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Interview with Pat Walsh

RCA Heritage Program

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[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

[00:00:07] Patrick: My name is Patrick Walsh, and I started at RCA in 1957.

[00:00:14] Female Speaker: What was your first position at RCA?

[00:00:17] Patrick: Well, I came in as, I guess a semi project manager, okay? One of the first projects I had was the Philadelphia police radio system where they were putting a new RCA system over there, which I think it was called Carfone at that time. And we put new antennas up around the city, actually, I put one on top of Willy Penn, and I think I was on that job probably about three years, something like that. And I'm trying to remember the guy I worked for, I think he was a big wig in RCA, had his own company at one time, but I just forget his name now, forget his name. And after... after the Philadelphia police radio system, I went to work on a Western Union microwave system which was a new microwave system all the way from the East Coast to the West Coast with junction stations up and down in the middle of the country. And I probably spent maybe three years on that, something like that. And then after that it was various jobs, TV studios, in late sixties I went to Saudi Arabia to build a television station over there in a city called Al Dammam. We put up a 1,500 foot tower there and the first thing we put on the air was the old Indian head, test pattern, if anybody remembers the Indian head, like Jim probably does. A lot of the Arabs didn't like it.

[00:02:19] When we would come into the TV station, they would throw rocks at us and things like that until the Prince came down and said, "Anybody that fools with our new TV will be in big trouble." So that ended all that nonsense, because they know they get their head chopped off or something. Saudi Arabia at that time was very primitive, very primitive. We got a telephone put in our apartment, they ran a new telephone line all the way from the telephone exchange through windows and corners and on top of houses all the way to your apartment. So you'll see big globes of wires hanging out on the telephone poles, on the side of houses and things like that. But today it's probably a very modern city, but at that time it was pretty scary.

As a matter of fact, one time we went-- I had an Italian engineer over there to check out the antenna because the antenna was built by Coel in La Chiorella, Italy?. But it was vended under the RCA name, it was our European distributor. And we decided that we will go see an old town where there were actually remnants of the wars and crusades and things like that. The name of the town was Hofuf, and it was probably about 90 miles across the desert, and across from the car from the down mountain side.

[00:04:04]

We went there and it was a very interesting town and I had my translator with me, his name was Omar Sharif, he used to say, I'm a big movie star. But anyhow, we stayed there overnight, there was about six of us. We stayed in a chai house which is a tea house, you get a bed and you sleep there. We get up the next morning and we're getting ready to leave and had a station wagon. When we were all going to the station wagon and people were starting to bump into us, throw stuff at us and, "What in the world is going on?" And so I asked my translator, I said, "What's the matter, what happened?" So he got hold of a policeman, he asked the policeman what happened. What happened was the broadcast from Egypt was saying that the Americans had burned down the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem and so they were very upset about that.

So we got in our car and they broke all the windows out. Beating on them with rocks and whatever, I figured these were the last days for me. But anyhow we got back to Al Dammam and everything was fine there, because it was a modern city at that time, so that was the end of the Saudi Arabia job. And then from there I believe I went to Indonesia, and it was a survey to build a microwave system across the archipelago, from across the main island of Java into Bali and across. It was an interesting trip, we had a lot of surveying equipment with us and I had a Canadian engineer with me.

[00:06:00]

We'd carry all the stuff up to the high mountain tops and hills, and stuff like that, to see where we could get clear microwave shots from one site to another. And while I was fine, one time I'm up at the site and the kids would follow us, they were from the villages. And this little girl came up to me and she's rubbing my arm like this. I asked my friend, I said, "What's with her?" He says, "She's never seen a white man before. She's

wondering what's wrong with you." But that's how remote some of these places were.

[00:06:36] Female Speaker: Yeah, right.

[00:06:38] Patrick: But anyhow, we didn't get the job so I never went back. Where else did I go for them? Oh, I went to Frankfurt, Germany, and built a RCA studio for the Armed Forces network. That probably lasted about four or five months, something like that. It was a small studio but they liked to watch the stuff from Armed Forces network because they put on things like Hogens Heroes and stuff like that, and they thought that was pretty fun. Let's see, where did we go after that? I spent some time in Alaska, I went up there during the Christmas holidays to relieve some guys, they were building a cable system up there. So I went up there to relieve the project manager for the holidays, I was up there for about two weeks. And let's see, and then in 1977 I got assigned to the World Trade Center project.

