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Interview with Bill Baney

RCA Heritage Program

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[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

[0:00:08] Bill Baney: Alright, my name is Bill Baney, I started with RCA in November of 1960 in Camden, New Jersey. I arrived on the scene at the bright age of 24, had a wife, new baby, and one on the way. And I was most impressed by RCA in the size of that location at the time. Which I think it's between 17 and 18 thousand in employees. Huge. My position was in, then called the personnel department, now human resources as an interviewer. My... The location consisted then of RCA corporate offices. Some from personnel, then the law department, etcetera. The headquarters for government systems division, the headquarters for commercial electronics systems division, two operating systems in the government end, two operating systems in the commercial end, being broadcast communication systems, mobile communications. They were kind of all over the place. I was... I was in Camden for three years before I even got to the employee parking lot to give you some idea of the size of this.

There were also, a lot of people might forget this, but the electronic data processing division was manufactured and the computers were built in Camden at that time. So it was a huge operation, and the HR department of course serviced all of them. So, that was a unique experience, and one just trying to figure out what was going on in terms of product etcetera, was a challenge in itself. But, it turned out, as far as I'm concerned, to be a unique opportunity. There was no formal training program. I would say in the HR department but the process they had could not have been better. Because you went through the each of the chairs that were required for anyone who was going to go anywhere in human resources. With time in it, they get measuring from people who really knew what they were talking about. So, it was great, a great and fortunate experience for me, I think.

[0:02:08] Speaker 2: Okay, so, um, let's talk about your supervisors when you started.

[0:02:16] Bill Baney: Alright. I started, I was working for the manager of employment at the time, and it was large enough then with 18,000 employees that there were departments within. The employment activity that handled salaried employees, there was someone who handled technical employees. There was a whole engineering department, dedicated to recruiting, etcetera. So there was a supervisor of all employment, and my first three or four years doing recruiting etcetera I reported to one or two of those individuals. Very helpful. Again, no formal kind of training etcetera, but so much real life stuff that this is really how it works. It was much appreciated.

And I moved from there, as you go through the seats as you will, from employment to what they called wage and salary. That's now compensation today. Again, I had two supervisors there handling things like, uh, pricing or traveling, sending people to Japan out of the corporate offices, a great experience, which I had no idea how to do it at that time. But this was good, again, because we had I think about 8,000 hourly employees, about 4,000 engineers. So the compensation end of things was, was quite enlightening, etcetera. We also handled corporate incentive compensation. Really good, great experience. Moved through those chairs. I went from the wage and salary end of things into labor relations.

Which when I studied in college that's really the main thing I was interested in. And of course at that time there were seven bargaining units in Camden. So, all the labor relations you would ever want in a million years was there. Good tutoring, good advice, I really enjoyed the experience. I guess some of it was four or five years of that, and then I guess seven years I was moved in my first management role. And again, this is all no formal training etcetera, but just kind of the experience that is priceless, etcetera. So, I have my first management assignment as manager of that compensation department.

[0:04:20] Speaker 2: Were you satisfied with your career progression? Did you feel like they recognized the value of your contribution?

[0:04:28] Bill Baney: I'd say absolutely. I don't think anyone... I don't know where else you could have gone to get that kind of experience in that time frame. And I was compensated certainly fairly. I had no problem with that whatsoever, and I think the fact that they moved me from one assignment to the next was a pretty good indication that I was doing okay. And I thought... It could not have been more fair.

[0:04:50] Speaker 2: Okay. In your position you dealt with a lot of RCA employees.

[0:04:58] Bill Baney: Yes.

[0:04:59] Speaker 2: Could you give us your general impression?

