

## **Bill Sergeant – An icon of Oak Ridge Security**

On Friday, February 18, 2011, I attended the burial and celebration of life of Bill Sergeant. He was loved by family, admired by friends, honored by Rotary Clubs internationally for leading the charge to rid the world of polio, and remembered by many in security at the Y-12 National Security Complex and Oak Ridge. He was my friend.

One of the joys of writing early history of Y-12 and Oak Ridge was Bill's periodic phone calls. He would always have a new story for me, but often he would also kindly correct mistakes I had made. He was always gentle with me because he liked what I was doing. He thought the history of Oak Ridge was important for the world to know and always sought ways to promote it.

He lived the experiences I tried to document. So, his perspective was precise and he helped me immensely as we collectively documented his early years in security for the Manhattan Project, the Atomic Energy Commission, the Energy Research and Development Administration and the Department of Energy.

Bill told me, "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 to 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."

What a tremendous description of service to his country is depicted in those simple and straightforward words from Bill Sergeant. Like so many others who lived the experiences of the Manhattan Project, the Korean War and even the later wars the United States has fought (I am pleased to be a Vietnam veteran), Bill was proud of his military service.

Bill was more than just a resource for my history stories written both in *Historically Speaking*, in more general terms about Oak Ridge history, and in *Y-12: Oak Ridge treasure, national resource*. He often invited me to his home and to the annual parties he held.

He also donated two flags to the Y-12 History Center — one flag is the Atomic Energy Commission flag and the other is the Energy Research and Development Administration flag. They are both on display at the entrance to the Y-12 History Center.

Bill explained how he personally took those flags down from the flag pole flying at the headquarters of his security division and kept them as historical artifacts. He had held on to them for years hoping to find just the right place to display them. He found that in the Y-12 History Center. We officially accepted his donation and recognized him with a ceremony and photographs. It was noted then that he had served his country well and had provided exceptional security service to the Oak Ridge Reservation, including Y-12.

Bill enjoyed explaining how his security forces were likely the first tactical rapid response team in Oak Ridge. He said they handpicked a group of men who were assigned duty to be ready to respond to Colonel Kenneth Nichols, who was in charge of the Manhattan Project in Oak Ridge.

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.

He also liked to point out that the building at 101 Bus Terminal Road in Oak Ridge 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 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.

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.

It was Bill who helped me to 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.

Bill Sergeant, an icon with a memory like a steel trap. How I miss him already!