catapulted into the history books of entrepreneurs whose ideas had intersected with opportunity like a surfer finding the crest of a great wave. That opportunity could have carried him to unimaginable fortune. Already seeing the upswing of business prospects after the harsh economic drought of the previous decade, Victor had broken ground for a new, larger manufacturing facility in neighboring Osgood. The company was one month away from moving into the new plant when Victor Deissler vanished without a trace.

² Greenville *Record Argus*, Feb 3, 1941



On January 18, 1941, Victor Deissler, his father Frank and shop foreman Kenneth Unger had returned from an air conditioning trade show, a national affair held in Chicago, Illinois. A good deal of preparation was necessary to transport several different models of compressor equipment for display at this trade show. The following photographs taken in Chicago demonstrate a line of products that were manufactured by Deissler Machine Company, including the Coca-Cola “Red Top” Westinghouse cooler located on the right side of the photograph. This photograph clearly depicts the white lettering of the Coca-Cola brand.



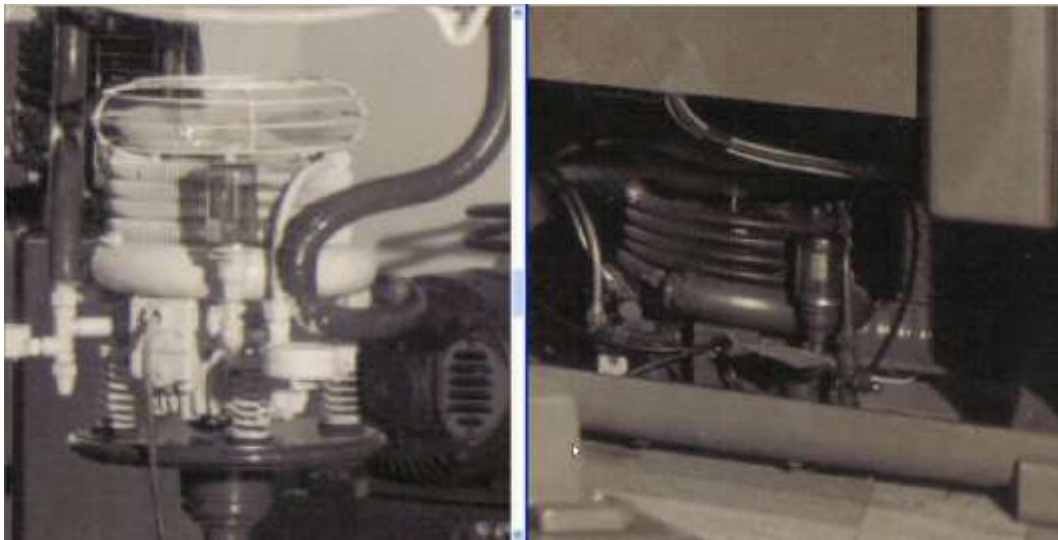
Victor’s trade mark D-ICE-LER was a clever advertising idea incorporating the concept of frosting over the top of the letters “ICE” tied to the phonetic sound of his last name “Deissler”.



As seen here, Victor demonstrates a table top model of his “DICELER” 4-cycle compressor, which causes moisture in the air to condense and frost ICE on the tubing that forms the company logo.

In this black and white photograph, Victor is seen wearing a pinstripe suit. A similar suit was described as being found in his Cadillac the night of his disappearance.

The photos below compare a close-up of Victor’s table top compressor to an enlarged view of the lower portion of the Coca-Cola “Red Top” vending machine at the Chicago trade show. Indeed, these were the same units being supplied by the Deissler Machine Company for the Westinghouse—coolers manufactured for the Coca-Cola bottling company.



