

My years at AEDC

by Marion Laster, PhD



My interest in AEDC began while I was a graduate student at Georgia Tech in 1957. A fellow student had scheduled an interview with the Arnold Research Organization, Inc. (ARO) at AEDC in May

1957. He invited me along for the ride.

I was scheduled to enter the Air Force to serve my military commitment as soon as I finished my graduate degree, so I didn't plan on an interview. However, I did interview during this visit – encouraged to do so by ARO personnel – and subsequently I was offered a job with the understanding that I had the military service commitment to fulfill.

I interviewed in the Propulsion Wind Tunnel (PWT), Engine Test Facility (ETF) and von Kármán Gas Dynamics Facility (VKF) (the Gas Dynamics Facility at the time) and was offered a job in all three facilities. I chose PWT and reported to work in September 1957 to work as a test project engineer. Bill Wimbrow was my first supervisor and headed the aerodynamics section where I was assigned.

Jack Marshall, Lew Rittenhouse, Harry Kaup, Howard Chevalier and Flora Yando were also in this section. Lew Rittenhouse was my

mentor until I got my feet on the ground. My first test project was testing a model of the Army's Redstone rocket in PWT's one-foot transonic wind tunnel 1-T. Bill Chew was in charge of the facility operations. That first year was very busy. I participated in additional test projects in 1-T and also in PWT's one-foot supersonic tunnel 1-S and the 16-foot transonic wind tunnel 16-T.

With having to fulfill my military commitment, ARO, Inc. (with my permission) requested a year's extension for my reporting to active duty. The Air Force granted this. During this time I became familiar with both ARO, Inc. and Air Force operations and personnel assigned to AEDC and the immensely interesting test work. I also successfully campaigned to begin my Air Force military service at AEDC and reported for duty in August 1958.

My initial assignment was in the Deputy Chief of Staff (DCS) Installation Engineering, which was the Air Force deputy responsible for facility construction. Godfrey Arnold, one of the German "paperclip" scientists, was my first supervisor. His section provided aerodynamic support to the Air Force construction offices who in turn worked with the Army Corps of Engineers on construction of the various facilities. Some of the people I worked for or with were Lt. Col. Henry Sherborne, Maj. O. B.

Thornton, Capt. Don Beitsch, "Pop" Moon, George Wade, Dottie Lawson, Mabel Banks, Charles Smith, Mr. Cunningham, Paul Katish, Mr. Emmons, and Col. Moore.

In the two years I was assigned Mr. Arnold's group, I performed engineering assignments for the design and construction of the PWT drier, Tunnel C, 16-S and the secondary cooling reservoir. In 1960 I was appointed the Air Force project manager for completing the construction of PWT's 16-S. I was honored and amazed to have this assignment being that I was only 25-years-old at the time and relatively inexperienced.

After serving my three year military commitment, I went to work as a civilian for the Air Force at AEDC in the research division of DCS Operations. Lt. Col. Don Carlson was the chief. George Pratt, Dr. Jim Mitchell,

Dr. Hans Doetsch and Eules "Tex" Hively were some of my co-workers. This division was responsible for directing the AEDC facility and test techniques research and development. After reorganization in the early 60s, the division was moved to the newly created DCS Technology with Don Eastman as head. I remained in the research branch. Later Mr. Eastman became the AEDC chief scientist and the deputy head was a colonel. After a while Robert Dietz returned from an assignment in Europe and headed the directorate.

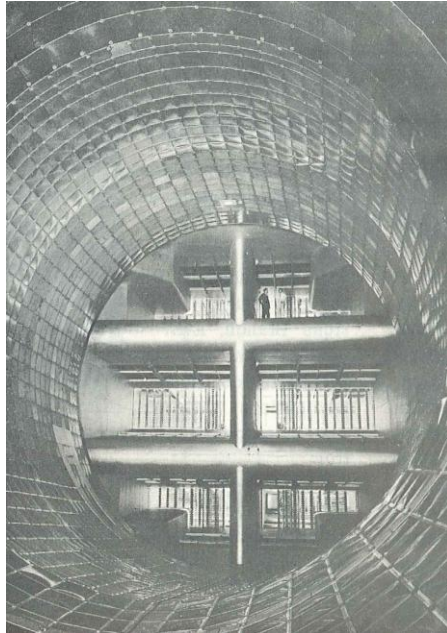
In 1963, I returned to Georgia Tech for a year's additional graduate course work with the objective of eventually obtaining a doctorate degree. I returned to the research division in

1964 and spent much of my off-duty time working on a dissertation which I completed in 1971.

After reorganization in the late 70s, Technology was moved back under the DCS Operations and a newly created analysis and evaluation division emerged. I was assigned to head this analysis and evaluation division, a position I held until the mid 80s.

This job was very exciting. I enjoyed being on the forefront of new technology developments. At the peak of activity, more than 200 man-years were devoted to technology projects including facility and test techniques technology and customer reimbursed technology.

One of my most pleasurable experiences during the 80s was being assigned to the NATO AGARD



The Propulsion Wind Tunnel supersonic circuit heat exchanger

Fluid Dynamic Panel for seven years. This along with my assignments of serving as a project officer for data exchange agreements with France, Germany and Australia were some of my best and memorable experiences. The interacting with other test organizations around the world was extremely valuable, especially on joint projects of interest.

In 1989 I was reassigned to be the technical director of plans under Luther Neal and later under Forrest Smith and Dr. Keith Kushman. During the period of this assignment I spent several months in the Pentagon working issues relative to test facilities.

I also participated in the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board and other Department of

Defense studies relative to test facility requirements. After 40 years of Department of Defense service both in the military and as a civilian, I officially retired from full-time work. I have continued to work on hypersonic facility

research for the last 14 years on a part-time basis at AEDC.

I have enjoyed my career at AEDC immensely. I believe the AEDC mission is one of the most important elements of this country's defense.