

J.W.SUTHERLAND C.B.E. - PERSONAL HISTORY 1965-1983

September 1965 appointed Manager, Radar Division; responsible to Dr B.J.O'Kane, General Manager, Electronics Group of the Marconi Company. Absorbed the whole activity of the existing Radar Division, plus several sections of the Research Division at Great Baddow, forming an enlarged engineering department and systems department. The so-called "project groups" within the existing Radar Division were dissolved. Manufacture remained as a central Marconi Company activity. Spares, repairs, handbooks etc also remained, for the time being with Central Division, but were later devolved to Radar.

The key personalities were: Mike Wolf as Marketing Manager, responsible for all sales and contracts and Roy Simons as Technical Manager, responsible for all design, system and development engineering and associated activity. Other senior personnel included Len Whitaker and Nigel Ellis-Robinson as development managers, Ian Donaldson and Max Stothard as system managers, Gerry Taylor in charge of Air Traffic Control and Maurice Burrage in charge of Field Services (installation and maintenance).

My office was briefly in Great Baddow, then the 4th floor of Marconi House, New street and then to the old Crompton Parkinson Works to be known as "Writtle Road". The staff on the re-formation of Radar Division were scattered at Great Baddow, New Street, Broomfield, with outposts at Rivenhall and Bushy Hill. We very shortly concentrated technical staff at Great Baddow, and the rest at New Street, soon to be moved to Writtle Road.

August 4th 1969 appointed Managing Director of Marconi Radar Systems Limited, (MRSL) responsible to Robert Telford (from June 1977 Sir Robert) Managing Director of The Marconi Company Limited and of GEC-Marconi Electronics Ltd. MRSL absorbed the Radar Division of Marconi, a large part of Airspace Control Division of Elliott Automation, the Electronic Engineering department of AEI Leicester (less some civil business) and the associated factory at Blackbird Road.

Radar Division covered all radar and data handling requirements for military, ground air defence and naval application and civil air traffic control; it specialised in "turnkey" package deals. Airspace Control Division specialised in air defence data handling systems, IFF and secondary radar systems and simulation. AEI Leicester had in hand the large air defence project for Saudi Arabia (for which Marconi Radar and Marconi Communications were major sub-contractors), searchlights and gun control for fighting vehicles, the Seadart Radar and various control systems for the Royal Navy, plus a small activity in civil marine radar and beacons, and a section devoted to simulation and instrumentation.

Key people in MRSL in 1969 were Roy Simons and Mike Wolf as Technical Director and Marketing Director respectively, and Iorwerth Evans as General Manager responsible for Airspace Control at Borehamwood. This Division was formally moved to Chelmsford - a few people came with the activity which was absorbed into the existing organisation; the remaining people stayed at Borehamwood, including Iorwerth Evans, and undertook other duties. Peter Way, who had been manager of the now wound-up automation division assumed responsibility for the work at Leicester as General Manager and Director with Max Stothard also from Chelmsford as his Technical Manager. Bill Melville, former general manager, Leicester, came to Chelmsford to run the massive Seawolf project. This structure remained stable for over eight years. Mike Wolf retired at the end of 1977 (he sadly died on 16th July 1979) and Peter Way returned to Chelmsford as Marketing Director.

In the early years of MRSL, the support activities formerly in Central Division plus field services etc were brought together into a single support division, and this was latterly run by Iain Butler, who became a director of MRSL in March 1977 with the same responsibility.

On the accounting side of MRSL, the first Financial Director was Malcolm Holladay, who was later replaced by Peter Causey.

A Chairman was appointed to MRSL in August 1981; Vice Admiral Sir Philip Watson.

Manufacturing responsibility was devolved to the "system companies" during the early years, and MRSL held three main factories at Gatehead, Blackbird Road Leicester and Writtle Road Chelmsford, with Works Managers Bill Henderson, Owen Jones and Alan Shelley respectively. Roy Simons, whilst remaining Technical Director, also supervised the activity of the three factories until, in the mid-70's, a Production Director, Bob Scott, responsible for all manufacture, was recruited from outside.

The staff numbers increased and premises multiplied as the turnover of the business grew. In the period 1979 to 1981, with sales exceeding £100 million (compared with £29M in 1969), there were 6000 employees, plus a further 600 under training. Individual locations included the Gateshead, Leicester and Chelmsford factories, the Writtle Road, Great Baddow and New Parks Leicester main establishments, test sites at Rivenhall, Bushy Hill, Leicester, with outstations at Watford, Norwich, Plymouth and an office in the middle of Leicester. (The outstations were necessary to recruit scarce specialist skills).

Marconi Radar Systems Limited received The Queen's Award to Industry for Export Achievement in 1980.

Public recognition of MRSL efforts came through the Honours Lists.

J.W.Sutherland CBE
M.C.Wolf OBE
R.W.Simons OBE
H.N.C.Ellis-Robinson OBE
J.L.Pickard OBE
F.L.C.Firmin MBE
R.James MBE
L.Biggs MBE
R.McCullagh MBE
S.Brewin BEM
A.Preston BEM

(I apologise for any errors oversights or omissions)

1982-83

In April 1982 I was appointed Vice-Chairman of the Marconi Company, relocated to Stanmore, with responsibility for putting together major overseas defence deals, based on consortia of Companies, British and Overseas, and backed by the British Government. I retired in April 1983, just before my 60th birthday, and have enjoyed a decade of consultancy, and non-executive chairmanships and directorships with a string of "high-tech" companies.