

## **Dr. Googin and his early days at Y-12, part 5 — Beside the railroad tracks with John Googin**

In our last installment of the saga of John Googin's arrival at Y-12 in late May, 1944, John had just finished his tour of Building 9202 and had gone to a warehouse near where Building 9720-6 was later built to pick up his clothes. He had walked from one building to the other along the railroad tracks with his new supervisor, Ed Vitalla.

As they walked along, John and Ed had shared conversation regarding the work to be done at Y-12 and the immediate objectives of the Bulk Treatment operation. They had discussed the pressing need to produce more and more as the new production buildings came on line. There was an expansion of Bulk Treatment already underway. This they discussed in detail. Remember, this is John's first day on the job!

Don't you know Ed had to wonder just what kind of person this John Googin was? I am sure John was already asking questions faster than Ed could provide answers. I am sure also that in his thinking, John was well ahead of the conversation and already had answers to many questions; he just asked them to confirm what he felt he already knew.

In the conversation with Ed along the railroad, John estimated it would take six months or more before the expansion of the Bulk Treatment operation could be finished. He realized the need for increased production required the present plant to become much more productive in the meantime. This level of discernment on the part of this "new recruit" amazed the supervisor.

As the conversation continued to grow more detailed and specific, Ed had to begin to see he was being introduced to an extraordinary individual. John Googin made a strong impression on everyone who met him. In later years, his presence was so imposing that top managers at Y-12 would caution him not to ask speakers questions that were too difficult. John could easily pin down any error made or failure to understand a problem in depth.

Gordon Fee, the top manager of Y-12 who replaced Jack Case, told me of his briefing regarding Dr. John Googin when Jack Case was handing over the responsibility to manage Y-12. Gordon said of Dr. John, "I remember one of the instructions Jack Case gave me when I became plant manager was "When in doubt, ask Dr. John, and no matter how smart you think you are, do what he says not what you think, and don't be afraid to tell him to quit asking so many tough questions of speakers in public."

Now back to the conversation on the railroad. At the same time, the information John was gaining from Ed and others regarding the war work being done at Y-12 caused him to quickly gain a conviction to support the work. He was happy to be a part of what he immediately realized was very important to the nation and the winning of the war.

John stated in his autobiography of his Manhattan Project years, "On the way back from the warehouse with the clothes, the conversation turned to the near future and the new recruit told his new supervision that all of the evidence on hand to that time indicated to the new recruit that the immediate goals could be met. It was suggested that the recruit would be supervising his present supervisor within the next three months."

John Googin was just that matter of fact. He reported the conversation as it had occurred with no polish and no elaboration, just pure facts. He was also a person who easily stood out in any conversation as his insights were keen and his observations precise. Can't you just imagine how Ed, his new supervisor, felt when the obviously highly intelligent young college graduate began saying things that he observed in just a few hours that Ed might well have taken weeks or months to figure out.

John's arrival at Y-12 in May of 1944 was only the mere beginning of world impacting changes he would introduce at Y-12 and through that career literally change the face of the globe. These world events Dr. Googin influenced began with the separation of uranium-235 for Little Boy and continued through the separation of hafnium-free zirconium for Naval reactors, to separation of lithium-6 for thermonuclear weapons, to many machining, processing and material improvements to nuclear weapons systems that

helped win the Cold War, and finally even to the disclosure of facilities for weapons of mass destruction being constructed in Iraq.

Retired Reverend Howard Box, Dr. John Googin's long time friend, co-civil rights advocate, and admirer of Dr. Googan, called to express his personal appreciation for the articles being published on Dr. Googin's career at Y-12. He wanted to be sure I understood that John had both a family side and a community side to John that these were important areas to cover as well. That is true and I will appreciate his help getting that part of John's life in the story.

However, the most significant comment he has made to me so far has been to pass along a quote from one of John's many obituaries. The quote is, "John Googin started his career before there was a Soviet Union and by the time he ended his career there was no Soviet Union." John had a lot to do with that!