

Automotive engineer ended career as GMH chief

CHARLES CHAPMAN
MARINE, ENGINEER, INDUSTRIALIST
23-3-1926 - 18-12-2012

By **WILLIAM CHAPMAN**

CHARLES Sherman Chapman, a senior General Motors executive who for the final 12 years of his career was based in Melbourne overseeing the company's operations in the region, has died in the US at the age of 86.

Charles was born in Duluth, Minnesota. His family was of modest means during the Great Depression, and he started working at an early age. He once remarked that he earned the money to buy all the clothes he ever owned starting from when he was a teenager. Because of his family's difficult

circumstances, he attended four different high schools in Minnesota and Michigan.

In 1943, on the day after his graduation from high school, he joined the US Marines, and served as a corporal in the battle of Iwo Jima against the Japanese in early 1945, working in radar and communications. He was preparing for the invasion of Japan when the atomic bomb was dropped and World War II ended. He was discharged in 1946.

On his return home, he attended college at the University of Detroit and Wayne State University in Detroit on the G.I. Bill while also working. A few months after beginning college, he met Mary Elizabeth Carleton and in 1948 they were married.

He graduated summa cum laude from Wayne State with a BSc in industrial engineering in 1950 and went on to get a masters in automotive engineering from the Chrysler Institute of Engineering in 1952. He continued to take night engineering and business classes for the next 14 years, earning an MBA from Michigan State in 1966 and accumulating the equivalent of a second masters of engineering.

In 1956 he joined the Buick motor division of General Motors, working in the design and development of automatic transmissions. In his 11 years as an engineer at Buick, he earned eight



patents related to transmissions and braking systems. He received regular promotions, eventually becoming assistant chief engineer.

In 1967 he moved with his wife and five children to Frankfurt, West Germany, where he was chief engineer of General Motors' Opel division

until 1975. During some of those years, Opel was the best-selling car company in Germany, outselling even Volkswagen.

In 1976 he moved to Melbourne where he served as managing director of General Motors Holden until he retired in 1988. At retirement he was a vice-president of General Motors, in charge of

Australia, New Zealand and south-east Asia.

Upon retiring, he and his wife moved to Evergreen, Colorado. Mary died in 1993 after suffering from cancer for several years. In 1994, he married Delores Spinzig.

Charles was an easy person to be with. He was humorous, generous, friendly, positive, caring and smart. He was also active athletically throughout his life, working out regularly each morning, skiing into his 70s and a lifelong golfer.

He is survived by Delores, five children, three stepchildren, 10 grandchildren, six step grandchildren, two great-grandchildren and one step great-grandchild.

William Chapman is a son of Charles Chapman.