

## **MY HISTORY WITH REMINGTON RAND THROUGH UNISYS WYNN ROBERTS**

*The Unisys VIP Club, an organization of retirees, is compiling an historic summary of Unisys and predecessor organizations for their Legacy web site. Artifacts and corporation history were displayed as part of the Minnesota sesquicentennial celebration in 2008. The web site includes actual experiences of employees. We were asked to include personal situations including the names of products and personnel and items that might be of interest to other retirees and historians. Hence the details included in the following story, my contribution respectfully submitted. **O. Wynn Roberts***

Most of my career was spent with Univac/Sperry/Unisys. A large part of it was with the International Division as Sperry's International Representative. Except for a four year diversion during which time I was engaged in a different kind of foreign adventure. I then returned to Sperry where I went on to become, Director of Program Management, Director Product Quality Assurance, Director Sales and Marketing, etc.

Although I am from Wales, I went to school at Rugby College of Technology and Arts, Rugby England on a scholarship program. Upon graduating, I received a letter from my parents saying to come home to Wales because we are emigrating to the United States. This was a tad unusual since they would normally move and not tell me. (Just joking)

I came to the US with my father, mother and sister. Since our sponsors to the USA lived in Utica New York, (Fifty miles east of Syracuse) we settled there.

I worked on construction while I shopped around for a job in industry. I interviewed with local companies such as General Electric, Bendix, Rome Air Development Center etc. Each would have hired me, but since they were all engaged in military programs and since I was an alien, the law prevented them from doing so. (It was going to be five years before I could become a Citizen.) Naturally, I was getting quite worried, when I stumbled into the Univac plant in Utica who said "No problem, we are a non military Commercial Division, you are hired."

I said earlier that they were called Univac Division of Remington Rand but they might also have been called the Univac Division of Sperry Rand. This plant employed about 4,000 people and manufactured computer peripherals such as Card Punches, Card Readers, Uniservo Tape Drives and medium sized Mainframes - UNIVAC III at the time, later 1004s, 9200s, 9400s etc. It was a very large complex, which during the war was occupied by Savage Arms Corp, producing machine guns etc. At that time it housed 10,000 employees.

The elevators were quite an experience to ride in. They were old, probably pre World war I and were steam operated. You got on, lowered the gates and started yanking on a rope which tipped some kind of balance and the elevator started rattling and hissing steam as it went up. You were glad to get off. One day a workman had just taken it up to the roof to work on it, He had just stepped off when it let

go and hurtled down four floors to the basement. I was on the second floor, just about to summon it when it went by me and smashed to smithereens in the basement. I took the stairs to my fourth floor office from then on.

There were some places such as the fifth floor storage area where you just did not want to go. It was dark and there were rats running around. Hard to believe today.

Nobody paid any attention to the environment back then. The Utica plant had a very large printed circuit board plating operation. The fluids utilized were pretty nasty, acids etc. When it was time to discard them, they were poured into fifty gallon drums and a contractor hauled them off to a landfill. Many years later when the environment became a concern, the drums were discovered at the dump site. We were caught red handed since the drums had been stenciled 'Univac Corporation, 311 Turner Street Utica, NY' and most were leaking. The cost to Univac for cleanup and fines was tremendous.

In those days vacuum tubes and grasshopper fuses were still being used and every cabinet was huge.

My first job was with Test Equipment Development. Starting as a Draftsman then moving on to Manager of Technical Publications, I wrote many of the operating manuals for the test equipment. I think I went a little overboard in documenting safety instructions. It turns out that the assembly folks were refusing to use the equipment. Citing warnings in the front of the manuals such as 'BEWARE LETHAL VOLTAGES, FAILURE TO FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS CAN LEAD TO BODILY HARM OR DEATH' led to quick rewrites and a reissue of the manuals to get production back on line.

Later, I was transferred to the Ilion, NY plant which was also a big employer, located across the street from Remington Arms and just 10 miles from Utica. I am not sure how the Remington of Remington Arms was connected to the Remington of typewriter and computer fame. Here I worked as a cable and harness designer for the main frames of the day.

I was then asked to join a secret program under development in Darien, Connecticut. It was housed on the estate of Jimmy Rand one of our company founders, who no longer resided there. It was located in a very exclusive area of Darien, the last place you would expect to find such an operation. The offices were in the mansion and the engineering labs were in converted barn buildings on the estate. Hence the term 'Barn Project' The project official name was 'The Bumblebee Program.' Because of the secrecy involved, Pinkerton guards protected the place.

