

Historian's Corner

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Memories – Back Then

During this past year, several conversations seem to center around an individual's memories about working conditions and the way it was in the early 60's on the Titan Programs. Here are some snippets from some of the people about their memories (Not necessarily factual but what they remember).

Those memories are arranged by categories: Work Space, Work Environment, Work Aids, Time Keeping, The View, and a 40 Year Launch Tradition's Beginning.

Work Space:

Three work shifts required a lot of people; rumor has it that there were about 15,000 Martin people on the payroll as the Titan I, Titan II, Gemini and Titan III Programs overlapped.

As you entered the first and second floors of the Engineering Building from the stairwells, it was like a big sea of desks and drafting boards (as each engineer only had a desk or a drafting board not both.). Rows of military grey metal desks and drafting boards neatly aligned front to front running from an aisle on the East side of the building to an aisle on the West side of the building. The engineers sat back to back and some people seem to remember that in some cases more than one engineer shared the same desk or drafting board. At least two engineers shared a single phone. These engineering areas were affectionately referred to as "Bull Pens". On the workers side, the aisles were lined with partitions made of green metal bottoms and opaque plastic tops. Along the windows were the management areas, a lot of which were carpeted. "Called on the carpet" had a real meaning back then. There was a small advantage but with a dark side to this setup. As the Titan I, Titan II and Gemini Programs ended and the first Titan III came off of the production line, there was a dramatic reduction of personnel. If you happened to be the one of the last people left in your area, all unfinished work piled up on your desk. The only good side was that it was visible that you were needed.

The Manufacturing Liaison Engineers located on the factory second floor mezzanine still worked three shifts as the Titan III factory production rate increased. In most cases the Engineers on each of the three shifts shared a desk.

WORK ENVIRONMENT:

By today's standards, some things were backwards. Smoking not only was allowed; it seemed to be encouraged. If you were in management, it seemed like the status symbol was a very large cigar. Also, there were no coffee or other drinks available, except in the vending machines in the stair wells or cafeteria and then only during breaks. The vending machines were particularly good at dispensing coffee before dispensing the cup. In fact the only coffee pots in any work area were in the Air Force Quality Inspector's Offices. It was not surprising that they had a lot of manufacturing and test visitors.

WORK AIDS:

Computers: Only existed in the central computer area in the Administration Building. Woe is me if you dropped your box of cards: if you didn't, then the compiler usually ate some cards and tossed some out of the feed tray. It really helped to be friendly with the computer desk people.

Calculators: Adding machines and slide rules. You were "king" if you could take a square root on your slide rule or use it to add or subtract.

TIME KEEPING:

Time cards/Time clocks - In the 60's everyone had to punch in and out on time clocks. At the start of a shift, everyone scrambled thru the lines in front of the few time clocks available at the building entrances - you had to get punched-in before your start time. In the afternoon, the same lines formed, but you had to wait for the clock to advance past your designated finish time. No one even thought about the concept of flex time; or a crazy concept like 9/80.

THE VIEW:

The test stands, located up the hill from the main plant, were used to test Titan Propellant components and Titan Stages prior to the delivery of the first vehicles. Occasionally something would go wrong and a big red cloud (aka. BFRC) would creep down to the main plant buildings and parking lot. Everyone would be advised to stay inside until the cloud dissipated. This seemed to work, except for the paint that peeled off of some cars in the lot.

A 40 YEAR LAUNCH TRADITION'S BEGINNING:

After a launch delay for the first Titan IIIC due to a tropical storm, several members of the Titan management team went to dinner at a local Cocoa Beach restaurant. During the dinner someone brought up a story about Wanda-the- Weather Witch. As the story went, if you buried a silver knife, Wanda-the-Weather Witch would move the bad weather in the direction that the knife was pointing. One of the team brought a knife from the restaurant back to the motel where most of the Titan Management team was staying. After some more discussion, the team adjourned to the beach and ceremoniously buried the knife. The next day the weather cleared and Titan IIIC-7 was successfully launched. Thus began a forty year tradition (albeit with considerable embellishments over the years) for East Coast Titan III and Titan IV launches that ended with the successful launch of Titan IV-B30 on April 29, 2005.



Many Thanks to the members of the Wednesday Titan Lunch Bunch for their assistance with this year's article.

I finally found a topic for this year's article, but this is my last article. Thanks for letting me share the past articles with you.

Jim