After getting out of the navy in 1968 i went back to school in chicago. Not being a scholar i left school to join interstate photo supply midwest in early 1969. My mother had worked there for years as the credit manager. I was hired as a tech rep to introduce the broncolor studio lighting products as well as handle the bauer 16mm projection equipment that were upscale lines imported by allied impex.
I hope the history i give you is accurate.
The company originally was located at 300 park avenue south. They were the sole importers for bauer 8mm products, bauer ultrablitz electronic flash, miranda cameras, soligor lenses. They also imported some other exotic film splicers from germany and small accessory items. The names escape me for the moment.
The men who owned the company were victor silverman and his brother ben and a lovely man name bruno multer who handled the financial side. All were german jews who had escaped the holocaust and run to england with their families just ahead of the nazis and eventually made their way to america. The fourth and most elusive member of the group was another german jewish refugee ralph lowenstein. He was younger than the rest. But he was trusted since he was also of the same cloth as victor, ben and bruno.
At some point they were doing well enough that they took the company public calling it aic photo, inc. They formed allied impex which was the import export arm of the company and allowed for certain profits to be moved between the various divisions. When the company went public they had the money to acquire the ownership of the miranda camera factory in japan. Shortly thereafter the japanese government passed a law outlawing all foreign ownership of japanese companies. Ralph moved to japan to manage the factory. This was the beginning of the end for miranda as ralph did not understand the japanese culture and brought with him the german attitude that he was the boss and they were the workers. Recall this was not that long after the war so the japanese had not really come into their own.
There were also four interstate photo branches that were the sales arms. One in new york, one in chicago, one in dallas and one in l.a. walter director founded the one in chicago, harry porter founded dallas and karl kaufman the one in the los angeles area. There was also an office in germany that was headed by hans gottschalk. I worked for walter director and covered 14 mid-western states trying

to sell upscale bauer 16mm projectors and swiss made broncolor lighting. When the broncolor line and 16mm bauer line were not as successful i became a salesman for the company.

Shortly after joining the company in 1969 bruno multer died. I believe that he was really the financial brains of the company. Victor silverman who was also extremely sharp did not have any of the charm or management skills that bruno had. His younger brother benny was a delightful and personable man who everyone loved. But as i was told he was a plumber when victor brought him into the company. He was married to an english woman who had her own wealth and he was not the brightest guy and nobody ever really knew what he did.

At some point in the early 70's the company was approached by a man offering a new low cost instant camera to compete with polaroid as well as a pocket 110 camera. The 110 camera i did see a prototype of but i never did see the instant camera. Announcements were made, stock soared and nothing happened. A lot of money was spent but the product never materialized. I suspect that ralph lowenstein saw it as a threat to his empire in japan and did nothing to help it. Victor silverman without bruno multer's guidance was sold the emperor's clothing since victor had no technical understanding of any of the products or photography in general he was easily taken in. He was only interested in making the stock price go up. He bet on this product and lost. This was real beginning of the end of aic.

About 1974 walter director was moved back to new york to take over the job of vice president of sales and marketing after a line of outsiders were brought in that had failed because they were unable to tell victor silverman what he wanted to hear. They had told him the truth and victor had his own thoughts that ultimately would end the company. Walter was a real politician and a great ass kisser so he fit right into the picture in carle place.

In 1975 walter brought me to new york to become the product manager for the new soligor electronic flash. Bauer had stopped building the ultrablitz line so we were in the process of developing our own product to compete with the new vivitar 192 the hottest unit on the market. Shortly after arriving in new york the product manager of miranda harold spector left the company so i was given the miranda line and soligor came along with that.

Working in the headquarters office was an enlightening experience to say the least. We dictated letters on a large disk that looked like a 78 record and then gave it to one of two typists who were locked into a small room where all they did was type every letter the company sent out. Often letters would take a day or two to get back. Victor and benny had offices side by side and on more than one occasion they would get into fights. They would scream at each other at the top of their lungs calling each other names. With doors slamming the entire company would go into hiding not knowing what was going to happen next.

There was no true engineering support and all my ideas and direction for the development of the new flash unit was transmitted by teletype to japan. I was never allowed to travel to japan to meet with the engineers. Ultimately we did make the product by copying the vivitar 192. I was involved with the dx-3 from the standpoint that i was the product manager. But in name only. The camera was being developed in japan as an attempt to copy the already released olympus camera which was called the om-1 and was setting the world on fire with its' bright large viewfinder and small size. I was able to sell a load of laborec cameras by working with a great amateur astronomer named bob little.

At the same time vivitar who had formerly been a west coast distributor called ponder and best was now developing their own line under the name vivitar and hitting the market with sharp advertising, great new innovative products and exciting packaging and promotions. They were kicking aic's ass.

My time at carle place was not fun. The atmosphere was terrible. The u.s. customs department was investigating the company for importing parts as sewing machine parts that were actually camera parts to avoid some duties. Sales of the miranda had fallen from the high in 1967 when it was rated as the best buy by consumer reports to a new low as nikon, canon, minolta, pentax and olympus all began to sell direct. The reliability of the camera was also a problem. The new sensomat re which used a variable resistor system was failing, the new sensorex auto was to large and clunky with out of date styling, the sensoret, probably one of the best cameras miranda ever made had other problems such as the ability to double expose a frame by holding the advance lever out after transporting the film would allow the shutter to fire multiple times. Soligor lenses were not exciting compared

to the vivitar series one. I recall one shipment of new lenses. The carrying case that the lens came in had the traditional japanese red corduroy interior. But instead of the ribs of the material running horizontal in the case they ran radially. The lens had rubber knurling rings and was shipped with the lens in a plastic bag. But when the bag was removed and the lens reinserted into the case the knurling locked in to the corduroy and it would not come out. By this time every item that arrived in new york was always based on how much it cost and how cheaply could it be sold. The handwriting was on the wall. Bauer royal super 8 cameras were not selling in large enough numbers and the overall business was being totally mismanaged. There was no money or talent to support new product development. The money i was promised to move to new york by walter director was never given to me. It was clear that there was no future for the company.

In the spring of 1976 i had a meeting with bert keppler of modern photography magazine. The idea was to show him a new product, but i told him that i needed to escape aic. A few days later i had a call from don cohee of vivitar in santa monica and shortly thereafter a meeting in new york with paul ellis the v.p. of marketing of the company. In 1977 i joined vivitar remaining there until i became vice president of vivitar computer products in 1983. When vivitar was sold to hanimex in 1986 i also sold the computer division and left.

Dan multer bruno's son is living in new york. He worked at the company in charge of advertising and is married to another former employee. His mother is also still alive. I believe ralph lowenstein is still alive but i am not sure of ben silverman. Victor has died. The last manager and former number one salesman for the company was ron gelman, father of michael gelman of the regis and kelly show. He lives in florida. I think walter director may be alive as well. These are the remaining folks that can shed more light on the history of this company.

Please understand that these are my memories and opinions, i am not sure of their accuracy at this point as to all the history of the company. I do have some old cameras around, but most of my collection is vivitar items where my life really took a huge turn for the better.

Regards,

lee