

## REMEMBERING DICK BROAD

### Apprentice ~ Nuclear Power Pioneer ~ Shipyard Vice President

Like many talented NNS engineers of his era, and at a time when nuclear propulsion for naval vessels was still in its infancy, **Richard Broad** (1921 - 2007) was far too busy making history to record it.

Buried in the still-classified archives of the navy and the shipyard, but forever burned into the memories of those who worked for him, is his leadership role in the very earliest years of nuclear-related activities at Newport News. That memory deserves to be more fully shared and better appreciated; especially now.

Richard Broad, Jr. was a native of Hampton, Virginia. He graduated from the Apprentice School in 1942, completing his apprenticeship in the Outside Machinists' trade. While in 'his time' he was the President of the Apprentice School's Honor Council.



By 1952, he had acquired an engineering degree from the University of Michigan, and had returned to work in the shipyard. Then, that August, his life changed forever.

He was one of six young engineers hand-picked by shipyard president J. B. Woodward to go to the Oak Ridge School of Reactor Technology for a year to study nuclear physics. The selection of this handful of shipyard pioneers in nuclear power, sometimes called '*The Original Oak Ridge Boys of NNS*', was approved by a then-obscure Navy captain by the name of Rickover.

Returning to NNS a year later, Dick served as a nuclear technician in Engine Tech before joining the newly created Atomic Power Division in 1954. In 1958, he pioneered the concept of an innovative Quality Inspection Program for nuclear work at Newport News. He had to overcome considerable in-house opposition, but persisted and was instrumental in making NNS a leader in naval nuclear ship construction. That success attracted Rickover's attention for a second time, and in 1963 Dick Broad was named the yard's Vice President of Nuclear Power. He served in that extremely demanding capacity for a quarter of a century, retiring in 1986.

During his long tenure as the head of nuclear power operations at NNS, Dick Broad had the unenviable task of serving as the shipyard's lightning rod for the constant complaints and harsh criticisms of Rickover. For years, Dick fielded calls seven days a week, twenty four hours a day from the Father of Naval Nuclear propulsion, his subordinates, both in Washington, DC and his field representatives stationed within the confines of the shipyard. He also had to frequently meet with the dozens of never-satisfied Prospective Commanding Officers that passed through Newport News during the heyday of nuclear ship construction and overhaul at the shipyard.

Consequently, and understandably, his moods often shifted rapidly and unpredictably between irritability, irascibility and irrationality. His ‘vocal volcanoes’ – often following a demanding or accusing call from Rickover - are legendary. Anyone who was in the aisle quickly scattered when he burst, red-faced, from his office on the second floor of Building 123; hell-bent for a confrontation with someone in the local Naval Reactors’ office at the opposite end of the building. He was not real popular, in those days. But many an employee in APD – including me – badly misjudged him, back then.

For in his retirement years, Dick Broad – finally relieved of the tremendous pressures of his position – became a pleasure to know. He even found his own past tirades humorous. But I don’t think he ever apologized for any of them!

My own interface with R. Broad (as he signed his memos), was not significant. But, like my exposure to Rickover several times, it was always memorable. I only worked indirectly for Mr. Broad (as we addressed him) for a few short months – between October of 1964 and June of 1965 when the shipyard refueled and overhauled the ENTERPRISE.

That was a pioneering adventure for all, and tensions were high, especially onboard ship. My assignment was to stand watch in the ‘lead’ plant – where a number of first-of-a-kind evolutions and tests for NNS in the refueling business took place. Two encounters (no other word will suffice) that I had with Mr. B are as vivid today, as when they occurred.

I had become a qualified Shift Test Engineer shortly before ENTERPRISE arrived. Short-handed, at the start, we worked 12 hour shifts, seven days a week for about two months until more STE’s could be qualified. Consequently, I was somewhat less than a happy camper when Dick Broad charged in a control station one night and demanded that I perform an unauthorized operation that, in my opinion, entailed some risk

When I refused to proceed, in the interest of safety, he told me to get off the ship; that he’d do it himself. For some reason, when I informed him that he wasn’t qualified to relieve me, he seemed to get ‘slightly’ madder. Fortunately, for me, the guy I was sharing a back-to-back watch with arrived in the nick of time, and I departed shortly thereafter (after being properly relieved by a qualified STE).

Later that night, things didn’t go well for either my relief or Mr. B. My relief knuckled under to Mr. Broad’s demands, and both of them caught hell from all directions when what was attempted caused a problem. The next day, as I thought “I told you so”, I spent hours performing corrective actions to deal with the situation that resulted from Mr. Broad’s insistence. Come to think of it, he never apologized for that, either.

Towards the end of the first refueling/overhaul period for ENTERPRISE, all the dock-side work and tests had been completed in the propulsion plant to which I had been assigned. While waiting for the other plants to finish, and for sea trials to commence, I was granted a few days’ vacation time.

I had hardly begun to decompress, when I was called by my immediate supervisor. He told me one of the other STE’s had been accused of sleeping on watch, and had to be replaced, and – tag – I was it. I refused.

A few minutes later, George Morse, the Chief Test Engineer (and like Dick and myself, an Apprentice School grad) called to tell me I just had to come in. I refused, again.

Then, Dick Broad called. In no uncertain terms, he told me to get my posterior back on the ship in time to take the second shift – or not come back to the shipyard at all. I chose to report, as ‘requested’. When asked why I said ‘no’ twice, and then reported to work, I told people that it wasn’t until I talked (nay, listened) to Mr. B that I fully understood the gravity of the situation.

After that, up to the end of 1984 when I left the yard, our encounters were largely happenstance; passing within the yard’s confines, at management sessions or Apprentice Alumni Association events. But I did get comfortable with calling him ‘Dick’, and he stopped starting every conversation with “Dammit, Lee...” and called me Bill.

Taking a job elsewhere, and moving far from “Shipyard Virginia”, I didn’t have any further contact with him until I helped organize a STE Reunion in 2001. As a part of that celebration, I created a history of the STE program, and threw in some supportive material about the early days of nuclear power at NNS for good measure.

In order to gather some useful information I called, amongst others, Dick Broad; not at all sure that he’d return the call. But he did, and we had a delightful discussion and reminisce about ‘the good old days’. We talked for over two hours; longer than all my prior conversations with him, put together. He couldn’t have been more friendly or helpful, and provided a lot of background that I could never have obtained anywhere else.

Later on, at the reunion, I summarized that conversation for the benefit of a largely incredulous audience who had known him ‘way back when. I couldn’t resist adding, as he sat nearby and laughed: “*And not once, during the entire conversation, did he fire me!*”

I last saw Dick Broad on that happy occasion; May 12, 2001. Today, as I look at pictures like this one, I fondly remember Dick and our all-too-brief adventures together onboard ENTERPRISE.

*Bill Lee*  
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