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Interview with Bryan Hodgson

RCA Heritage Program

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File Name: 0903151121_Bryan_Hodgson

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[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

[0:00:06] Bryan Hodgson: I'm Bryan Hodgson. If you want to be formal, Dr. Bryan Hodgson. I worked in RCA Moorestown in the same building for about 20 years.

[0:00:16] Female Speaker: Great. What was the first position you had with RCA?

[0:00:20] Bryan Hodgson: The first position was as a unit manager. The doctor, Dr. Bill Patton, brought me into the company. The original title was going to be air-born and electronic warfare antenna, but by the time I actually reached my desk that job had gone away and so I just went into an R&D function with the company.

[0:00:41] Female Speaker: What was that like? Did you...What was it like being a brand new employee at RCA?

[0:00:46] Bryan Hodgson: Oh yes, brand new, yes.

[0:00:48] Female Speaker: What was that like?

[0:00:50] Bryan Hodgson: It was the biggest company I had ever worked for, so it was a little daunting initially, but I got on fine with the rest of the people in the building, so I had no problem really.

[0:00:59] Female Speaker: Did you have a mentor, somebody who led you through as a young...

[0:01:04] Bryan Hodgson: Mo Briezawas the manager I reported to and so he was very good, really. I found him very, very workable with...workable with.

[0:01:14] Female Speaker: What kind of things did he do to sort of help you become a good...to inspire you or make you a better worker?

[0:01:22] Bryan Hodgson: I think the cooperation I got from him and just sorting out any problems I had and basically he was very approachable, which made it easier.

[0:01:35] Female Speaker: Approachability.

[0:01:37] Bryan Hodgson: Speak up just a little more?

[0:01:38] Female Speaker: Sure, no problem. How were your coworkers?

[0:01:42] Bryan Hodgson: Well, of course they were all engineers, so were all fine (laughter). An engineer is an engineer and usually they're very much, very similar in the way you can approach them and the assistance that you can get from them. They usually give you any assistance they can, so I got on quite well with them, yes.

[0:02:03] Female Speaker: So you feel like you worked like a team then?

[0:02:06] Bryan Hodgson: Certainly, certainly it was. Yes.

[0:02:10] Female Speaker: What was the most significant project you worked on?

[0:02:13] Bryan Hodgson: Well of course, after about five years in that R&D function, they moved me into the program management office, which was AEGIS based and so I was working on the AEGIS arrays for about the last 12 years of my time there.

[0:02:33] Female Speaker: Can you tell us about AEGIS?

[0:02:35] Bryan Hodgson: Well, as you know, it's an antenna. They put four of them on a ship so that it can see 360 degrees around and they weigh about six tons and they take about a year to build and the Navy seems to love them.

[0:02:54] Female Speaker: What was your role in helping build them or develop them?

[0:02:59] Bryan Hodgson: It was hardware, between hardware and paperwork. I was involved in trying to work on many snags that arose during the manufacture and there was a significant amount of paperwork went into each array and basically it generated a three-inch thick file for each antenna and so I was involved in keeping that all straight.

[0:03:22] Female Speaker: What was the biggest snag you ever encountered in doing all this?

[0:03:26] Bryan Hodgson: Time.

[0:03:26] Female Speaker: Time.

[0:03:27] Bryan Hodgson: Time, yes.

[0:03:27] Female Speaker: Trying to get everything done fast enough?

[0:03:28] Bryan Hodgson: Yes, that's right. Try to get...pull all the ends together, yes.

[0:03:34] Female Speaker: How did your...so you, you...after about five years, you got started on AEGIS and how did your career progress from there?

[0:03:41] Bryan Hodgson: Well I...

[0:03:42] Female Speaker: How many did you work on?

[0:03:43] Bryan Hodgson: When I came out to my unit. In 1988, GE took over and their philosophy was that every unit manager had to have about 10 or 12 people working for him. Well, I only had three people working for him, so my unit manager position went out the window and I became a senior engineer...in the program of organization.

[0:04:05] Female Speaker: And how did that... did that change your job a lot?

[0:04:09] Bryan Hodgson: No, not really, no, no.

[0:04:12] Female Speaker: Did you find it...how different was it working under GE for you?

[0:04:15] Bryan Hodgson: I don't know. They weren't there for long enough. Here...a small anecdote with RCA. You know that they had an RCA store in the building, okay. Well, they use to sell televisions, all that sort of stuff. Well, quite frequently at 11 o'clock in the morning, you will see factory people watching baseball games in the RCA store, okay. Well, GE came in and that stopped dead. That didn't go on anymore, so you can see GE was concerned about tightening up the ship quite a bit.