[0:05:01] Bill Baney: Sure. I would think... Just this, the adage of the RCA family, we all talk about it, etcetera, it's real as far as I'm concerned. I'm going to tell you firsthand. This was not something dreamed, and so this is the RCA family. All of the employees that I talked with and dealt with, and of course I'm interviewing new employees all the time, but there seemed to be an esprit de corps. A realization that there is things bigger than their individual assignment, etcetera. And I found that... I find this throughout. Kind of when I look back to it, it's kind of almost hard to believe. I mean I... The bargaining units, etcetera, we all had our differences and arguments, etcetera. But, I think our bottom line was no matter what side of the table someone was on, there seemed to be an understanding that there's one main cause. And if that

main cause doesn't go, we're all going to be in trouble. I think in general everyone seemed to be willing to work with one another, to help one another, and you know we went through some trying times, too. If you got out of that massive hiring, so whether the... We had some defense layoffs, etcetera, which were brutal. But, I think everybody acted like a professional, and I certainly was pleased. But that... It's not just a word, "RCA Family", it meant something and I lived it.

[0:06:17] Speaker 2: Um, what were some of the downsides in RCA?

[0:06:22] Bill Baney: Well, I'm going to get back to the sad part. The downside was because it was a defense citizen, we did have some major cutbacks, and that's brutal. You never like to see people being let go or laid off, and I think from that perspective if I ever said what was the... Well... What was the worst part of it, no question that was it, just living through that. I can't think. There might be some other incidentals, but that was the one thing that would stand out in my mind.

[0:06:46] Speaker 2: Great. Could you talk about your co-workers?

[0:06:49] Bill Baney: Yes. Co-workers, as I talked about how my supervisors may have helped me. And remember now, in these slots in HR, everybody is kind of in their own thing. There's not two people really doing the same thing. But if someone has been there, I think the very first person who is... Who I replaced spent, I thought was a tremendous amount of time just getting me up to speed. And this... This was not unusual, because everyone was kind of moving through the seats at the same time. And always willing to help out, and say, "Hey, you don't, if you got a problem, call." Or whatever. So in the HR department, that... That team spirit if you will, was right on top. It could not have been more helpful. I really mean it.

[0:07:30] Speaker 2: Did you spend time with co-workers outside of the working hours?

[0:07:35] Bill Baney: Yes I did. We had a lot of time outside, and again it was a pretty big department. In those days there was probably a hundred of us in the HR department. We had... You know, we'd play softball together. We'd watch football games together. Parties at one another's houses. Got to know a lot of them. Some no longer with us, unfortunately, but some became lifetime friends. And, yes, I would say I just carried this family idea on. And many of us, some were from the area. I was not from the area originally. So that... Being invited into that venue, if you will, was very helpful to my career.

[0:08:13] Speaker 2: What about the influence of RCA on South Jersey itself? On the region?

[0:08:20] Bill Baney: I'd say it would have to be huge. I may be a little prejudice, but not much. If you're 17, 18 thousand people. If you look at Camden in 1960, Campbell's soup was still pretty big in Camden right next to the RCA facility. But I don't think they had more than maybe 3,000, which is a lot of people. New York

Ship down the road had probably over 20,000. So, the three huge companies had an immense impact on South Jersey. It really did. Almost anywhere you went, "Oh it's RCA you work for." The old timers used to say, "You worked for the RCA." Uh, but it was RCA, and Campbell's Soup, and New York Ship, but they went down pretty quickly. But the impact, almost everywhere that you went when you volunteered for things... And by the way, let me just say now, RCA as into helping out the United Way in an incredible way. The corporation matched whatever those 18,000 employees did, and then some. Almost the second year I was there, I was encouraged to help out with things like the chamber of commerce. I ended up later on for 25 years being the... On the New Jersey Business and Industry Association, the co-director of that. All RCA's said, "Do it." They want you to do this. This is in the community, and these are the kinds of things you ought to be doing. So that's your... I think was there, and was supported right to the top of the house at RCA.

[0:09:51] Speaker 2: Wow. What about over time, did you notice the development in South Jersey?

[0:10:00] Bill Bane: Well I did. Uh, and I remember now, this... The time that I was there, I was in Camden for 15 years and then left for another 15 years to go to another RCA facility and GE facility, etcetera. But there was a lot of development. Unfortunately, the cutbacks didn't help us. Because things were going downhill. RCA was, you know, on the cusp of the technical world. There was not much question about that. As far as what was going on in the community, now again we continue to support even though the numbers were going down we helped with United Way with volunteers and with money. I... I think the development wouldn't have been much better if we did not have the cutbacks, but, you know, it was there. And they were always in the community, and they were always in the forefront of what was ever going on.