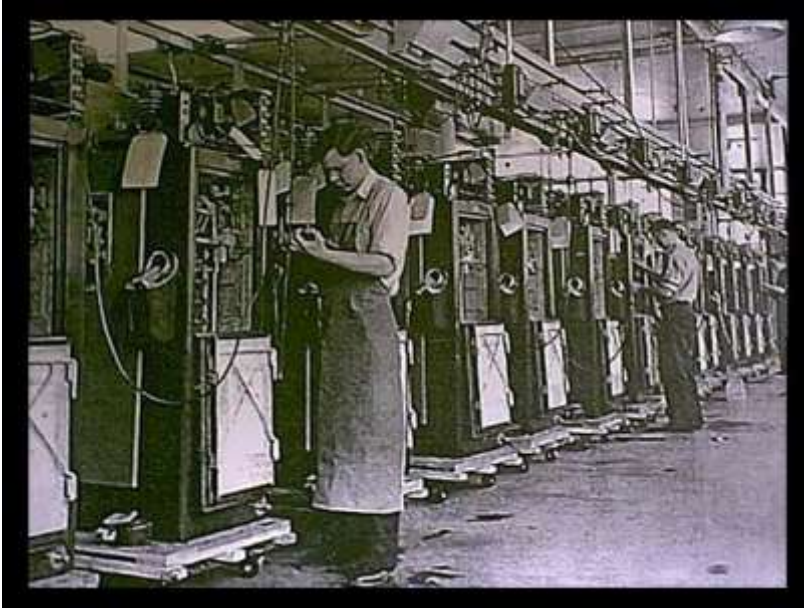
But one must wonder. What caused the expression that both Victor and Frank Deissler seem to share in this trade show photograph below?



Clearly, they knew their photograph was being taken. They had spent a great deal of time, energy and effort preparing for the trade show. Had they just received distressing news? Or were they facing some type of challenge? No one will ever know for sure. But one thing is certain. When this picture was taken, neither was happy.

Is it possible that Victor and Frank Deissler received a proposition by a representative from a competitor who wanted to buy them out? Was a threat made against their business? Did someone try to muscle Deissler Machine Company out of the Coca-Cola franchise? Victor had just invested and financed a brand new plant in Osgood that was due to be operational in the next 6 weeks. Certainly he could not have backed out from completing it. The expressions captured in this photograph lead one to suspect that something happened at this trade show, depressing Victor and angering Frank Deissler. Two weeks after this trade show, Victor Deissler was never seen again.

Reviewing other pieces of data surrounding this investigation, a picture of intrigue begins to form. The key evidence for this assumption comes from what was strewn on the floor of Victor's car when it was found abandoned in Youngstown, Ohio. Along with Victor's clothing, wallet and identification, there were **several** brochures from the Mills Novelty Company — a Chicago manufacturer of coin vending controls such as those used in slot machines and automated vending apparatus. The authorities conducting the investigation assumed these brochures were simply brought back by Victor from the recent Chicago trade show. Our theory is that they were not. Why would Victor gather up several copies of his competitor's brochures? Obviously, he would not be inclined to distribute advertisements from one of his rivals. Yet, why would a handful of these be found in the car? More importantly, who left them?



The Mills Company had recently spent a half-million dollars building a new, state-of-the-art manufacturing plant to produce their Coca-Cola model 47 vending machine.

Investigation into the early years of the Mills Novelty Company reveals a business closely associated with the mafia crime syndicate. As a vendor of slot machine control units, the Mills Novelty Company held patents for the majority of slot machines throughout the United States. Due to the gambling aspect, the mafia became interested in and established a business partnership with Mills Novelty Company. Prohibition had provided the mafia with the opportunity for bootlegging alcohol, and it served as a major source of revenue in the 1920s. Once the law was repealed, the mafia needed a new source of revenue and saw an opportunity within the slot machine business.³

Coming from small-town Greenville, Victor had no knowledge or experience with organized crime. To his misfortune, he had just participated in a trade show, displaying his innovative compressor unit to the very competitor who feared introduction of a new 4-cycle compressor. The Mills Novelty Company was also a supplier of vending equipment to Coca-Cola since 1935. Having spent a half-million dollars on a plant to supply their own proprietary compressors for the Model 47 Coca-Cola machine, the Mills Novelty Company may have seen the sudden appearance of Deissler's pioneering 4-cycle compressor, coupled with the Vendo "Red Top" unit and backed by Westinghouse's established reputation and financial resources, as a grave threat to a lucrative business venture — supplying Coca-Cola vending machines.