People with special skills were drawn from Univac facilities all over the country. The Bumble Bee Program evolved into the 1004 Mainframe, which was a Printer/Reader/Mainframe. It was programmed via a plug board. This was a very advanced punched card product that was designed to leap ahead of IBM, hence the secrecy. Later, it did indeed become very successful and was transferred to Utica for production.

Other individuals who worked on the Bumble Bee program down there, whose names may be familiar to Univac veterans were: George Cogar, Lauren King, Ted Robinson, Joe Ming, and Don Neddenriep – later to become a Unisys President.

Years later, Ed Johnson the General Manager of the Utica plant, Cogar, King, Robinson and Ming proposed a revolutionary new product called Keyboard to Magnetic Tape (as opposed to punch cards) to the Univac hierarchy. It was rejected, so they resigned en masse to found a new spin off company and produce it themselves. This company was called Mohawk Data Sciences, which was located just down the road from Utica in Herkimer, NY and became wildly successful.

I remember people coming through the Univac plant selling Mohawk Founder's stock at 50 cents a share, which had to be purchased in blocks of \$5,000. A sizeable sum for the day! Many people took them up on this investment which was highly speculative at the time. God Bless them. There are many interesting stories about these people and what drove them to invest. The investment of \$5,000 of Founder's stock was worth over a million dollars in 4 years, after splitting 2 for 1 and 3 for 1 a number of times. A huge amount for the 1960s! Regretfully, I did not take advantage of it. It had just seemed a tad too risky to me since their competition in the Key-to-Tape field was IBM. Who knew?

I can empathize with many of the Roseville folks who elected not to invest in Control Data following its successful spin off from Univac.

There is an interesting alternative side to this success story. George Cogar, Founder and the brains behind the Mohawk system, left Mohawk and founded yet another spin off called Cogar Corporation. Many of the people who had not invested in Mohawk and saw their friends and neighbors become millionaires, assumed old George was going to do it again. They invested their life savings in Cogar Corporation. In addition, people who did make a killing on Mohawk and thought they could repeat their good fortune did the same. Cogar Corp became the darling of Wall Street, based on George's past reputation and was touting the company to high heaven, so this just served to hype the investing frenzy. Tragically, Cogar went under and many people lost their shirts. Fortunately, I had not invested in Cogar either. Years later, George Cogar and a few friends were flying in a private plane over a desolate part of Canada on a hunting trip. They were never seen again. No wreckage was ever found.

I then returned to the Utica plant as Manager of Technical Publications.

While toiling at this job I was presented with the greatest job opportunity of my life. At that time there was position at the Utica Plant called International Representative. It was held by a man named Heintz Mathea, a German National, who reported to the International HQ in Roseville, MN. His boss was Jerry Nelson, Director of International Operations, who in turn reported to Paul Spillane. Heintz's job took him all over the world, since he was responsible for the support of our plants in Roedelheim Germany, Naples Italy, and Tokyo etc. He was tasked with solving problems at the International plants and managing the transfer of products being manufactured in the US, to those foreign plants for manufacture for the International markets. Needless to say, having such a glamorous job, he was revered by all of us drones at the plant who were lucky if we got to go the 10 miles down the road to the Ilion plant.

I knew Heintz casually since I had helped him with resources for these obligations.

One day I am sitting there minding my own business when Heintz shows up at my desk and says "Wynn, I am transferring back to Germany to head up the 9400 Program, would you like to take over my job as International Representative?" At first I thought it was a cruel joke but he was quite serious. It was as if he had just asked me if I wanted to be CEO of the company. I don't know if the term nanosecond was invented back then, but that's about how long it took me to blurt out my acceptance. I did not even think to ask about salary etc. Hell, I was so excited I would have done it for free. He informed me he would recommend me, and if accepted, I would be hearing from his boss shortly. I am deeply indebted to Heinz.

Jerry Nelson, Director of International Operations, flew in from Minneapolis and showed up in my office a few days later to interview me. It was a very intimidating situation. There were no initial pleasantries; he got right to it. The questions came at me like a machine gun, and this went on for a couple of hours, I was petrified. I thought it was doom on Wynn as far as getting the job went. He then jumps up, slams his briefcase closed and snaps "You got the job, I want you at the Roedelhiem Plant (Germany) next week" and he was gone. Despite his intimidating demeanor, Jerry was one of the best bosses I ever had.

