

Roy Williams as recalled by Bill Wilcox and others

As is my usual practice, I contacted Bill Wilcox when I wanted to know more about Roy Williams and his historical contributions to the success of Y-12 over the years. Bill obliged with the following details that shed additional light on Roy's distinguished 43 year career at Y-12—the only place he ever worked after completing his BS degree in chemistry at the University of Tennessee.

I had hoped that Bill would have known Roy when he came to work at Y-12 in June 1943. As you will recall, Bill went to work for the Manhattan Project, first in Rochester, New York, and came to Y-12 when the first chemistry building was completed. So he and Roy came to work at Y-12 at about the same time. They did not know each other then; however, Bill states that Roy Williams “was one of the survivors of the 1946 downsizing who, during the beginning of the new second mission days of 1947–1949, became a key in the new operations.

So, like Bill (who was transferred to K-25 in 1949 to assist the research and development director there), Roy was quick to be recognized by management as having much potential. He was soon given added responsibilities and quickly advanced through the ranks.

Bill states of Williams that “Googin, Case, Jasny and others have gotten deserved recognition for making Y-12 the success it was during its glory years with the Complex. But Roy's contributions have never been properly appreciated by the public, but he sure was appreciated by all those who ran Y-12!”

As a result of Bill's career of routine interaction with the top managers in all sites, becoming the Technical Director of both Y-12 and K-25 in 1969, he recalled having heard said of Roy Williams, “I heard from them personally that Roy was one person that Roger Hibbs, when he was Y-12 Plant Superintendent and Jack Case during his later tenure, and then Gordon Fee, felt Y-12 could not do without. These were years when Y-12 was under such great pressure to meet schedules for new weapon and device parts from the Design Laboratories out west.”

Bill continued, “Roy, a native East Tennessean from Cocke County, quietly, but always effectively got the most challenging jobs done. He was little known outside Y-12 because his total devotion and loyalty was to Y-12; he never was concerned with getting credit or climbing up the ladder to being a ‘big boss.’ He was a doer, not a report writer or meeting caller.”

Of his interaction with Jack Case, Bill recalled, “Jack Case told me he could always count on Roy being on the job no matter how early in the day Jack came in, Roy was always there before him, getting done what had to get done. His entire career was devoted to Y-12, and he made a huge difference to Y-12.”

In Bill's Y-12 History book, *An Overview of the History of Y-12: 1942–1992*, he documented “...back in the frantic Lithium Isotope separation days in 1954 when Johnny Murray ran Y-12, Roy was the man he put in charge of Beta 4's huge ELEX separation plant. Ten years later Roger Hibbs was in charge and reorganized the operations and put Roy in charge of Forming—one of the keys to Y-12's new production missions in the '60s.”

His history book continues to note that, “Ten years later Jack Case organized his top team for the '70s and he chose Roy to head Metal Preparation, a key division to Y-12's success. For many years Roy led, not managed, the Metal Preparation Division from his office in 9212 - which he was most often ‘from.’”

I agree with Bill as he, too, recalls that Roy Williams' “...life was Y-12. It's no exaggeration to say Y-12 could not have earned its long reputation of meeting design agency schedules without Roy's personal contributions.”

Bill concludes with, “I have said for years we have not done justice to Roy's lifelong, so important contributions to Y-12. Glad you are doing this. Have your news story retyped as a memento and hang that tribute to him in your Y-12 History Center! Hundreds of Y-12ers who worked with him through the years will be so pleased to see it.”

That will be done along with a photograph of Roy, if I can find one. He never sat still long enough for many photographs to be made of him. He was always on the factory floor doing his job of leading the primary production portion of Y-12's mission.

At Bill's suggestion I called Roy's long-time secretary Joann Isham, who is retired and still lives in Oak Ridge and, you may recall, sings beautifully with the *Sweet Adelines*. She was delighted to recall the close to 30 years that she served as Roy's secretary.

You see, back then when a manager moved up in the organization, he took his secretary with him. Many of them stayed together for much of the manager's career. Joann spoke very fondly of the time she worked for Roy, calling him a "wonderful boss that everyone liked."

I also asked Ken Brady to comment on Roy Williams. I believe his insight is helpful to demonstrate a practical aspect of Roy's success. Ken said, "From some of my early encounters with Roy, I, as a 'textbook' taught manager fresh out of Georgia Tech, was somewhat skeptical of him as a manager. He seemed to lack the flash and charisma that I expected would be characteristic of a manager in his position."

Ken continued, "It didn't take long, however, before I observed and realized the kind of leadership he provided isn't something that comes from a text book. His passion, dedication, and simple approach to 'getting the job done' were the lessons I came away with from my experiences over the years as I had occasion to interact with him personally and with the organizations he managed as a whole."

Concluding his comments, Ken said of Roy Williams, "He didn't 'stand on ceremony' when it came to cutting to the chase and getting the task at hand accomplished. It was truly an honor to work with him and learn from him. He was one of those early Y-12 pioneers that truly contributed to winning the Cold War when the best needed to step forward."