The stakes were high and action had to be taken swiftly to extinguish the threat to the Mills Novelty Company's empire. Westinghouse, by its own

³ <http://www.crimemagazine.com/kastel.htm>

monolithic size, was too large to take on. Vendo while smaller, was a direct competitor and had several executives managing the company. However, the Deissler Machine Company had one key point of failure: its owner and operator, Victor Deissler.

One supposition is that during the trade show, Victor was made an offer to either give up his compressor design, or by some means, remove his company from supplying this item to Westinghouse. However, Victor refused the proposition. An experienced businessman, he did not fear competition from other suppliers. Additionally, Deissler Machine Company stood to lose a great deal of capital from Westinghouse if Victor were to withdraw from his business agreement with them.

Failing to convince Victor to sell his compressor or withdraw from supplying it to Westinghouse, the Mills Novelty Company may have resorted to the last option available: eliminate the competition. It would have been nothing personal against Victor, but simply a matter of business. As is common in these instances, perhaps a contract was negotiated between the regional crime syndicates and the job given to a local branch of the family. Greenville is located close to Youngstown, Ohio, a city that would later bear the nickname “Murdertown, USA” in light of numerous contract killings.

More than a simple murder was required to paralyze the competition. If Victor’s body were found, the sense of closure might cause an associate to take over as his successor and swiftly resume normal business operations. A disappearance, on the other hand, would be devastating. Mysterious and inconclusive, the loss of Deissler Machine Company’s owner, operator, and driving force would have caused operations to stop until his whereabouts could be ascertained. Additionally, unless a body is found, there can be no prosecution of a crime.

The plan had the desired effect. Six months of Victor’s disappearance, the company was bankrupt. All assets, machines, patents, and the logo for Deissler Machine Company were auctioned in August 1941.

The following description of events is a fictional recreation of what could have transpired the night of February 2, 1941. All details are based on known evidence attained at the time, stitching facts together with speculation. We will never know for certain how Victor’s disappearance was orchestrated. Only one person knew the actual details of Victor’s last hours on earth. After 75 years, this murderer is most likely dead himself.

It does not take much imagination to put yourself in Victor’s shoes that night. Alone, on a cold, dark winter night – with circumstances beyond his control – he endured a surreal experience that he simply wanted to survive in order to get back to his family, business, and life.

Join me now for a reenactment of what might have transpired so long ago for a man who has slipped into the whispers of history.

Returning home after a long drive through New York State, Victor entered the familiar downtown business district of Greenville. It was Sunday, February 2, 1941, around 6:30 in the evening. He had been absent since Friday on a business trip that took him through Buffalo, Elmira, and Cornell, in New York.

Having left Cornell in the morning on his way to Buffalo, he had driven 6 hours straight through the winding roads of New York to Erie, then turned due south toward home. He made good time and could still expect to have dinner waiting for



him if he didn't make any unnecessary stops along the way. Victor had promised Helen he'd be home for dinner that evening when he called her from a pay phone in Buffalo, and he was happy to have kept his promise.

As he turned right, easing the car into his driveway, the headlights washed over the contours of his home at 115 Plum Street. His car lunged slightly upward as it

Identical model year 1941 Cadillac Fleetwood

overcame the difference in elevation between Plum and the mouth of his driveway. Pulling alongside his home, he stopped in front of the garage, shifted into park, and shut off the engine. The glow of a kitchen light filtered through the side window and provided a dim wash over the driveway, just enough to see the confines of the stone sidewalk leading to the back door of the house. Sunset had come early – just after 5:30 PM in early February – and the air chilled quickly after sundown.