I sat stunned, wondering what just happened and how I could get ready to fly on such short notice and even what I was supposed to do when I got there. Fortunately my passport was still active so it turned out to be OK after all. This job took me all over the world, often with very little notice. Each day I went to work with my bags packed for International travel, in the trunk of my car. When I left, I never knew when I would be back. It was exhilarating, but never a problem. I was single in those days so it was easy.

My salary was split between Univac Roedelheim in Germany and OKI Univac Kaisha in Tokyo, who I also supported. The nice thing about this arrangement was neither one saw the whole amount and therefore I did not appear too prominently on their bottom lines. The downside was the fact that since I reported on a dotted line to the VP and General Managers of both facilities, each thought my whole purpose in life revolved around their operation. I had to walk a tightrope with them and still keep Jerry happy.

A point of interest for those in Roseville - In the 60s when I used to come out there, International was located in building 3. We co-occupied those buildings with Honeywell on one side and us on the other. The two companies were separated by a railroad that ran down the middle of the buildings. There is no evidence of this today. On my first visit to Roseville I was taken to a local restaurant called Mayslacks who probably served the best roast beef sandwiches in the country. Recently, now forty years later, I went to it again in 2009. It was exactly the same. The decor had not changed and the sandwich was as good as ever. I expect most Univacers, regardless of their origins knew about Mayslacks.

In Utica I used to get visitors from Customers and Univac facilities all over the globe. It was amazing just how many international operations we had in those days. These visitors, no matter what country they were from, had all heard of an exotic dancer establishment in Utica called the Inferno. The star

attraction was Heaven Lee who, when the curtain went up, she emerged from a coffin with a python. What's not to like about such a spectacle! Ironically, the Inferno eventually burnt to the ground. I was so relieved that I no longer had to degrade myself taking visitors to such a smutty establishment.

I was approached by a former Univac man, now working for the aforementioned Mohawk Data Sciences, who, along with some other Mohawk people and a couple of Univac employees, were about to quit and found yet another spin-off called Mobydata. I was offered the spot of Co-founder and VP Operations. Their objective was to develop and manufacture a data processing system for the Hotel/Motel industry, which hitherto had used cumbersome Kardex files. The system we developed was based around a minicomputer made by Data General. It had a whopping 4K memory and cost \$19,000. Data General was a spin off from a company called DEC - Digital Computer Controls who had developed a minicomputer called a PDP 11 in 1969. This company had previously spun off from Univac.

This offer presented me with a terrible dilemma. To leave my dream job with International and join a very risky startup outfit which could leave me extremely wealthy or extremely broke. Since I had recently seen the incredible success of Mohawk Data Sciences, an opportunity I had let pass me by, not to mention Control Data and other successful spin-offs, I decided that I was not about to let it happen again.

I reluctantly resigned from Univac. My tenure with Mobydata lasted 6 years before the Sweda Division of Litton Industries acquired them 'off of the court house steps' as they say - a victim of cash flow and the 70s economy. I did not become extremely rich according to my plan, I became extremely broke. I then decided that if I were to ever work for a major corporation again, I would just as soon have it be Univac instead of Litton, since Univac had treated me very well in the past.

In 1976, I called one of my previous bosses, Bert Mueleners, who was then Vice President of Peripherals in Blue Bell Headquarters. He ran operations around the country and the world. My question to him was, "Have you got a spot for a good man?" His response was "Yes I do, whom do you have in mind?" After I made a rude retort I realized that he already knew of my predicament and had been expecting my call. He asked me if I would like to go out to his ISS - Information Storage Systems Division in Cupertino CA as Program Manager. Since beggars can't be choosers I accepted immediately. I then had to go home to my wife of six months and tell her to pack her things we were moving to California. Fortunately she was used to me moving and took it in stride. It turns out that I was to be reporting to Ted Vosu who was a friend and former colleague when I was with the International Division. Things could not be better. {Editor's note: *In the early 60's, Bert Mueleners was the Manufacturing Manager for the UNIVAC Antenna Coupler Department based in St. Paul.*}

ISS was itself a start-up company and an innovator in the Disk Subsystem world, which had been acquired by Sperry. They went on to produce disk subsystems for Sperry mainframes as well as OEM systems for other companies. The VP and General Manager was Everett Behr who reported back to Bert Mueleners in Blue Bell.