There was a lot that was going on with that project before I got to it which I didn't even know about. But all the antennas and a lot of the steel was all in storage because there had been a conflict about coverage, whether they really needed to go there, what was happening, I don't know. There was law suits going on or something. But anyhow, they decided, "Okay, we're going to move from Empire State Building over to World Trade Center." We said, "Okay." So we had to take all the antennas out of storage and get the steel ready, and things like that.

[00:08:40] So, most of this refurbishing was done at our plant in Gibbsboro and the project was probably worth more restoring it than it had originally cost. Because we had to get everything out of storage, all the antennas had to be retested again completely. So in '77 I went to the World Trade Center just to see what I'm up against there. We were taking readings to see if we get interference with our meters and stuff from other systems and see how everything would work out. So by probably late '78, I'd hate to look at my presentation but I think they was... I said, "Okay, it's a go." There was a platform left in the middle of the World Trade Center, WTC One which was the north tower, for the antennas to be stacked on and they left a crane on the roof to lift the materials in case it ever happened, the stuff would be there. So we started bringing the steel up

and the first 100 feet, we called these sections AC, which meant Antenna Core, the first 100 feet were standby antennas for the VHF channels mainly, like 4, 5 and stuff like that. And also the first 100 feet of the tower was to be insulated because they were afraid in cold weather and high winds you could get cracks in the steel.

[00:10:43]

So they put boots around the legs, outside insulating boots, insulated everything inside and the cap at the top of the first 100 feet was all steel and it was all sealed off because the transmission line would go through that. But there was holes already for the transmission lines and boots to go around to keep the heat in. So after that section got built, then we put up the gin pole, I don't know if you know what gin pole is. Everybody knows what a gin pole is. Well, your crane only goes so high, it can stack you up to about 100 feet, okay? After that, you got to put a gin pole on the side of the structure you're building, okay? So there's a-- we call them bends which we sink and fit into and then strapped onto the tower that you're building.

And as you go up, we move the gin pole up with this. In other words, we might stack another 50 feet of antennas and then we would take the gin pole, we would crank that up to the next level and then we cable it off. Then we would build another 50 feet or so, then we move the gin pole up again. Eventually, the gin pole would be up to 400 feet. After that, the next sections we set were, trying to recall, were channels 41 and 47, one of them was Spanish Broadcasting and although nobody could tell, we had mechanical tilt in those two antennas where the base where they would go was shaved slightly at a degree or so, to tilt it one way then the next antenna was tilted another way.

[00:12:52]

You can't notice it by looking at it but there was mechanical tilt. Other antennas, they used electrical tilt, because if you have an antenna and you don't want to broadcast out from 1,400 feet in the air, the signal would never hit the ground so they build an electrical tilt to tilt the signal down. So we got those two guys up and then it was getting to be winter and we had a lot of storms, you can only work probably three and a half days a week up there because of the wind in the winter time. You get rain and sleet and snow and everything else. In my presentation you'll see I got the-- you can't believe the amount of ice formed up there. Anyhow, we managed to do other work during the winter which is running transmission lines up through the stack itself. The stack of

antennas when completed weighed 400 tones. So then the next sections we set were like triangular sections and that was channel two with butterfly antennas, and channel 31 with VZ panels on the edges of the channel two antenna. That was two sections we put up. Then after that we put up channel seven, and after that we put up channel, I recall, 13, I think it was 13 and nine, it was a combined antenna.

[00:14:49]

And after that it was channel 11, and after that it was channel four and five which was the top antenna. It was a combined antenna for channels four and channel five to use the same antenna, and of course on top of that we had the completion flag, which the ironworkers always do. We had another flag up there, for one of the ironworkers brothers who got killed a couple of days before on a job over in Brooklyn. When you see some of the pictures of the presentation, they are pretty impressive because all around the top of the building, it's like a railroad track, and those were the window washers, and they automatically go up over, down the track and wash all the windows and come back up, move over down the track. Then let's see, we finished up I guess, in the spring of 1980 as far as the RCA was concerned, the World Trade Center may have other things to do.

But we always had steel inspectors on the job with us, we had Bobby Lockman, who was one of the steel inspectors, Jimmy Sullivan, steel inspector, and my main link to the World Trade Center, the big guy there was a guy there by the name of Lester Feld who kind of watched the project and the money for the Trade Center. Where did I go after that? I went to Chicago a couple of times just to see what was happening there with the new antennas going up on the Sears building.