Victor carried \$600, the proceeds from his business trip. Perhaps it was an investment in his revolutionary four-cycle refrigeration compressor, or maybe a down payment for equipment on order with the Deissler Machine Company. It is unlikely that Victor carried this sum of money for travel purposes since the total expenses for a three-day trip would have been less than \$100. So the amount of money was likely a matter of importance



Victor and Helen Deissler's home on Plum Street

for the company. On this point one can only speculate. We may never know the importance of this significant sum. It would disappear later that same evening when an apparent robbery would take place at the Deissler Machine Company.

Around 8:30 PM that evening, Victor told his wife he wanted to take the money to the safe at work. The bank would open on Monday morning and Victor thought it prudent to keep this money someplace safe rather than inside their home. The very fact that it was inside his home incited a fear of crooks trying to break in, jeopardizing the safety of his family. The Deissler Machine Company's office was located on Achre Way, a mere 1 ½ miles from his home, and the streets were deserted for the most part at this time in the evening. Besides, he knew there would be a pile of paperwork setting on his desk, begging for his attention. A quick review might help him organize his day on Monday.

So after dinner, Victor left for "just a little while" and expected to return home in short order. However, it was all too common for Victor to work late into the evening. Time trickled away quickly as Victor put the money in the safe and then picked up the stack of mail and papers.

The night was quiet and cold; the temperature fell to 10 degrees. The waning crescent moon provided little illumination. Snow began silently floating down from the black sky, the crystal flakes so fine that they were noticeable only against the street lights shining down upon Achre Way.

Victor's office chair creaked as his weight shifted and his feet found their familiar spot on the top edge of his desk. He was unaware of a shadowy figure looming outside the back window, straining on tiptoes to gain a better view. Eyes peered through the frosty glass — watching, plotting, formulating the next move.

The phone's shrill ring suddenly broke the silence, startling Victor. Once again, he had surrendered himself to work and forgot his promise to be home soon. It was 10 PM and Helen was checking up on him to see if he was all right.

She asked, "When will you be coming home?" Victor responded, "I'll be along directly." Helen knew the word "directly" meant he was wrapping up whatever he was doing, and she might expect him in the next 15 to 20 minutes. She retired for the evening and went to sleep.

As Victor placed the receiver in the stirrup hanging up the phone, a thudding sound seized his attention. His pulse quickened and he stood at his desk, frozen. Did something fall from the shelf in the front foyer? Perhaps a cat or other animal had found a way into the building and was moving about. Two more thuds! A ripple of tension pulsed down Victor's back.

Standing perfectly still as he waited for this moment to pass, Victor forced a swallow in a parched throat. The watchman didn't work on Sundays. He was alone.

Victor reached for a 30-inch hexagonal iron bar he kept next to his office desk. The night watchman had given this bar to Victor when he realized how many late nights his boss worked. He remembered the watchman's advice: "You should have something to defend yourself if you keep working these long nights, Mr. Deissler. Here's eight pounds of *persuasion* in case you find yourself in an unfriendly

discussion.” Grinning at his own humor, he had propped the iron weapon in the corner beside Victor’s desk.

Victor slowly crept toward the foyer, the iron bar’s cold weight sucking heat from his grip. Reaching the foyer entrance, he turned on the overhead light to illuminate the room. Neatly stacked shipping containers lined the wall by the front door. Nothing seemed to be disturbed; all was quiet. He wondered if someone might be trying to break into his Fleetwood. Crossing the foyer, Victor gripped the doorknob and gave it a slow clockwise turn.

Pushing the door open with his left hand, he walked down the steps exiting the building. As his eyes adjusted to the cold emptiness of the night air, he froze at the sight of a silhouette approaching, silent and ominous. Victor raised the iron bar above his head, threatening serious injury. The figure closed in. The hexagon weapon in Victor’s hand whooshed past the dodging shadow, ripping cold air. He swung a second time to no avail. The figure remained outside the iron bar’s deadly arc.

