

Y-12 takes on the Cold War

John S. Salman, Historical Consultant, said in the introductions to his *Cold War Sites: A National Historic Landmark Theme Study*, completed in December, 2010, "As World War II ended, the planet entered what has become known as the Cold War Era. Two facts dominated this period: the United States and the West vied against the Soviet Union and its satellites in a global political and military struggle for supremacy, and the threat – sometimes seemingly the promise – of nuclear obliteration hung over all the Earth like the Sword of Damocles.

"Day in and day out for four and a half decades, the two sides maneuvered. Puppet states, proxy wars, espionage and counterespionage, subtle intimidation and raw violence, threats and bluster, public pronouncements and smoke and mirrors – the world sweated and trembled as each side toyed with reality and illusion to gain advantage. To many people the greatest delusion of all was the belief that mere mortals could somehow control the means of annihilation and keep the finger hovering over the button from ever pushing it.

"The world watched with white knuckles as time and time, each side slipped and slid closer to the fatal moment in a clumsy dance macabre. Would this be the day that one or both made final stumble or miscalculation? In America, children gasped whenever television screens went black in the middle of an evening sitcom, the word BULLETIN dropped into view, and a grim voice intoned. 'We interrupt this program for a special announcement.'

"Were the missiles on their way? To most Americans, the Cold War was an era of constant low-grade fear and worry punctuated by unforgettable moments of sheer terror."

Salman describes the powerful position the Soviet Union seemed to hold when Nikita Khrushchev bragged, "We will bury you!" To most the strength claimed by the Soviet Union seemed real, but in actuality it was more show than anything else.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, when it is generally concluded we were the closest ever to a nuclear war, the fate of the world literally balanced in the hands of a very few individuals. The United States military commanders were at their highest state of readiness, and the Soviet commanders in Cuba stood ready to use nuclear weapons to defend the island if invaded.

The primary reason for the crisis was because the Soviet Union tried to get their missiles within striking distance of the United States. In 1962, the United States held a superior position as our missiles were capable of striking the entire Soviet Union, as stated in *An Overview of the Crisis* by the ThinkQuest Team. However, at that time the Soviet Union's missiles were only capable of reaching Europe and not the United States.

While the political ideology of Communism seemed to gain momentum for a time in Europe, Communism ultimately collapsed, and the Soviet Union broke apart. Capitalism continued its advance and remains a growing strength in the world today.

The military side of the Cold War was known as an "arms race," and Y-12 was right in the midst of the fight. In the 1970's Y-12 was buying ever more precise machine tools and measuring machines as well as experimenting with various materials used in nose cone shapes for potential use on missiles.

Jack Case took over the Y-12 Plant Manager's job in 1967 and held that position until 1981. It was during this time that the major build up in machine tool capacity and highly trained staff at Y-12 provided the resources necessary to help win the Cold War nearly a decade after he retired. But the basic "Can Do" philosophy and the experienced management team resulted from Case's drive to see Y-12 be the very best it could be.

Case's management team consisted of Roy Williams, Metal Preparations Division Manager; Keith Kahl, Fabrication Division Manager; Hank Stoner, Assembly Division Manager; J. W. (Bill) Ebert, Maintenance

Manager; George Evans, Shift Superintendents; Harwell Smith, Product Engineering and Scheduling; Herm Snyder, Employee Relations; Ed Pluhar, Materials and Services; Larry Phillips, Classification; John Sergeant, Salary Administration; Harvey Kite, Technical Coordinator; Ken Haeusler, Consulting Engineer.

If you have been around Y-12 long, you will recognize most of those names as they were long-time managers during the 1970's and early 1980's. They each had capable department managers, and it has been said by many that the division managers and department superintendents really ran the plant and the general supervisors and supervisors along with the crafts got the work done.

The management system was an effective large system style approach. Each manager from the supervisor to the Plant Manager knew their job, and each was held accountable for executing the needed tasks safely and securely. Once an administrative action was initiated, you did not have to check at each interface point to see if it was continuing to be carried out, the system assured it continued to completion.

An example of how that worked was the "18 Day Turnaround Program" known merely as "Circle 18." Bob Presley reminded me of how this system worked. There were stamps at every point of interface where a weapons part job might pass. These stamps were made to place a circle with an 18 in the middle on the part card or work order.

If you received something with a circle 18 on it, that item was to be automatically placed ahead of ALL other work and was to be worked immediately and to completion before passing it on to the next stop. Bob said the system worked really well to bring focus on the items requiring quick turnaround.

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If you know where one of those "Circle 18" stamps might be located today, I would sure like to put it in the Y-12 History Center.