[00:16:57]

But that was just a visit for a couple of days to look it over because we had already put antennas up on top of the John Hancock building. Let me see where we went after that. Oh, I wanted to tell you a story about one of the ironworkers in the Trade Center. His name was Bobby Chizmadia, everybody called him Bobby Chiz, and he came to work with a suit, you'd think he was a Wall Street banker, and a briefcase. He'd put on his old overalls and then he'd go to work, and at the end of the day, he'd get a shower, clean himself up, put his suit on, get his briefcase and he'd go back to Long Island where he lived. And when we were there and I said, "Bobby, why do you do that?" And he says, "Well, I ride the railroad every day," he says, "I just thought I look like a bum." He puts

his suit on and grabs his briefcase and off he goes. But he was a good worker, we had a couple of Indians on the job there, you'll find a lot of them, these ironworkers, the Indians. After the Trade Center, I was offered a job in Van Nuys, California.

[00:18:19] Female Speaker: For RCA?

[00:18:20] Patrick: Yeah, for RCA Cable Vision. So I went out to RCA Cable Vision and I was in charge of the field projects throughout to make sure they're running right, things like that. And also the design engineering department out there. But they were in trouble, things weren't going good, and after a couple of years there, they shut it down. Then I came back here and I went to work for project implementation back here. And one of the projects was the GWEN System, which was the Ground Wave Emergency Network, I was locating sites for the transmitters. In fact, one of them is right here in New Jersey, probably broadcasting, they have a GWEN site there, I assume it's still there, I don't know.

And I worked on that for a year or two and then I went down to Florida, to Cujoe Key, where I put an antenna on a balloon that the military has where they can go up in the air and they can survey all the drug traffic and things like that. But they add an extra track there and a balloon and so we were allowed to use that, it was the broadcast to Cuba on channel 13. Whether it's still in operation, I don't know but it worked out all right. These balloons were massive, big dodge balls or something like that. All the hardware was General Electric, they had big-- looked like diesel engines that drove these things around circular tracks so that they can position the balloon properly.

[00:20:25] Balloons would probably go up eight or 9,000 feet or something like that on a cable like that. You can imagine the weight of that thing when it's up there. And after that, let's see, I come back and I worked on some miscellaneous projects and then it was over. And I left, it was GE by that time when I left and then I went to work for some various companies doing some field surveys work for them and things like that, but it was mainly for cellular telephones systems. In fact, the last one I worked on was a couple of years ago was putting Verizon equipment in the Market Street Subway because they had no coverage down there. I was getting too old about then and I said, "That's it, I'm not doing anymore, I'm

going home." And that's where I've been ever since. I had serious health problems with my spine and I just-- I couldn't even walk anymore or go anywhere. It was kind of ironic because I went to University of Pennsylvania and said, "Can you guys help me?" They said, "No, we can't help you. You're too far gone." Okay, so I went to Cooper, "Can you guys help me?" They looked at all the MRIs and said, "No, we can't help you." I said, "Somebody's gotta help me." Finally they said, "Yeah, we can help you." Well, I may be slightly better off after a year lying in bed almost...

[00:22:20] Female Speaker: We're glad you made it today. Can you tell me a little bit about the RCA employees you worked with?

[00:22:27] Patrick: Yeah, yeah. Most of us stayed together for a long time, one of the fellows that I--

[00:22:35] Female Speaker: Like a crew that went to all these places... Different groups...

[00:22:39] Patrick: Well, sometimes-- No, no. It was like a project implementation department and everybody had their specialty. But we were in 2-building, I think on the fourth or fifth floor or something like that, and everybody had their own cage and that depended with what the job was, with transmitters, bit of sky, towers into the sky or we probably... but some of the people there, there were one or two people there that I worked with over thirty years at the same place. Other guys came and went and things like that, but it was a good experience, RCA was a great company and it was a shock when GE took over.

[00:23:36] Female Speaker: Did you have anybody who mentored you when you first came in?

[00:23:39] Patrick: Yeah, I did. A guy by the name of Bob Venor, which is-- that's one project I forgot to tell you about. Bob was pretty dynamic, tough guy to deal with, but they assigned him to a project in Austria which was building new TV studios. I'm trying to remember the name of the project, it escapes me for a minute. He went over and got it started and got some of the engineers over there for the design work, what they really wanted and things like that. And then he called for me to go over, so I went over and I probably stayed there six months, something like

that, helping him out. I just-- the name of the project escapes me, but Bob and I remained good friends for many years and we kept in contact all the time. I see him doing some presentations to the Austrian government and TV people over there, and he would do it in German, he was very good at it.

[00:24:53] Female Speaker: And you stuck together?