Victor’s arm ached under the weapon’s weight and inertia. Adrenaline surged through his veins, giving him the strength for one more swing. Another whoosh, another miss. This time the figure stepped into the lunging sweep, wrapping his arm around Victor’s rendering the weapon useless. From Victor’s left unprotected side, a fist landed a jab to the face.

Pain flooded Victor’s sinuses. He tasted blood. His free hand reflexively clapped over his assaulted nose. He felt a brief sense of relief as the iron weight clattered to the ground. The world spun around him, and in a moment, a carpet of fresh snow began soaking cold and wet through his pant legs. Everything was surreal; this couldn’t be happening, but it was.

“Where’s your keys?” demanded the assailant. “You got them?”

Victor’s mind numbed. Covering his bloody nose with his hands, he reasoned, *Give this thief whatever he wants and he’ll go away.*

“They’re in the office!” he responded.

“Fine, then let’s get your keys. I want you to drive me someplace.” The massive assailant grabbed Victor under his arm pit, tugging him up and shoving him back into the foyer. Blood coated Victor’s hands. Its stain smeared the shipping crates that he used to pull himself up.

He staggered toward his office, splotches of blood marking each step. Followed by the menace, he paused over his office desk and regained some composure. Crimson drops fell upon letters and memos on his desk. *What do I do now?*

“Open the safe!” demanded the assailant. “Let’s see what you got.”

Victor collapsed into his chair and turned to open the safe. *Maybe he’ll leave if I give him some money. Yes — that will be the end of this nightmare and I’ll just call the police in the morning.*

The safe door groaned open and the assailant's hands clutched a neatly stacked series of bills. "All right!" He shoved the cash into his jacket pockets. "Okay, get your keys and let's go!"

Victor fought a wave of sickness. *It's not over yet.* Hoping to gain control of the situation, he shouted, "You got what you wanted! Just leave!"

"I need a lift. You're going to drop me off." The steel-blue glint of a revolver convinced Victor he had no other option.

He reached for his jacket on the coat rack but the menace said, "Forget the coat. You won't need it. Just get the keys. You'll drive me where I want to go, and then I'll leave you alone."

Victor finally complied. At 10:30 PM, he plunged back into the freezing 10-degree night, the shadow accompanying his every step. Victor climbed behind the wheel and started the engine.

Deprived of his overcoat, Victor sneezed. Pain pulsed through his bloody nose. A fine red mist spattered the dash and steering wheel. Convinced he would be released by his captor once he drove him to his destination, he made no more attempts to fight the menace. His only thought was getting to the place his assailant wanted him to go: Mahoning Avenue in Youngstown, Ohio.

Under his attacker's instruction, Victor took a 36-mile route that lasted just over an hour. He soon understood why the man had chosen this route: it avoided major towns and cities. A more direct route would have taken them through Transfer, Sharpsville, Sharon, Masury and Hubbard before reaching Youngstown. Had they traveled that way, Victor might have seized the opportunity to signal police or attract a bystander's attention.

At 6:30 the following morning, February 3, Helen awoke and realized that Victor had failed to return from work. Alarmed, she called her father-in-law Frank Deissler and asked him to check on Victor at the plant.

The plant on Achre Way was a little over a mile from Frank's home on Main Street. At the plant, Frank



Likely route driven from Greenville Pa to Youngstown Oh - 1941



discovered the factory doors swinging wide open. A 30 inch long hexagonal steel bar lay by the front entrance. Blood stains hinted at the struggle that had taken place. Crimson streaked the front door and splashed over packing boxes in the foyer and in the office. A grisly combination of blood, papers, and pamphlets covered the office floor. The safe gaped open, its contents removed. Given the disarray, it was immediately apparent that there had been a robbery and altercation at the office. Victor was nowhere to be found, and despite the numbing chill outside, his overcoat was still hanging on a coat rack. Also, Victor's new 1941 Cadillac Fleetwood was missing. An immediate search began for his whereabouts in Greenville and surrounding areas.

