

Another key Y-12 General Foreman remembered

The article featuring Ray Guinn and Herman Butler has been well received and has resulted in many positive comments. Many people who worked at Y-12, and even some of us still here, recall with fond memories the likes of these two dedicated individual leaders.

It is not just the memories of the skills they possessed or the technical knowledge or even the manner of supervision they exhibited. These men were genuine. They were deeply concerned for their workers and for the families of those workers. They were more than just good supervisors; they were high-quality individuals. Yet, they could be hard as nails when needed.

There are others I am sure you will recall who fit into the same mold as Ray and Elmer. One that I had thought of when writing the article on them was Bob McAlister. He was General Foreman over operations of Building 9206. I provided him maintenance support and also had the privilege of having him serve as a trainer in Interaction Management.

Interaction Management was a supervisory training program introduced in the 1980s and was intended to help the first-line supervisor have more effective interactions with the workers. It consisted of three key principles: "Maintain or Enhance Self-Esteem, Listen and Respond with Empathy, and Ask for Help in Solving the Problem."

The training program also had "critical steps" for each interaction and used role playing in the training method, which was called "Skills Practice." One of the keys to the success of the program was that it was taught by line managers and not professional trainers.

However, the line managers had to be certified to teach. I was the Interaction Management Master Trainer and trained well over 100 managers to teach the program. One of them was Bob McAlister. He was a most interesting student.

He was as sharp as a tack, knew his people well and told me more than once that this training was a bit soft for his liking. He felt a more straightforward discussion would be more productive and more likely to correct the problem employee.

One of the teaching competencies I had to measure on each line manager was their willingness to accept the principles and apply the skills themselves as models for the students. I told Bob that was the situation and that I felt he already did practice the techniques. He laughed and agreed with me. He was just giving me a hard time. We laughed about that for years.

When the article on Ray and Elmer was placed on Y-Source, as all of them are, the first thing in the morning after it was posted, I got an email from Steve Combs. Steve said, "Just read your article on Ray Guinn and Herman Butler. Excellent. Two guys whose contributions should not be forgotten. I was a little disappointed that Bob McAlister (9206) was not included in that article. Bob was a contemporary of Ray and Herman and worked under a philosophy much like they employed with the same dedication."

That same day, Steve sent me the following comments on Bob from Donnie Eblen, who worked for Bob as a first-line supervisor.

Donnie said, "I first met Bob McAlister in October 1986, when Herman sent me to work for him as a supervisor. Ernie [Ernie's last name was Lamoyer or something like that...and the story is told that when he came to work for Bob he was the size of David Daniels, who was a rather tall and muscular individual, and Ernie was very short and small] and a few other supervisors had just left in August, and that was why

I was moved to 9206. I didn't get to meet Ernie or the others. When I showed up on the 9206 doorstep, we were working seven-day rotations, diligently processing materials from Savannah River Site.

"I don't think Bob had a #2 [person considered his second in command] when I first got there. The seven-day rotation shift only lasted a couple of years, and we returned to five-day rotating shifts. When that occurred, David Daniels was selected as McAlister's #2 and remained so for many years.

"I worked for Bob McAlister during the heyday of production at Y-12. He was very intelligent, knew the processes in Building 9206 to the slightest detail, and he was a very demanding general supervisor. He expected an honest day's work for the pay he offered to his supervisors.

"It was not unusual to receive a phone call from Bob at 1:00 am, just checking up on something that was keeping him up that night. We had numerous operations ongoing in 9206 that supported various projects at Y-12.

"Bob expected his supervisors to keep those processes running and to always make a product of the highest quality. He always kept handwritten, detailed ledger books that indicated the material specifications for the products made in 9206."

Donnie concluded with, "Those are some of the supervisor traits that I learned from him." Over the years, those traits have served Donnie well, and I am sure there are many others who recall Bob McAlister with fond memories and can recite things he taught them...maybe even in an Interaction Management class.