

## **Richard Rookard – TAT Instructor**

Training and Technology (TAT) instructors came from many backgrounds. Here is the story of an experienced school teacher who found something special in TAT. Richard Rookard, a Y-12 employee, wrote me about his experience there. His input follows:

“I hired on with Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU) in March 1977 as a classroom instructor for TAT. At the time, I had 13 years teaching experience in public schools and held teaching certifications in both Tennessee and Kentucky. I had never made more than \$10,000 per year and started at TAT making \$11,000, but I had to work all twelve months.

“So much money and so many trainees became available that TAT School went to two shifts per day. The two shifts would swing or change time schedule very month for the trainees, day shift one month, evening shift the next month.

“The ORAU instructors had the task of giving pertinent general education to each different training discipline, which included welding, pipefitting, machining, physical testing and drafting. We also had a G.E.D. instructor.

“The instructions would proceed from the simple to the more complex. As special projects would arise on the work floor, the instructor would interrupt the regular progressive training to provide timely instruction for current floor projects so trainees would receive the greatest benefit.

“I thought that the most innovative of the training disciplines was drafting, which was a nine month course. In conjunction with Roane State Community College, some of their instructors, such as Dr. Klima (whose son works here at the Y-12 Plant), would come onsite to the TAT School and provide instruction in courses such as algebra, mechanics and strength of materials.

“Upon successful completion of the program, Roane State would grant 30 hours of college credit to the trainees, thereby encouraging them to continue their education to seek a degree.

“A very interesting and effective aspect of this training program was referred to as Industrial Behavior. Trainees had to be serious about their training and observe rules that would be expected by an employer.

“Three strikes and you were out for such things as drinking, unexcused absence, tardiness, failing grades, undisciplined behavior, sleeping in class, etc.

“Charlie Jackson was one of the training service officers of note. His job was to help trainees with housing and business matters and try to keep them out of trouble. Charlie told me about one trainee that successfully completed the program but had no job and no place to go and no relatives or friends to rely on. Charlie took him home with him to his nice apartment. The trainee asked to take a shower. He placed the shower curtain outside the stall, took a long shower, and flooded Charlie's carpeted bathroom.

“A certain young trainee was the youngest of several brothers and the son of a tough dad. All the older boys had become successful craftsmen or business owners. The dad had told the youngest that he was ‘a sorry lot and would never amount to anything,’ and would not supply him with any extra assistance money during TAT School.

“The young man began to sell his blood plasma, on a too frequent basis, to different extraction services to get transportation money. He became tired and would fall asleep in class. He was written up and got three strikes and was declared dismissed or the program by the industrial Behavior Committee headed up by Richard Dew, subject to appeal.

“The trainee was headed out the door and stopped to tell me what happened. He told me he had just got kicked out and also told me about the plasma donations and that he had not brought that subject up during the disciplinary meeting. He only had a month left of his six-month training. I encouraged him to

appeal and tell the committee about the plasma donations. The committee gave him a reprieve, and he finished the program.

"I once bought a leather coat and a calculator from a graduating trainee so he could have gas money for his motorcycle and food money to get him to his new destination.

"Once during a festive occasion at Jackson Square, a young man came directly to me to talk. He had paid his own way through TAT School by using an adult education sponsor. He had established a successful career after leaving TAT School and was proud to tell me about it. He introduced a very nice little French woman, who had become his wife, and showed me a beautiful baby girl of which they were very proud.

"A young man from Knoxville Job Corps group was the youngest of 11 brothers. The other 10 were in jail, on probation or awaiting trial for criminal activity. He only received about \$35 per week for food and rides. His legs had been run over by a furniture truck. His fellow classmates refused to let him carpool when he had no money to pay, which resulted in a two-mile walk to TAT School and late arrival.

"I saw him walking one morning along Lafayette Drive and stopped to pick him up. He was so glad to get a ride that he jumped into my truck and sat on my lunch before I had a chance to move it from the passenger seat.

"An interesting group sponsored for Tat Training was the "Displaced Homemakers," mostly women who adapted very well to the industrial setting and caused the 'fellas' to be more careful about their behavior.

"The Union Carbide instructors held a technical class of their own to discuss pertinent floor projects. I disturbed one of those classes one day while I was demonstrating the use of my safety award chosen from an Amway catalog. I pushed the button on my pop-up umbrella and it shot about 15 feet down the hallway and opened like a parachute. We laughed, but disturbed the technical class.

"Several of the TAT graduates got jobs at Y-12 and some of them are still working here. I had to seek other employment in 1984 as the CETA funding expired and TAT School trained its last classes. With the economy as bad as it is now, this might be a good time to initiate some new training programs like TAT."

- *Richard Rookard*

What a great story Richard recalls about TAT. It was not unusual for these type things to happen there. His use of the "TAT School" name for the program brought back memories. I now recall hearing that term being used as the standard way to which the program was referred. I had forgotten that until his note reminded me.