Around noon that day, Youngstown police located Victor's Cadillac Fleetwood. Officers on night patrol had spotted an abandoned car sitting in a parking lot at 728 Mahoning Avenue. Upon investigation, they determined that the make, model, and license plates matched the car belonging to Victor Deissler. The doors were unlocked, and the keys were found in the ignition. Witnesses had observed a man with a tan hat, tan overcoat, and medium build park the car at 11:30 the previous evening, and then casually walk up the street - disappearing into the darkness. Hoping to prevent the vehicle from being stolen, officers locked the doors and took the keys to their precinct headquarters.



Once Victor's car had been located, an examination took place. The green pinstripe suit Victor wore on that fateful evening lay in a pile on the backseat floor, along with his empty wallet. A shirt, pajamas and shaving supply kit were also found. Strewn on the car floor were the contents of Victor's wallet and brochures from the Mills Novelty Company, a Chicago manufacturer of coin vending controls such as those used in slot machines and vending machines. Initially, no evidence of physical violence was detected in the automobile. However, later examination conducted by the Pennsylvania State Police found tiny droplets of blood on the steering wheel and dashboard consistent with someone who might have sneezed while in the driver's seat. Examination of fingerprints in the car proved inconclusive, possibly due to the treatment of the vehicle as it was secured by the Youngstown police.

Meanwhile, investigators in Greenville discovered footprints behind the Deissler Machine Company office where someone had peered through a window into the building, then walked around the west side toward the front entrance. Little could be discerned from the single set of tracks since it had snowed lightly during the night. Police feared foul play and a possible abduction of Victor Deissler.

Since evidence indicated that the crime had crossed state lines, the FBI was summoned to investigate. Meanwhile, Youngstown police continued their search of all neighboring hospitals and boarding rooms for any recent activity or emergency cases involving injuries. Additionally, they investigated a nearby railroad station for signs of the missing man. Employees of the Deissler Machine Company assisted local police in searching under bridges and culverts all along possible routes between Greenville and Youngstown, but failed to find their company president and friend.

Youngstown police had two suspects at this point. The first was a man from a local boarding house, and he had an acceptable alibi. The second was a man who had checked into the hospital with substantial wounds. Interviewing the patient, they discovered that he had been in an automobile accident in Patagonia, Pennsylvania, not a brawl. Both suspects were promptly dismissed.

Investigators did receive two reports by persons who believed they had seen Victor Deissler after his disappearance. One sighting occurred at an infirmary (*a government run facility providing healthcare and food to the needy – often referred to as a “poor house”*) some 15 miles from where his car was found that morning. Additionally, a hay hauler told authorities he had picked up a hitchhiker whom he noted as clean-shaven and well dressed. Investigators deemed both accounts unlikely, as there would be no reason for a man with \$600 to eat at a poorhouse, or hitchhike around the area. No additional sightings were reported.

By February 21, all leads in the case had been examined and the detectives believed they had arrived at a dead end. There was no more evidence in the case.

On August 26, 1941, the Deissler Machine Company was auctioned off. All machinery, vehicles, property and patents were sold to a high bidder, L.J. Wiesen, a Sharon, Pennsylvania lawyer. The August 25 *Record Argus* notes Mr. Wiesen represented Greenville interests.

The Deissler Machine Company was no more. In 1948, Victor Deissler was declared legally dead.

Two main theories were proposed to explain the disappearance:

1. Victor abandoned his family and business to escape either a failing business or personal family conflict.

2. Homicide during or after the robbery.

Victor had no motive for abandoning his family or business. In 1937 the Deisslers had lost their young son, Victor Edward Deissler, “Eddie”, in a tragic accident when the six-year-old contracted tetanus from a puncture wound. Such a time demanded family solidarity, and Helen’s diary entries indicated a close, loving relationship in their marriage. Victor was attentive to his wife and family, making candy on some occasions, washing clothes on others.

Victor’s business was doing very well. He was one month away from opening a new factory in Osgood, two miles from Greenville. This plant would expand on current facilities, indicating financial success rather than failure. Victor was well respected in the community and had a reputation that he took great care to guard.

