

## **Tennessee Eastman letter on Y-12 reduction in force**

While I am generally trying to keep these historical articles focused on Y-12 with some emphasis on the history of Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the Department of Energy as there are ties to Y-12's history, this article is presented well out of sequence. It contains original material that is valuable to a better understanding of the transition that took place at Y-12 after the Manhattan Project ended. In December of 1946, Y-12 was headed quickly toward a complete stop of all uranium separation work.

Recently I came across a copy of the memorandum Tennessee Eastman management wrote Y-12 employees when the order was received to curtail work at Y-12. This was a huge blow to the employees, many of whom were trying to find ways to keep Y-12 going. It did not look good for the future of Y-12 coming as it did right on top of the holidays in 1946.

At the end of the war, many workers learned for the first time what Y-12 was doing. Several reductions took place but the work load remained high even into 1946. But, by the end of 1946, most knew the future of Y-12 did not look good.

One has to wonder if Tennessee Eastman was not beginning to look for a way to gain release from the government's requirement for them to operate Y-12. Their war mission was over and the next phase of Y-12, whatever that was, might well be perceived as not holding the same degree of dedicated commitment as required from them during the war effort. That transition did occur in May, 1947 when Carbide and Carbon Chemical Company took over operation of Y-12 from Tennessee Eastman.

Here is the text of the Tennessee Eastman notice given employees by Dr. F. R. Conklin, Works Manager regarding the pending reduction in force. It was published in *The Bulletin*, the company newsletter.

On December 26, 1946, we were notified by our government to curtail the work at Y-12. We immediately passed on to you as much of the government's instructions as security rules would permit. The circumstances surrounding the decision were such as to permit no delay in notifying you, unfortunate as it was to disturb your enjoyment of the holiday season.

I'm sure all of you realize that the reduction in our work is not Tennessee Eastman Corporation's decision. It is the decision of our government, made in the national interest... The company is employed here to carry out the work laid down by the government. Technological improvements reduced the extent of the work. We are obeying our orders.

### **Reduction to be orderly**

Our present expectation is that the reduction will proceed in an orderly fashion at the rate of about 250 persons per day.

### **Must maintain efficiency**

Again, I wish this reduction in force were not necessary. The company wishes good luck to those of the present plant staff who must be terminated.

Fred. R. Conklin  
Tennessee Eastman Corporation  
Y-12 Works Manager

On January 2, 1947, the Oak Ridge Journal carried a story announcing terminations of more than 5,000 people. The reason given for the reduction in force was "Efficiency and Economy of Operations" as a result of improvements in the processes for the separation of uranium 235.

In the same article it was noted that the population of Oak Ridge was at 32,000 and was not expected to decrease even with the reductions as the applications on file and awaiting assignment of homes exceeded the announced reductions.

An earlier reduction in force of 10,000 workers had taken place in September, 1945, when "...one phase of the process operations was discontinued and placed in a standby condition." That was when the Alpha calutrons at Y-12 were shut down.

At that time the S-50 Plant was providing feed material that exceeded the capability of the Alpha Calutron and soon the K-25 gaseous diffusion process was producing even greater enrichment and being fed directly into Y-12's Beta calutrons. These are the efficiency and economy of operations and improvements in the processes for the separation of Uranium 235 mentioned in the newspaper.