

Project Mercury

By Don Saunders

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I thought the Bendix Radio Foundation might be interested in some information about Bendix's participation in Project Mercury. I am sure there are many people still around the Baltimore area that participated.

The NASA people at Langley Field, Virginia controlled the ground station equipment and worldwide layout for Project Mercury. Our initial contract was a letter contract from Western Electric who was anticipating a Cost-Plus-Fixed-Fee (CPFF) final contract from NASA for the furnishing of equipment and services for a tracking and ground instrumentation system for Project Mercury. The CPFF contract was issued on March 25, 1960 for an initial value of \$20,333,000. The team consisted of Western Electric as leader, Bell Labs, Burns and Roe, IBM, Bendix Radio, and Bendix Pacific. Bendix' Corporate efforts were headed by the Bendix Radio Division and we worked very closely with the Bendix-Pacific Division.

Representatives from the entire project group spent a month at Old Point Comfort / Langley Field working to establish the various work statements and contracts. Travel from Baltimore to Old Point Comfort was by way of the Chesapeake Bay on the Old Bay Line Steamer.

Once the contract conditions were ironed out, work began at the various team member facilities. Bill Spicer as Program Manager and Henry Newton as Assistant Program Manager headed the Bendix corporate effort. Stan Swales was the Pacific Division's leader. It wasn't very far into the program when Dick Abel replaced Spicer and Newton with Carl Georgi as Program Manager and Bob White as Assistant Program Manager.

Project meetings were held every two weeks at the Western Electric facility on Church Street, New York. [Pictures of one of these meetings is available in the BRF Archives]. As I review the picture of one of these meetings, I can't determine when it was taken but I find it unusual that only three Bendix people are in attendance as we usually had more than that. The overall leader at the head of the table is Rod Gotchiers and I'm not sure I'm spelling that properly. At his right side is our John Taylor and on the other side of the table I am almost obliterated by Stan Swales of Pacific. Behind me, the man with the mustache, is Sam Maddelena, Western's buyer with whom I had daily contact. He was a fine man to deal with. Another photo was taken at Bendix Radio in Towson, MD and include on the right side Carl Georgi, Bob White, John Taylor and behind Wilson Lamb, Barney Marshall and others.

The Project Mercury Final Project Report, prepared by the Bendix Corporation for Western Electric Company, dated July 29, 1959 to June 1, 1961 [Report on file in the BRF Archives] needs no further comment except to compare the number of tracking stations (19) with the way that function is handled today. Communication sites were established in Florida, Maryland, Grand Turk Island, Grand Bahamas Island, Bermuda, Indian Ocean Ship, Atlantic Ship, New Jersey, Virginia, Canary Island, Nigeria, Zanzibar, Australia, Canton Island, Hawaii, California, Mexico, New Mexico, and Texas.

As the contract progressed and it approached the later stages, Carl Gerogi stepped down and Bob White took his place as Program Manager and I was asked to pick up Bob's old job as Assistant Program Manger. Bob had been essentially carrying the entire program previously and he just carried on and there was very little extra work for me.

You might recall that when the first missions were flown, there were TV sets strategically placed enabling many people in the Bendix Radio plant to watch the Mercury liftoff. We considered Bendix's part of the job successful and were pleased to be a part of a national project as important as Project Mercury.

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