If the motive was to abandon his family, why would he discard all his clothing in his vehicle on a very cold February night?

Clearly, the only reason for removing all clothing and identification was to make it difficult, if not impossible given 1940s technology, to identify a body floating down the Mahoning River.

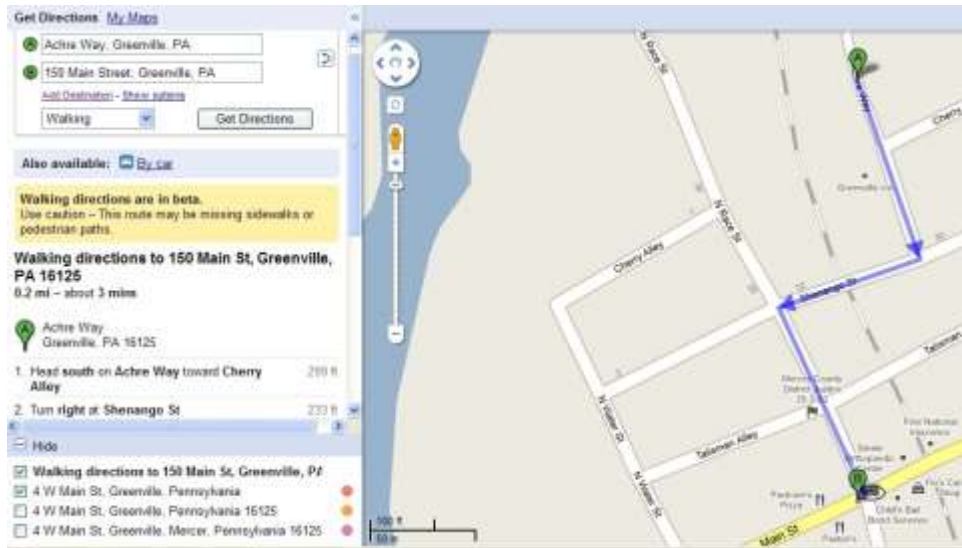
Since his innovative equipment poised a threat to the Mills Novelty Company, the most plausible explanation for his disappearance is a contract killing. Of the three members of the joint venture—Westinghouse, Vendo Company, and Deissler Machine Company—Victor was the smallest and most vital cog. Westinghouse was a megalithic company. The production of the Coke Cooler could not be halted by threat or violence. The Vendo Company, while much smaller, still had 15 executives running the business of 100 employees. Killing key members of this company would have drawn too much attention. Deissler Machine Company held the key to affecting production of the Westinghouse series of Coke machines. Victor was the mind, heart and soul of his business. Eliminating him would strike a serious blow to the Westinghouse venture.

The brochures left on the floor of the car were purposely planted by the murderer as a message and acknowledgement for those who authorized the hit. The killer knew all the information about the car’s contents would be in the newspaper. Mentioning the brochures in the newspaper article provided evidence to whoever ordered the contract—they were a killer’s receipt for services rendered.

The Murderer’s Plan

The theory promoted here is that the killer arrived in Greenville from Youngstown aboard the B&O Railroad passenger service as early as

January 19, 1941. He could have taken a room at the nearby Phillips Hotel, a mere three minute walk from Victor's plant on Achre Way.



As can readily be seen, the railway passed between Race Street and Achre Way. There was also a passenger stop on Main Street. The proximity of the hotel to the Deissler Company provided ample opportunity to observe the victim's habits and plan the crime in advance. Using the B&O Railroad, the assailant would not have required a car to travel between Greenville and his base in Youngstown. It is an interesting observation that this person had Victor drive him, in Victor's car, back to Youngstown. Of course, one would not be able to force the victim aboard a passenger train without being noticed or providing an opportunity for the victim to acquire help from others.

