

Y-12, submarines, work for others and AVLIS – Reader response:

The following response comes from Ruth Tuft. Her response to my articles written about work for others at Y-12 is refreshing. While she is not the only one to respond, as you know Tom Smith has also been very helpful in that regard, Ruth's response is from yet another unique perspective.

These insights gained from people who actually did the work are extremely valuable in capturing the true history of the times. She lived through the events and has a great recall of the people working with her. I have edited her comments a bit, with her permission, but have tried to leave much of her comments intact so you can get the personal flavor of her recollections.

In an e-mail to me, Ruth said, "Mr. Smith – I loved the column today. It brought back all sorts of memories! I was part of the software team that developed the control system for the AVLIS (Atomic Vapor Laser Isotope Separation) project at Y-12. At the time, I was officially a member of the Instrumentation and Controls Division at ORNL. I was on loan to the Engineering Division, working with the software development team at Y-12.

"At that time, I had to report to Building 3500 at ORNL and then catch the bus to Y-12. Near the end of the day, I had to work up to the last minute at Building 9202, then catch the last bus back to X-10. I lost at least one hour every day riding the bus. Finally, all the men I worked with decided to stand up for me, and they compelled my supervisor to allow me to report to Y-12 every morning.

"Later, I was 'loaned' out to Engineering, to work in the Vibration and Acoustics Lab. While I was there, I worked on the Amphibious Assault Vehicle, the LCAC (Landing Craft Air Cushion), the Helicopter Landing Craft (that was a lot of fun!), and several other 'Work for Others' projects.

"Eventually I was transferred to the Engineering Division. I remained there until our function was 'outsourced' to smaller, private engineering companies.

Ruth's e-mail then transitioned to other aspects of her job that involved writing.

She said, "One of the tasks I got involved with was writing papers for engineering journals. 'My' engineers did wonderful work, but they weren't very good writers. It ended up with them providing me an outline (or a good hint), and I did the writing.

"They would then take my draft and make corrections or insert data. Finally, I would finish the papers off and submit them.

"Once I was writing a technical paper on one of our projects. I was going full-tilt to make deadline. I got to a part that needed engineering input, so I typed 'Engineer will insert details here.' I finished the paper and had the guys review it. They passed it and gave it to our supervisor for final review.

"He brought it back and asked 'Did you leave something out?' I was embarrassed, but not as badly as the two engineers who 1) were supposed to fill in the blanks, and 2) review it for accuracy!!

"Those were the good old days!"

Indeed, Ruth, you have reminded us again of the “good old days” for many who have worked at Y-12. *A Nuclear Family*, the documentary film series reflects on the history of Y-12 through the eyes of the people who have worked and are working here.

I spoke by phone to Dr. Bill Bibb, the retired DOE manager responsible for Y-12 when it was a part of the Defense Programs office of DOE Oak Ridge Operations. He had just finished watching *A Nuclear Family*. He spoke highly of the documentary. Copies of the DVD set are available at the Y-12 History Center.

Bill has promised to talk to me more; I look forward to that. It is most helpful when people who know about Y-12 contact me. I truly desire to document the history in the best manner possible, and I solicit the help of readers who have experience, especially stories about the people, as those stories make the history come alive!

I will close this article with one more story that Ruth shared with me. This one pertains to the submarine work.

Ruth said, “Back when K-25 was working on the model submarine, I was working in the Vibration and Acoustics Lab in the Engineering Division. One of my fellow workers had been a draftsman and had worked his way up to a senior planner. He was one of the men selected to go to Idaho with the group of workers who delivered the submarine to the Navy.

“I raised Arabian horses and showed them – so, of course, I was considered an expert on all things equine. There is no pari-mutuel betting in Tennessee, but there is racing (and betting) in Idaho. He asked me how pari-mutuel betting works. I told him what I know (which took about a minute),” she said.

Ruth told her co-worker to take only enough money to pay for dinner and a movie and leave everything else in his room. She also told him to bet only on the favorite across the board. He did and won. Others, who went with him but did not have the benefit of the wise council of Ruth’s advice, lost money.