Because of my ties to Bert and Blue Bell headquarters I was looked upon with deep suspicion. Blue

Bell was always viewed as the enemy by the remote operations. I think they thought I was a 'Plant', it always took a while to fit in.

In 1978 I transferred to Blue Bell Headquarters as Business Manager for ISS affairs. This time I worked for Ray Maurstad, a Director in the Peripherals Division. Years prior, Ray was also a friend and colleague in the International Division. Ray ranked with Ted Vosu and Jerry Nelson as some of the finest individuals I have had the privilege of working for. Years later when I transferred to Roseville, I was fortunate to have Ray on my staff when I was setting up a Program Management Operation there. It is amazing how the web of people weaves its way back and forth over the years. {Editor's note: *Before joining Univac, Ray Maurstad was with the Coast Guard in 1956 when he picked up the initial SOS from the Andrea Doria as it sank in the Atlantic.*}

In 1981 I was offered a job with the Semiconductor Division as their Business Representative in Blue Bell, but reporting in to Eagan MN. How I got this job was also an interesting episode. I was down at an Operations Review at the Bristol Tennessee plant along with folks from other Divisions. The group was sitting around at the hotel after the meeting, when Bob Erickson the VP and GM of the Semiconductor Division in Eagan (whom I had never met before) says "Wynn, do you know how to spell Semiconductor?" So like a fool I spell it out since I thought it was some kind of gag. He says "Good, how would you like to come and work for me?" I was of course taken back, but explained to him that I knew as much about semiconductors as I did brain surgery. He said he didn't want me to design them, but rather to attend to his Division's interests in Blue Bell, similar to what I was doing for the ISS Division. The deal was right so I said OK. It seemed like all the remote General Managers wanted their own eyes and ears at Headquarters.

In 1983 I returned to the Peripherals Division still located in Blue Bell.

In 1984 another job materialized out of the blue, reminiscent of my introduction to the International Division. I was sitting with a group in the cafeteria at Blue Bell. I was kidding Pete Manskar, a colleague who was about to transfer to Roseville, about the horrors of Minnesota winters. At this point, one of the other members of the group, who I hardly knew, said: "Wynn do you have anything against Roseville. I said no not really I was just joking with Pete, why do you ask? He said, 'Because I want you to come and work for me, I am about to transfer out there myself as VP and General Manager of Manufacturing Operations and I need a Director of Program Management. When something like this happens, your first impression is 'He's putting me on.' I had only spoken to this man a few times, but he seemed to know a lot about me. The deal was right so I said here we go again, and went home to tell the wife "Pack your stuff, we are moving to Minnesota."

Around 1986 Burroughs Corporation, headed by Michael Blumenthal (Formerly, Jimmy Carter's Secretary of the Treasury), bought out Sperry. {Editor's note: *Opinion paragraph about this acquisition deleted.*}

I served at Roseville until about 1996 when Roseville manufacturing operations was shut down. The intriguing web of Univac contacts all over the country did not end there. I continued working, this time as a Consultant to Hughes Network Systems on the East Coast. Here I reported to Irv Roth ex



Established in 1980

Burroughs and a former Director of Quality in Blue Bell. I was tasked with transferring one of Qualcomm's products to Hughes. Qualcomm Corporation was located in San Diego and their CEO happened to be a former member of Unisys. Their VP of Operations was Ted Vosu, my former friend and colleague from the Univac International Division years prior. Needless to say it was an easy transition.

It never failed to amaze me how Univac people were so dispersed around the country. I still keep bumping into them in my travels even though I am now retired and living in Aitkin, near Brainerd, MN. Even in this out of the way place, I joined the Ham Radio club in Brainerd and 'low and behold' the President of the club is Lyle Amundson from Roseville's Manufacturing Quality department. It's incredible. Thinking back over this time period, I consider myself a very lucky man to have been presented with great job opportunities every few years, right out of the blue. In the process, I have met a fine bunch of colleagues. I appreciate their friendship and the knowledge that they imparted to me. I had a great run.

The foregoing was just a brief recollection of events that just scratched the surface of my career. Someday I may write a book.

*O. Wynn Roberts*

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