During the week of January 19, the murderer would have observed that Victor frequently worked late into the evening hours. He also would have noted the night guard who patrolled the property. Then, on Sunday, January 26, he saw that Victor was working late despite the guard's absence. Perhaps before he could spring into action, Victor left the building and thwarted the murderer's first chance to strike. However, the pattern was established and the killer knew there would be "other" Sundays of opportunity. He needed only to wait patiently.

Then, the unforeseen occurred when Victor left town on Friday for a business trip. Would another opportunity slip through the assassin's fingers? However, this would not be the case as Victor returned on the very day the killer needed him to. From the murderer's perspective, that Sunday was "lucky" day. He acted swiftly, for he knew that hesitation could once more deprive him of his prey.

A three minute walk from his hotel room placed him within easy striking distance of his target. He crossed a field from Race street—right across the tracks—and approached the Deissler Machine Company building from the west, leaving a single pair of footprints in the newly fallen snow.

Peering into the first floor window, he spied Victor at his desk, reading mail, leafing through papers, and finally having a brief conversation on the phone. Who might he be calling? The assassin didn't know or care, but he had to act quickly once the call ended in case it signaled Victor's imminent departure.

Creeping around to the front of the building, the assailant kicked the front door in hopes of luring his victim. Waiting for a few moments, he kicked once more and then retreated into the shadows. Soon the front door opened and Victor stepped out, brandishing a thirty-inch iron bar. A brief altercation ended with the assailant subduing his victim and controlling the remaining events of that evening.

After forcing Victor to drive to Youngstown, the killer finished his job and disposed of the evidence, leaving his receipt—the Mills Novelty Company brochures—as proof of services rendered.

It is probable that Victor was forced to remove his clothing and identification so that should his body turn up, it would be difficult for police to determine his identity. He may have been either shot or knocked unconscious, and then dumped from a bridge into the Mahoning River.



This narrow iron bridge (*in photo above*) spans the river. It is a short distance (*about 1000 feet*) from where Victor's car was found.

The murderer made only one mistake: the disposal of the car hadn't worked according to plan. He fully expected the car to be stolen by morning by some unsuspecting thief. This area had a heavy crime rate and one didn't have to wait very long for an unlocked car with key in the ignition to be stolen. However, two factors complicated his plan.

First, the temperature was only 10 degrees Fahrenheit that night. There are generally fewer crimes of opportunity committed when the weather is very cold.

Second, due to the increased crime rate, police had stepped up their surveillance of the Mahoning Avenue area. Within 30 minutes of the car being abandoned at 728 Mahoning avenue, a police patrol noticed the new vehicle with Pennsylvania license plates. Finding the car unlocked with the key still in the ignition, they removed the key and locked the doors.

As luck would have it, the appearance of this patrol car kept a critical piece of evidence from being moved. Detectives at the time mentioned how “it was almost as if someone wanted this car stolen.”⁴

Had the car been stolen as planned, the complication would have thoroughly covered up evidence of the location of the murder. He would have successfully moved the incriminating evidence away from himself. Perhaps the car would even be cut up for parts and never found at all.

Witnesses who saw a medium-built man wearing a tan hat and overcoat said he walked up Mahoning Avenue after parking the car. It is unlikely this murderer would have walked a great distance in 10 degree weather. It is therefore logical to assume he lived in this area.

Lacking further evidence—and crucially, a body—the case went cold and remains unsolved to this day.

Considering it has been seventy-five years since Victor Deissler’s disappearance, the scar tissue that Rose Kennedy described has covered this wound. In all probability, the murderer himself is no longer alive. All of the family members directly affected by Victor’s disappearance have passed on and they are together again.

Perhaps it is sufficient that his descendants know he was unwillingly taken from those who loved him, rather than leaving his family in distress. The guilty deprived Victor Deissler of his life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness which is the American dream. Not only was he responsible for this grievous injury to Victor, but also for the pain this crime caused his wife, daughter, son and father.

We therefore trust in God’s judgment and justice. We will remember Victor Deissler as a promising entrepreneur and a dedicated husband, father, and friend to those who knew and loved him.

⁴ *Record Argus* - February 4, 1941 – page 5