[0:04:47] Female Speaker: A different culture.

[0:04:48] Bryan Hodgson: Very different, yes, yes.

[0:04:50] Female Speaker: But you don't feel like in your day-to-day work that a different culture changed things too much?

[0:04:55] Bryan Hodgson: No, not that I saw.

[0:04:56] Female Speaker: And did you continue on with L-3 then or did you retire before then?

[0:05:02] Bryan Hodgson: Sorry, did I continue on with?

[0:05:03] Female Speaker: After GE left and L-3 came in?

[0:05:05] Bryan Hodgson: If I don't forget, then it became Martin Marietta.

[0:05:08] Female Speaker: I'm sorry...

[0:05:09] Bryan Hodgson: Okay. Then finally it became Lockheed and I retired in '02.

[0:05:13] Female Speaker: In '02?

[0:05:13] Bryan Hodgson: Mm-huh.

[0:05:15] Female Speaker: What was the best thing working for RCA?

[0:05:19] Bryan Hodgson: I think the overall experience, I can't point to any one particular item, but I enjoyed my time with...in that building, okay, whichever name was on the front, I enjoyed my time there. I never thought that when I joined them in '82 that I would wind up retiring 20 years later. I never thought that the job would last that long, but the Navy would just keep on buying ships and I said, hey, you buy the ships and we'll stick antenna's on them, okay.

[0:05:52] Female Speaker: What was the worst thing about working at RCA?

[0:05:58] **Bryan Hodgson:** I don't know that there was one. Nothing sticks in my mind as being a particular nuisance. No, I don't recall there being one.

[0:06:06] **Female Speaker:** Yeah, great. How did you handle the changes of technology that happened in the 20-30 years that you were working for GE?

[0:06:17] **Bryan Hodgson:** Uh...

[0:06:18] **Female Speaker:** Did they have to train you. Is there things that would change with...

[0:06:20] **Bryan Hodgson:** Yeah. One of the biggest changes that occurred on the arrays was a change in the style of coaxial cable that they started to use and that required an immense amount of mechanical effort, okay, but one of my parts of it was presenting what was happening inside the factory to all the Navy Brass and all the incoming RCA and GE people, so giving presentations was one of my great pleasures when I was there, I always used to enjoy that.

[0:06:57] **Female Speaker:** So you get to explain what's going on to everyone else?

[0:07:00] **Bryan Hodgson:** Well, you see, I always used to introduce hardware or graphics or moving items and I could hold the audience quite well, and I got the compliment once where one of the people came up and said, well, I wish you had been my professor at college.

[0:07:14] **Female Speaker:** Do you have good jokes?

[0:07:17] **Bryan Hodgson:** Not... not so much jokes as...it was graphics. It was good graphics, yes.

[0:07:20] **Female Speaker:** Good graphics makes things interesting. Did you have a social life with your coworkers?

[0:07:30] **Bryan Hodgson:** Not so much. I have followed up with them since then, but no, I had a family of three sons. The three sons were all very active in swimming and so any social life was basically resolved around water.

[0:07:44] **Female Speaker:** Yeah, living from pool to pool.

[0:07:46] **Bryan Hodgson:** Pool, pool, pool.

[0:07:47] **Female Speaker:** Where did you live why you were...?

[0:07:49] **Bryan Hodgson:** We lived in Voorhees

[0:07:50] **Female Speaker:** In Voorhees

[0:07:51] **Bryan Hodgson:** Yes.

[0:07:52] **Female Speaker:** What was Voorhees like when you first moved there? Was it really different?

[0:07:55] Bryan Hodgson: Obviously there was a tremendous amount of construction going on there since, okay. We moved into a small subdivision, Acorn Hill, and it was good. It was convenient for Moorestown. I could get to Moorestown relatively easily.

[0:08:12] Female Speaker: Mm-huh. And were other RCA employees near you?

[0:08:16] Bryan Hodgson: Not that I know of, no, not that I know.

[0:08:19] Female Speaker: Like your kids school, their classmates weren't necessarily...their parents weren't RCA employees necessarily?

[0:08:27] Bryan Hodgson: No.

[0:08:27] Female Speaker: Not very many of them?

[0:08:28] Bryan Hodgson: No.