[00:24:54] Patrick: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:24:57] Female Speaker: Did you feel like RCA fostered your ability to learn new things and become--

[00:25:05] Patrick: Oh yeah, yeah.

[00:25:07] Female Speaker: ...a stronger engineer? How did they do that?

[00:25:10] Patrick: Well, just the experience you get on all these different projects. I remember the name of the project, it was Oster Reicher Ronfunce.

[00:25:23] Female Speaker: So that was just by giving you great--

[00:25:25] Patrick: Yeah, yeah.

[00:25:27] Female Speaker: You kind of learned a lot over the years--

[00:25:28] Patrick: And they sent us to a lot of schools too, RCA did. Mainly management schools, but I probably went to a dozen different schools. They sent me to school one time to learn computers mainly because the microwave project had slowed down and we didn't have anything to do. So they said, "You want to go learn about computers?" I said, "Okay." So I went to school for nine months and then one day somebody came into the classroom and they called me out and they told me to go back where I was before. Some a microwave project came up or something they wanted me on. So that was my experience with the computers.

[00:26:14] Female Speaker: What's the best thing about working for RCA?

[00:26:19] Patrick: I tell you one thing, it wasn't the money. That's the truth because I found out when I left and I went to work for some of these other companies, I made a lot more money than I made at RCA. But RCA had... we could rely on them. It had great insurance and things like these, you never had to worry about a hospital bill or anything, everything was covered, I loved it.

[00:26:50] Female Speaker: That you felt secure. What was the worst thing about working for RCA?

[00:26:56] Patrick: I can't say anything bad against them.

[00:26:58] Female Speaker: That's good.

[00:27:00] Patrick: Can't tell.

[00:27:02] Female Speaker: Yeah. So GE changed things?

[00:27:03] Patrick: Yeah, that's when we became a number, yeah.

[00:27:06] Female Speaker: So you traveled all over the country, but where did you have a home, here in South Jersey?

[00:27:12] Patrick: Yeah, yeah.

[00:27:13] Female Speaker: Did you live...

[00:27:14] Patrick: I lived in Stratford.

[00:27:15] Female Speaker: In Stratford?

[00:27:16] Patrick: Yeah, mm-hmm.

[00:27:17] Female Speaker: Did you have a social life with your co-workers?

[00:27:21] Patrick: Not really. A few of them, maybe, but not really. When I lived in California that was a big thing in California, the social life, riding buses or Friday nights we go to Las Vegas, things like that. A lot of crew would go to Las Vegas, that was kind of fun. We had camping clubs in California where somebody would pick a spot to go camping and everybody would get their camper and that's how you spend your weekend.

[00:27:53] Female Speaker: When you first moved to Stratford was it really different? Was it really, did--

[00:28:00] Patrick: No, because I'd lived in Jersey before, so...

[00:28:04] Female Speaker: Did it grow a lot?

[00:28:05] Patrick: Since I lived there, yeah, sure, it would accrue with the taxes. When I first moved in there, my taxes were \$1,400 a year. Now are \$8,500 a year, same house.

[00:28:21] Female Speaker: Did you have a lot of RCA people living near you?

[00:28:25] Patrick: A few.

[00:28:26:] Female Speaker: A few.

[00:28:26] Patrick: A few, and we have a lunch club that we still have today, every Friday the ones that are left go to lunch together. One time we had maybe 10 guys but they left us. I don't know, one of the great guys we had there was Dana Pratt, I don't know if you ever knew Dana Pratt or not, but he was a salesman at RCA and he used to go to lunch with us. I still have a friend from Gibbsboro with RCA plan meets with us there and a couple of salesmen used to see our broadcast equipment meet with us there. But it's like four or five of us left that go to lunch.

[00:29:14] Female Speaker: That's great. So how would you sum up your experience at RCA? Was it just a job or...

[00:29:21] Patrick: No, it was a fun job, it really was. It was a fun job, when you have fun at what we were doing, it's nice, and it's comfortable. I wish I could go back and do it again, I really do. But like I said, my last job was two or three years ago and I finally gave up, I said, "I just can't do it anymore." Then my wife, she wouldn't even let me drive. That probably sums everything up that I can tell you. Unless you can think of something unique, something I know about right now.

[00:30:06] Female Speaker: Thank you so much for your time and all of your stories.

[00:30:10] Patrick: No problem, no problem.

[00:30:14] Female Speaker: You got a lot of international experience.

[00:30:16] Patrick: Yes, I did. Yes, I did.