[0:10:45] Speaker 2: How did your environment change over time?

[0:10:49] Bill Bane: The work environment itself I think, uh, computers were a major change in the HR department. Maybe not as much as engineering has had there, but certainly it changed an enormous... How the work was done, and how it was processed, etcetera. The... I guess the other major change... We always had... We always had to have the tools and the people to get things done. Benefits became a major issue. When I was first hired that was nothing. I don't mean nothing, but no one paid for benefits. It was just an expense that was incurred by the company, etcetera. It didn't really need top notch professionals to run. It was kind of an administrative issue. Over the years, that became an enormous problem for everything. You better get your top notch people in the benefits. So from that perspective that really changed. Again, I think labor relations became a less of a significant event, but it did

before that because it was less people. Compensation became more complex. And we went through a lot of... We went through wage freezes. That will do something for your wage and salary department, and then it was catch up all the time in the hiring new graduates, etcetera. As inflation hit that, it was like, "Wow." You jump sevenfold from one year to the next. So there were a lot of things then in the environment that made us change. We were right with it.

[0:12:14] Speaker 2: People talk about family members working for RCA. I had heard several time, "My father worked there." "My grandfather worked there." Can you comment on that? Did you observe any of that?

[0:12:26] Bill Baney: Absolutely. There was no question about it. There was... You know, I don't want to call nepotism because that's what we get in many, many of our great employees. But yes, there was no question. It was not uncommon to have, three, four, or five members of the same family working at RCA. And they could be in different fields, etcetera. I mean, engineer, you got somebody on the bench, but yes. I think an incredible number of people. And that's a good sign. If you want your kids to work there, that's terrific. Good, great place to work.

[0:12:55] Speaker 2: What about husbands meeting wives?

[0:12:58] Bill Baney: Uh, yeah, I did see. I did witness that. Not myself, but I witness a number of people, and this department that I worked in within three years were married. Secretaries or two professionals, or whatever. Not uncommon at all. And I guess our department would be very small compared to the others. So if it was big there, it had to be bigger in the larger departments.

[0:13:19] Speaker 2: How did your children view your work at RCA?

[0:13:24] Bill Baney: I think they recognized the fact that the old man was pretty dedicated, because sometimes they didn't see him for a while. But there is no question in my mind that the three children that I have, know the kind of respect that I have for RCA and the companies that follow. No question about it.

[0:13:43] Speaker 2: Now as you looked around your neighborhoods, did you observe other RCA employees in the same area?

[0:13:50] Bill Baney: Sure, yeah. I was in a relatively new housing development, and I think the first two years I commuted with three other engineers. Three engineers and myself, and then they switched and went somewhere else. Which was not uncommon, moving within RCA. It wasn't just Camden. I mean, you could move. You could move anywhere in the country. As I did later on. Not in the country, but yes, a lot of them from that. And that was a brand new community, so there were lots of that going on.

[0:14:18] Speaker 2: So if I asked you to just sum up, your career, your company, and all the rest about RCA, what would you say?

[0:14:27] Bill Baney: Well, let me tell you where the career went. I told you I started in Camden, I was there for 15 years. I left as manager of then, combined labor relations and wage and salary it was called. I was given an opportunity at that time to go to either Meadowlands, Pennsylvania or East Windsor Heightstown, New Jersey as the HR director. I chose Heightstown. I liked the space business, so the career was I went from Camden to Astro in Heightstown. Where we were in the midst of having... They just finished a downsizing, so were hiring. We were building a Nimbus, and I forget the other... Oh, satellites. Very exciting business. And it was a different community all together. It was... There were no bargaining units there, but we were bringing in people very quickly. I got a chance to learn and go to see space shots etcetera that I would have never dreamed of going on. I think I was accepted by that management team very graciously, and I think I brought something to the table, and I think I learned an awful lot from there. Just quickly I was there. For four years, uh, five years.

