

I might as well get into the act of talking about Tektronix and the history (plus a little about me).

I had just gotten out of the navy in late 1951 and was planning to use the G.I. bill for college but in the meantime I needed a job. After interviewing a few possibilities like Portland radio shops etc. (Montgomery Ward turned me down). I found out there was this company over the hill and out in the country that manufactured oscilloscopes. I walked into Tektronix and they showed me around. I was impressed with them and I guess they were impressed enough with me that they asked when I could come to work to test and calibrate scopes. I said I was ready now, so they asked if 7 AM the next morning would be OK.

The product line was mainly the updated Model 511, 514 (d.c. coupled vertical otherwise similar to the 511), 512 (a low frequency d.c. with a very slow sweep speed), and the state of the art 513 (a bright CRT with about 25 megacycles, (not mega Hz in those days). I soon spent the coffee breaks visiting engineering. They had just started to work on the 2nd generation of scopes. One nagging problem was the unblanking. The production scopes used a simple AC coupling to the CRT grid. The problem- a duty cycle changed the CRT bias and the intensity needed adjusting. Not too bad if it got brighter but other times would disappear and some users wouldn't know what happened and get totally lost. After thinking about it, I thought I would try a floating power supply to couple the unblanking signal to the CRT grid. I had wired a floating power supply to a scope that I was supposed to be testing. I suggested it to some engineers who were a bit dubious at first but after using the modified scope it looked like the floating power supply was the way to go.

I soon found myself in engineering helping with the new generation of scopes that were to become the 530 series.

The point I am trying to make is that everyone in the whole company was trying to come up with the best we could do. I also learned a lot about engineering.

Tek had committed to develop and manufacture a CRT for the new scopes. I was asked to move to the CRT department to help make the CRT compromises . The design goal was to have 6 cm of vertical display. Realizing that if the vertical display was limited to 4 cm, we could design a vertical amplifier that would be 2 to 3 times faster.

During the weekend I went into the lab and was using tin snips, pliers, files, and whatever else was there to have the 4 cm CRT ready to plump down Monday morning. That CRT design along with the redesigned amplifier became the 540 series. There was a special CRT designed for the 100 Megahertz 580 (and well, almost 100 MHz). I wasn't very proud of the 580 design as it had too many compromises.

The 570 vacuum tube curve tracer started out for in house use. But Tek soon decided to sell it. The 570 needed another CRT with similar xy sensitivities. Another case for in house CRTs.

When transistors started to become practical, Tek sent Bill Polits to, I think University of Michigan, for a 2 week primer on transistors. He in turn communicated it to the rest of us who were interested. That called for a transistor curve tracer. I remember a day at the beach, I was trying to hide from the sun while everyone else was getting their sunburn. I dug the sand out from under our new 1954 Chevy, got comfortable and figured out the circuits for the curve tracer soon to become the 575.

The Tek history kind of skipped the 1950's. They did mention the CRT manufacturing, but didn't say much about all of the instruments they allowed us to produce. It seems the 50's and into the 60's was the real heyday for Tektronix during which period there were really no high powered engineers. We learned from each other and pretty much used everyone's ideas in the designs.

Starting in the 60's (maybe coinciding with the move from the Sunset building) engineering and research became compartmentalized. To me it seemed that the allegiance went to their department instead of the company.

Never in my wildest dreams did I expect to end up with such an interesting and fun job while contributing to the industry in a small way. Ever since I can remember I was, playing, building, and experimenting with electrical stuff. Previous to Tek I used to build electronic stuff and somehow make things work. In my early experience at Tek, I learned from others how to predict, build and have it work (well, most of the time).

If I remember correctly, these are the people that were working in engineering during the early 50's: Logan Belleville, Henry Hayes, Frank Hood, Dean Kidd, John Larsen, Cliff Moulton, Chuck Nolan, Bill Polits, Dick Rieger, Dick Ropiquet, Howard Vollum (who was mostly busy with management).

John Kobbe

Beaverton, OR 97007