[00:30:17] Female Speaker: They sent you all over the world...

[00:30:18] Patrick: Yeah.

[00:30:18] Female Speaker: Did you like that part of your job?

[00:30:20] Patrick: Yeah, as a matter of fact, I'll tell you another story. We had a job in Israel refurbish a studio or something, we were going to put in the Diamond House in Jerusalem and my boss asks me, says, "You want to go over with us while we negotiate the contract?" I said, "I can't go to Israel," they said, "And why not?" I said, "Cuz I got Arab stamps all over my passport, are you kidding me?" He said, "Well you gotta go," he says, "they know how to handle things like that." I said, "Okay." So, I think we flew to Switzerland, we stayed overnight in Switzerland and then the next day we flew into Lod airport, okay. We got in at probably around 9:00 o'clock at night or 10:00 o'clock at night or something like that, and plane's on the tarmac, stops and a young guy with a sweater on walks

on with a soldier behind him. He's asking for passports, "Produce passports, passports."

And then he got back in at me, and "Passport," I showed him my passport, he says, "Arabica?" I said, "No man, I'm an American." "Arabica," and the soldier goes, (gun cocking imitation). I'm in some trouble, but anyhow, they took me off the airplane and they took another guy off the airplane and he was an Asian guy, a Japanese or something. And what triggered this was, just a week or two before where the Japanese red squad had shot up Lod airport, if you remember that. They killed a lot of people in the airport there, so the Israelis were very sensitive. So they got us out on the tarmac and then a colonel came out and told the pilots to go get our luggage off the plane so they can inspect it.

[00:32:26]

They hauled our luggage off, they made us strip on the tarmac, I even had little boxes of matches in my pocket that I'd got in Switzerland. They opened them up to see if there's anything in-- they checked everything. And then this colonel, he says to me, "I'm really sorry about this whole, we can't take any chances." He says, "You get on the bus now, everything is fine." So we got on the bus and then they started letting the people off, okay? And my boss, name's John, he comes walking down, and he comes in to the bus and he says, "What happened? What happened?" "Nothing, John. They just wanted me to get a good seat in the bus, that's all."

So, that was my experience in Israel which was... Israel, I enjoyed, it was very nice, very nice. We used to pick up... we had rented cars. The soldiers hitchhike a lot there. We going back and forth from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem on one of them and we'd pick them up, and they'd climb the backseat with their carbines and all the tools of the trade, they carried everything with them. You're always ready, you are going to a cafe and there was nothing, I see rifles all leaning against the tables, they carried everything with them. But it was an experience, it was a nice one, I enjoyed it.

[00:33:55] Male Speaker 2:

I've seen some of your presentation about 9/11. What was your feeling, what was your experience when you saw what happened with your antennas?

[00:34:08] Patrick:

I just couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it. I just didn't believe they could take that building down, I didn't believe it. But one thing I've heard about why it came down, and I'm off the record, the building was supported by the core and the curtain wall, so there were no posts in between, you get more floor space that way. The floor sections were like a cantilevered section with several in place, they bring about a bolt from down in the Bayon or something and lift them up by cranes and just keep stacking them up. They were supposed to have a lot of insulation on them, like a foot of insulation or something like that. But because of environmental things and the EPA, they didn't even let them put a light coat of insulation on these things because they considered it too hazardous. And they said that's why these things got soft and started melting, and once they got soft and started melting and they are only anchored here and there, they just dropped like a pancake, one on top of the other all the way down.

[00:35:31] Male Speaker 2:

I think we've done quite a few of these interviews and a term, the RCA family, keeps coming up. What does that mean to you?

[00:35:43] Patrick:

Well, all I remember is the family store. It was like I've been telling all along, it was like a family. You could trust people, most of them, 90% you'd trust. But, yeah, it was a family, RCA, absolutely. I just hated to see it go. I don't know why it went but I guess it was some bad management in there somewhere, I don't know. They just wanted to unload it to get out of the business, because, yeah, these other companies were walking all over them, especially the Japanese, especially in broadcast systems. We made a camera that sold for \$80,000, Japanese come up with one for \$20,000 and works better, so who are you going to buy from? Not the RCA. And basically, that was what I see happened. Even in the transmitters, the Japanese transmitters were better and they cost less. I hate to say that but that's my opinion of why the broadcast department failed. Video switches, the whole thing, they figured into the computer systems quicker than they did so that you can control the video switching and video and things like that. And of course, at that time I was NTSC, and that's ancient now in NTSC...

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]