

## Y-12's Training and Technology – TAT and Don McMurray

The stories from Training and Technology experiences keep on coming in. Thanks for helping create a fuller history of the TAT School. Everyone who has sent in information has done so because of the great results they have experienced while there and the significance that training experience has made in each of their lives.

I recently had a conversation with Don McMurray, the director of TAT when it closed. The story of the final phase of the program is a poignant one and one that Don remembers well to this day. The way he learned of the program's demise still sticks in his craw. It came from reading about it one morning at his breakfast table in the local newspaper.

Don's son, David McMurray, works at Y-12 and has helped me as we have communicated and captured this information from his dad. I found Don's story to be different from others because he was the director and saw the program in a broader perspective than most.

His experience was one of watching the efforts of instructors, seeing the struggles of trainees, and realizing the great amount of good that was being done from an overall perspective. He truly felt betrayed when the program was stopped. He was hurt by the way the information came to him but more so, I believe, by the loss of the valuable human assistance tool he managed.

Here is Don's story in his own words. Note that he has created what will now be the name for the stories I have captured when he called them "TAT Treasures." I appreciate that!

Don says, "My name is Don McMurray and I have read ten installments of the 'TAT Treasures.' They brought to mind many good memories I had of this great program at Y-12. Here are just a few of those memories.

"I had been the manager of the Materials Department for several years with 150 to 175 employees scattered all across Y-12. I felt ready for a change in jobs and was familiar with the TAT program since it was just across the street from my office.

"I had heard the current director of TAT, Ralph Pearson, was retiring and that they didn't have anyone in mind yet, so I talked to Ralph. The conversation went well, and we went to Personnel where we worked out the details of my taking the job. With a degree in Industrial Management from Tennessee Tech, I had developed skills in machining, welding, drafting, woodworking, physical testing, and other areas that were taught at TAT. Additionally, I had a permanent Tennessee teacher's certificate.

"I was more pleased with and enjoyed the TAT director position more than the five or six other departments I had managed over the past 30 years. Why? Because I was helping people find a better life. The best I recall, there were about 300 students at that time, and all found appropriate jobs upon graduation.

"A few times, I had difficulties with instructors sent to me from divisions within Y-12. Some were sent there because they had problems in their respective divisions. I visited each division manager involved, making it clear to them that I was not running a penal farm and invited them down for a review of the TAT program.

"One class was preparing for graduation and Y-12 Plant Manager, Gordon Fee, called and asked if he could speak to the graduates. I told him I had already picked one of the graduates to speak. He said that, 'you must be kidding,' but the graduate I had picked was an excellent student and could talk clearly about most any subject.

"I had gone over his notes and approved his data. Mr. Fee came to the graduation and sat next to me. After hearing a few minutes of the speaker, Mr. Fee said he understood why I had chosen him. Upon his graduation, the speaker got a management job in another company, but he made several trips back to TAT to encourage others to be serious about the program.

"I did wood carving as a hobby during my term as TAT manager. I had recently completed a confederate soldier, but it needed something else on the wooden base. Since I had served in the Army artillery, I got the idea of a cannon. I did a sketch of the cannon and gave it to the machinist class. They did a fantastic job of machining the cannon.

"Early one weekday morning I was reading the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* and found an article, probably by Frank Munger, stating the TAT program was closing down immediately. I called my division manager, but it was news to him, too. Finally, I called DOE and was assured that the program was over, though I never did learn why it was closed.

"Even after being retired from Y-12 for over 20 years, I still meet TAT graduates. Every one of them brags about what an excellent program it was. I'm just glad I had the opportunity to be associated with the program, even for a short period."

There you have Don's experience. Sad that his program ended, and still after all these years I sense a bit of bitterness. What actually happened to end the program will be described by Rac Cox, of the Oak Ridge Associated Universities, who also had a role in TAT, in a later installment of these "TAT Treasures," as Don has named this series of articles on the history of the Training and Technology program.

I have also been asked to compare what was done with TAT to the present Y-12 Apprentice Program and that installment will be forthcoming. Meanwhile, I continue to want to hear from you and your experience at TAT. Not a week goes by without someone speaking to me about how meaningful that school was in shaping their career. So, again, thanks for helping me capture the spirit of TAT!