

SNF Project's Jim Rusk celebrates 45 years at Hanford

Michele Gerber, *Fluor Hanford*

In 1957, the year Fluor Hanford employee Jim Rusk came to work at Hanford, the world and the site were very different places than they are today. That year, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, beating the United States in placing the first-ever vehicle in orbit around the Earth. Coming in one of the darkest periods of the Cold War, the news was startling and frightening, for it was obvious that the Sputnik satellite, or subsequent versions of it, could be used to deliver nuclear weapons around the globe.



Jim Rusk today

Other huge changes altered life in other parts of the world and nation. That year, Ghana became the first nation in sub-Saharan Africa to become independent from Britain, its European colonizer. Malaya also became independent of Britain, hastening a trend toward self-government in the Third World. In Little Rock, Ark., President Dwight Eisenhower sent troops to desegregate southern public schools.

Elvis Presley had the top three songs on the national top-10 charts, signaling the virtual takeover of rock 'n roll in popular culture. The songs were "Jailhouse Rock," "Teddy Bear" and "All Shook Up." Other top hits that year were "Love Letters in the Sand" by Pat Boone " and "Young Love" by Tab Hunter. "See Ya Later, Alligator" became the most frequently spoken phrase in America after the song by Bill Haley became popular.

Other memorable events that year included the deaths of movie star Humphrey Bogart and anti-communist crusader Senator Joseph McCarthy. The New York Giants relocated to San Francisco and the Brooklyn Dodgers relocated to Los Angeles. The European Common Market was founded, along with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Boris Pasternak published the novel *Dr. Zhivago* and Senator John F. Kennedy was awarded the Pulitzer prize for his book *Profiles in Courage*.



Jim Rusk at work at Hanford early in his career. He is wearing a "Hanford Laboratories Operation" lab coat.

Production-oriented

At Hanford, the K West Reactor had been operating for two years when Rusk arrived in 1957, and the K East Reactor had been running just 20 months. Six other single-pass reactors operated day and night at Hanford, and N Reactor was just an engineering dream. PUREX, the other main facility built by Eisenhower along with the K Reactors, was one year old and was breaking the processing records of all previous separations plants.

Plutonium production, the site's central mission, was climbing rapidly. The 1957 production figures were 57 percent higher than those of 1956. All energies were geared toward

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expanding production, supporting the production facilities and researching ways to increase the efficiency of production.

Jim Rusk began working at Hanford Jan. 23, 1957, as a messenger for the Irradiation Processing Division (IPD) — the organization that managed fuel-making in the 300 Area and irradiation in all of the site's reactors. In that assignment, he visited all reactor sites twice a day, hand-carrying important communications. He also spent a few months downtown in the IPD Payroll Department, then moved to the 100H Area in the fall of 1957.

In 1959 Rusk went to a four-year assignment, building and evaluating reactor test loops in the now-demolished, historic 189-D Design Test Laboratory. There, he worked on many of the process improvements for the K Reactors, and on studies of the process tubes, nozzles, gaskets, flanges and other working parts of N Reactor and the Hanford single-pass reactors.

Between 1963 and '64, Rusk took time off from work to get an engineering tech degree from Brigham Young University, and returned to Hanford in 1964. He doesn't count that year of school in his total of working years — that's why he now celebrates 45 years at Hanford instead of 46 years.

From 1964 to 1990, Rusk worked in 300 Area engineering technology, supporting fuels and reactor designs and experiments by building reactor capsules that were irradiated in the K East Reactor, writing post-irradiation exam plans for Fast Flux Test Facility fuel assemblies, and working in the hot cells of the 325, 327 and 324 Buildings during the examinations.

After being "loaned" for a two-year assignment to help refurbish the 242-A Evaporator in the 200 East Area in 1990 and '91, he returned to 300 Area experiments. In 1999, he was tapped by the Spent Nuclear Fuel Project Engineering Department to work in the 100K Area. He worked in fuels characterization and facilities engineering. Over the years, Rusk won a number of quality awards and collected a large folder full of commendations and letters of appreciation.

Dan Mildon, Rusk's supervisor in SNF Engineering, commends Jim as a "conscientious, timely and precise worker. His input is always of high quality and his integrity is impeccable. He is respected by all who work with him."

Norm Boyter, Fluor Hanford vice president for the SNF Project, saluted Rusk at an employee celebration last week commemorating his 45 years on site. "Thanks for your many contributions over the years, thanks for your loyalty and dedication to this place and its missions, and please stay with us and continue to give us your expertise," Boyter said.



Snow covers the ground in the 100D Area in the 1950s. The 189-D Laboratory, where Jim Rusk worked, is the large building in the upper right corner of the photo.

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Flexibility the secret

How does Rusk see Hanford, and what is the secret to his long career here? According to him, he's an optimist and he's flexible! He says that he likes people and likes coming to work.

When asked how he has coped with all the changes and reorganizations at Hanford over the years, Rusk said he just accepts what he cannot change. "When Hanford reorganizes, it's frustrating," he said. "But I just go along with it and make the best of it. There are good people in every organization."

The aspect of Hanford today that's most different from the Hanford of early years, Rusk observes, is the complexity of the work-control system. While the strict procedures today may be required, he believes they're "ponderous." He's especially pleased by the recent, rapid cleanup progress of the SNF Project.

In the future, Rusk hopes to see a cleaner Hanford opened up to public access and recreation, especially in the rivershore areas. He also wouldn't mind seeing the restart of the FFTF.

Rusk is a graduate of Kiona-Benton High School and a lifelong resident of the area. He has a wife, seven children and 14 grandchildren, and he said his family is really the secret to a happy life. ■