

John William (Bill) Ebert Jr. – Longtime Y-12 Maintenance Manager

I knew him as “Mr. Ebert” when his office was in Building 9734. I used to park my bicycle in the hallway just outside his door. I was the Y-12 Maintenance Division auditor and made weekly visits to each of the Work Control Centers in the Maintenance Division.

My office was located at the end of the southwest hallway in the building. To get to the coffee pot, people from the front of the building had to pass by my office door.

Often Mr. Ebert would step into my office, sit down at the side of my desk and chat. He would likely have a new idea about managing maintenance work or implementing maintenance standards that he would want to “try out” on me. I would listen attentively and try my best to reflect back to him something of value to add to the discussion.

Mr. Ebert was way ahead of me in his thinking. He already had several years of experience under his belt, and I was a young upstart just promoted from the electrician ranks to maintenance planner and estimator and was recently assigned as auditor for the entire division. I was learning quickly, but not quickly enough to keep up with Mr. Ebert.

He was the first really smart manager that took time to talk to me about management and leadership. Later I would learn more from other senior managers such as Dave Jennings, Dale Allen and several others.

But I have always remembered those quiet times in Building 9734 when I could ask Mr. Ebert why he did some of the things he did and learn from his experiences. He implemented the first maintenance standards in Y-12. He introduced the first computerized maintenance management system using the A. T. Kerney estimating standards.

This standard estimating system was already in place and functioning in a mature fashion when I became the auditor, having been first implemented in the 1960s. I was the division auditor in the late 1970s.

When I audited maintenance work, I would go to the general supervisor of the Work Control Center and we would review about three jobs per week. I would show the general supervisor any variance from the estimate, and we would discuss the reasons the job may have taken longer than estimated. Often the supervisor of the work would be asked to explain any delays. We would involve the local planner and estimator as well.

This system of specific and detailed feedback on the validity of the estimates enabled the local Work Control Center management and supervision to stay on top of the actual time taken to do jobs versus the amount estimated before the work began.

Mr. Ebert would look at the audit reports and use those results to talk with Maintenance Division superintendents regarding improvements in efficiency. He was constantly driving his organization to produce the most effective support for the production organizations. He understood the need for routine “recall maintenance” where calibration of instrumentation took place.

He supported his department managers when they had difficulty scheduling routine maintenance and would often speak with operations managers regarding the importance of keeping the maintenance current. I had

also worked as the planner and estimator for the Recall Program in Building 9737 and saw firsthand the importance attached to that work in the Standards Laboratory located in that building.

I believe Mr. Ebert was an example of the strength of Y-12 during those years when tremendous advances were being made in precision machining and inspection. He understood the importance of accurate and timely maintenance support for production.

There were several other division managers who were handpicked by Jack Case, the Y-12 Plant manager at the time. He looked to them as his primary strengths, and it seems to me that during that era the division managers actually ran the plant. Mr. Case regularly moved his key managers from one organization to another, and they did the same to their department managers. I was privileged to participate in that management rotation later on, and, as a result, I have at one time or the other had responsibility for the maintenance of every building at Y-12.

Mr. Ebert lived in Cumberland County and thus had a long drive to work. James (Jim) Akins rode with Mr. Ebert for many years. Jim also got to know Mr. Ebert even better after retirement from Y-12. Jim called me and wanted to be sure I knew about Mr. Ebert's passing.

Jim also arranged for me to talk with Ann Ebert, Mr. Ebert's daughter who co-owned the store with her dad. She and I talked about Mr. Ebert for a long time on the phone. She told of his fondness for dogs, especially miniature schnauzers, and recalled that he bred and raised show dogs in his early years. Ann also told of his love of horses and how he had an Arabian stallion that he enjoyed riding to round up his cattle. She said people would stop on the road and watch him work the cattle on horseback; he was a genuine cowboy and rode with exceptional grace.

Ann recalled that her dad was a huge Lady Vol fan, traveling to five final four championship competitions to see the games. Always being a person who sought knowledge, she said, he took an interest in cultivating grasses late in his life and his lawn was the most perfectly groomed yard she ever saw.

Mr. Ebert passed away on Tuesday, January 21, 2014, at the age of 98. Since retiring from Y-12 he had farmed, raised prize Arabian horses and registered Red Angus cattle. He also purchased part ownership in the Cumberland General Store in Crossville, Tenn. He and his daughter, Ann, operated the store until 2004.

I learned in his obituary that Mr. Ebert was "born on September 20, 1915. He led a rich life full of many interests and activities. He was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, to Sadie A. Cottle and John W. Ebert Sr., where they owned a saloon and hotel in a Nevada mining town. He grew up on a farm in Richfield, Idaho, and later had several jobs as a heavy equipment operator."

Mr. Ebert came to Oak Ridge in 1944 and advanced to Maintenance Division manager before retiring after 36 years. His retirement coincided closely with that of Jack Case and, thus, an era of management at Y-12 came to a close and yet another one began under the leadership of Gordon Fee. What Jack Case, Bill Ebert and others had created at Y-12 helped enable Gordon and others to contribute to what may well have been one of Y-12's finest hours—that of helping to end the Cold War.

I have fond memories of the Y-12 I have known for the past 43 years. But I must admit, Mr. Ebert holds a special place in my heart. He impressed me when I was young and seeking to know how to make it in the world of management at Y-12.