Moved from there, to take over the HR director at Moorestown, New Jersey. That was when Ad70 or what we now know as Aegis was all about. Bill Goodwin and company was one filing that next year's. So this was a huge boom. I was there for two years. I went from there back to Cherry Hill, where the headquarters of the government systems division had moved. Where I was given a responsibility for... For compensation and organization and development, and employment for the whole government systems division. And then we're about 12,000 employees. That would be Camden, Burlington, Massachusetts, Moorestown, New Jersey, and Astro. And we were given some commercial credits, because then we picked up Meadowlands and some of the broadcast plants. And I was there until '86, when a merger occurred with GE.

[0:16:26] And from there I moved to take over the HR director's spot at the whole Astro-space division that was East Windsor and Valley Forge. And putting those two together from an HR perspective may have taken two or three of hairs that used to be on my head up here. But that was a unique experience, two kind of different companies. Great companies, etcetera. I think there were... I sense more formality in GE then there was in RCA, but they were great companies. And you can look back and say, "Oh that screwed up my career." It actually provided some more opportunities, if you think about it. Maybe there were fewer spots at the top, but there was certainly was a lot more very significant roles for HR people in the areas. And it opened up, you know, broader spaces.

So, I moved from that role to take over all of the technology with Jim Feller. I guess it was Aerospace Technology. We had ATL in Camden. We had E-labs

up in Syracuse. I forget where... Oh there was... There was still some of the people in Valley Forge, but I moved my office from Valley Forge to Moorestown again. I was there for three or four years, and Martin Marietta came along and took GE. And then when you looked at the facility there, and decided, "Gee, maybe we can make the..." ATL was in Moorestown at the time. We said, "Maybe we can move into Camden and save some... Some rent." If you will. And we did. We moved back, I think 1996. So I was in Camden for 15 years, left for 15 years, and came back, ironically. For more than 15 years. And then in 1990... '90... When did L-3 come about? '96?

[0:18:14] Okay, '96. I was asked by then HR director, Mike Riley, to consider joining L-3 after it spun off. So, I retired from Lockheed Martin. I think I moved my office three offices down the aisle, and then joined L-3. And spent, believe it or not, 15 years there and retired after 52 years with the whole enchilada. Great career as far as I was concerned.

[0:18:42] Speaker 2: Now, along this time you encountered a man named John Mastran. Can you explain where you encountered him?

[0:18:50] Bill Baney: Yeah, John Mastran was a corporate maven. And I believe his main thrust was in organization development. I met John, seems to be a lot of years ago, and I guess it was. You know, you would go to corporate staff then and say, "Oh this is this. This is that. This is the top of the heap, etcetera." He and I were certainly not bosom buddies at all, but I knew who he was, and I think he probably who I was, because I was moving up the ranks okay. But it was great... In fact corporate staff was a very talented and professional group of people, and John was right on top of them. I was always impressed by the whole. The whole group at 30 Rock was what we used to call it anyway. And I had an opportunity to join that, and was not interested in going to sunny, downtown New York. So I passed up on that.

[0:19:39] Speaker 2: Okay. Is there anything else that you would like to add to the interview?

[0:19:44] Bill Baney: No. I guess I don't want to get mushy, but you know, 52 years was a big chunk. I didn't think I would ever live for 52. I'll tell you a funny experience. When they first... I first was hired, they say, "Well, you have to retire at 65." I said, "Well, that's really not a problem. No one in my family has lived to be 65." So, we went through that. I have to tell you that I don't think you have to write to get the experiences that I had there. A lot of great people. Did I not get some of the things maybe I thought I did get? Yeah. That's sure. Like all of us. But, there were not really any major disappointments that I didn't handle. And, I... If we hadn't had some cutbacks, I think I might still be there. The last couple of years with L-3, unfortunately we started to cut back, and that's... If you've ever been in HR that's no fun at all. Believe me. And, so I decided to try some volunteer stuff. But no, it was a challenge. It was a satisfying experience, and I don't think I'd trade it in for anything.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]