

## **Building 9213's earliest history – Bill Sergeant**

One of the joys of writing early history of Y-12 and Oak Ridge is the periodic phone calls I get from Bill Sergeant. Bill's memory is amazing. When I write about the times when Bill was "living the experiences," he often adds valuable content to the history. Such is the case with Building 9213.

First, let's look at a bit of background on Bill's career. Bill says, "In my Manhattan District days my energy was concentrated on guarding the perimeter of Oak Ridge by manning the gates; patrolling with cars, horses and boats the borders; providing police work everywhere — homes, banks, trailers dorms; traffic control; making arrests for murder, drunkenness, speeding, etc. My group of about 1,000 military and armed civilians conducted all enforcement except inside the three main plants. Even there, I had some training duties of armed civilian guards."

Bill continues, "From 1947-1950 my experience was with the police and fire protection outside the plants. I was back in the army from 1950 to mid 1952 as a Lieutenant Colonel in Washington, Korea [Bill led a 300-person battalion of the National Guard in Oak Ridge as they served in the Korean War], and Colorado. From 1952 to late 1979 I was in the AEC/ERDA/DOE [Atomic Energy Commission/Energy Research and Development Administration/Department of Energy] Security Division as physical branch Chief, Deputy Division Director and Division Director."

See why I rely on Bill so heavily? He lived the security of Oak Ridge. He was in charge of it and understood the vital nature of the job. When I wrote the first article about Building 9213, not an hour after the story hit the street in the morning, I got that call from Bill. I was delighted!

Bill began by saying he was glad to see a story on Building 9213. He went on to tell me of the time during 1946, before the Atomic Energy Commission took over Oak Ridge and when he was still a member of the Army's Manhattan District, when Building 9213 was THE highest security threat about which he had to worry.

He went on to tell how Building 9213 was connected by radio to a secure location right in the middle of Oak Ridge. The building at 101 Bus Terminal Road had a significant connection to Building 9213 at Y-12.

The portion of the building at 101 Bus Terminal Road commonly mistaken as a "jail" was first built as a security communications center. It was linked by radio to Building 9213, just south of the ridge beyond Y-12, and where the world's ONLY supply of enriched uranium-235 was stored. This was after the war ended and when K-25 was producing feed material to Y-12 and before Y-12 calutrons were shut down.

The full capacity of K-25 and Y-12 was put to the task of separating more uranium-235. The Cold War was feared even as early as 1946. Remember, Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech was delivered on March 5, 1946, at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. This marks the onset of the Cold War!

The concern they had at the time was that an attack would be made to capture that valuable material stored in a vault. They wanted the security forces to know of such an attack immediately. They also wanted the security forces headquarters to be safe from attack, which explains the 1-foot thick concrete ceiling, no windows, and heavy concrete construction of the addition to 101 Bus Terminal Road, in the middle of the secret city of Oak Ridge.

Bill also told me of the concern his security force had regarding the many country roads that led to Building 9213 back then. Many of these gravel roads exist today but few are maintained. The main road that runs from Bethel Valley Road going by Building 9213 and crossing Chestnut Ridge before dropping

off into Bear Creek Valley very near the old Steam Plant at Y-12 is still visible today. It was paved a number of years ago and served as a short cut between Y-12 and ORNL for years.

Today there is again a locked gate limiting access to Building 9213, which is used as a Y-12 training facility where National Guard units learn to identify and isolate radioactive sources as part of their training for Homeland Security. The old building is well suited for this training.

Bill said they traced out all the roads and ran exercise drills where they would simulate an attack on Building 9213 and hurriedly station security police officers at the exits of all possible escape routes from Building 9213. All this was managed from the secure communication center in the middle of Oak Ridge.

As we were ending our conversation about Building 9213, Bill said, "Ray, that time was one of the most exciting times in my career. We were training to protect this uranium, and we knew we were the only thing that could keep it from being taken. We were creating new procedures that had never been thought of before." Bill's excitement grew even as he spoke about the challenges faced by him and his men who made up the security patrol.

My thanks to Bill for helping me confirm that Building 9213 existed prior to 1950 when the critical experiments test cell additions to the security vault were added. Here is yet another example of how important elements of history can be lost unless we capture it from those who actually lived it.

The documents I have researched about Building 9213 totally miss the existence of the security vault prior to 1950. What a tremendous history Building 9213 has. I am so glad Joe Lenhard insisted there was more to the history of that building and that I should dig into it. Thanks Joe!