[0:08:29] Female Speaker: Cherry Hill was the big center for a lot of that I think.

[0:08:32] Bryan Hodgson: That's right. All of my guys went to Eastern, you know, went to Eastern.

[0:08:36] Female Speaker: So, what did your kids think about your career at RCA? Did they know what you did or did you talk about it with them?

[0:08:43] Bryan Hodgson: They knew what I did, but it's not easy discussing some of the aspects of the job to them. It was not easy stuff to describe. They did go to one or two of the open houses and they saw where I worked on. I think they were suitably impressed.

[0:09:05] Female Speaker: Good. And did you...could you share information about AEGIS with them or is that all classified?

[0:09:11] Bryan Hodgson: Well, some of the general stuff you could, but classified stuff I still don't say anything about.

[0:09:16] Female Speaker: I can imagine for boys, that would be an interesting topic?

[0:09:20] Bryan Hodgson: Well, they knew dad had a secret clearance, but I mean, beyond that, they didn't know.

[0:09:28] Female Speaker: So, there's this trend called the RCA family. What does that mean to you?

[0:09:34] Bryan Hodgson: It means that RCA was a very family oriented company when I joined them, which as I said GE put an end to a lot of that when they came in. So, in the open days and this sort of thing, it was family oriented. The fact that the company would bother to bring families in, like

every other year, I think it was. It meant that there was an interest in the company and keeping things running smoothly.

[0:10:12] Female Speaker: So, how would you sum up your time at RCA?

[0:10:17] Bryan Hodgson: I guess the 20 years, I enjoyed it very much. I had a good career there. I enjoyed it. The work was always very innovative. You could introduce new ideas, where you thought they were worthwhile and I got on...I interacted a lot with a lot of Navy personal because we were selling something to the Navy, so I interacted with them. I got along fine with them and as you may guess sometimes the accent works wonders.

[0:10:47] Female Speaker: How was it working with the government. So, you worked with the Navy a lot. Was it...was it?

[0:10:52] Bryan Hodgson: Yes, it's the...people that...

[0:10:54] Female Speaker: Part of the snags... Were they...

[0:10:56] Bryan Hodgson: No, no. Very seldom. Occasionally I had to chase after them to get a final...final signature or something of that sort, but, no, I got along fine with them.

[0:11:06] Female Speaker: Great. Well anything else you want to share about your experience at RCA?

[0:11:15] Bryan Hodgson: I don't know. I could tell you some of the stuff that we built. In that initial R&D period before GE came in it was all very much, a lot of R&D money lying around, and, so we would involved in developing different types of antenna radiating elements, different types of different frequency band radiating elements, and all this other stuff, and one of the things that was...was a very light weight antenna. We built a very light weight antenna, built out of carbon fiber, built out of carbon fiber and metal-foil. This thing was about 8 feet long, about the size of that cabinet back there. You could quite easily lift it up and carry it around. I think the ultimate intention was sort of put this in the belly of a drone or some sort of light airplane for looking down on the ground, though I never did hear how far it went. I never did hear if it was ever used.

[0:12:14] Female Speaker: Thank you so much for your time.

[0:12:16] Bryan Hodgson: Very good.

[0:12:16] Female Speaker: I enjoyed your...

[0:12:17] Bryan Hodgson: Nice talking.

[0:12:18] Female Speaker: Thank you.

[0:12:19] Bryan Hodgson: I'm very happy to be here. This is just like being home in my basement. I can see some of the pieces I brought in here. I can still recognize them and I have another nipper. He's halfway between that one and this one. He stands about this high, so he's got to come down here sometime, okay.

[0:12:37] Female Speaker: Did you get it...at the RCA store?

[0:12:40] Bryan Hodgson: I forgot where he came from, but what I used to do when anybody retired or left, I use to go through their desk after they left and pull out all the RCA stuff, so which is why I got bookcases full of stuff and boxes full of stuff and nippers and radios and you name it, all sorts of stuff.

[0:12:57] Female Speaker: You had a lot of things to keep.

[0:12:59] Bryan Hodgson: Yes. Because when we came over to the United States in '67, yeah, you couldn't really visualize where you were going to be, like 40 years later, but basically we were very fortunate. We were very fortunate. What we had to do was to learn to drive on the wrong side of the road and use their funny money, but basically it was a very good move.

[0:13:18] Female Speaker: Thank you so much for your conversation with us today.

[0:13:21] Bryan Hodgson: My pleasure, thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]