

CLASS OF '61

Continues...

THE SULPHIDER INTERVIEWED TWO EMPLOYEES FROM THE "CLASS OF '61", IN A SERIES OF ARTICLES ABOUT OUR "LONG SERVING EMPLOYEES".

MIXING MEMORIES OF RABBITS AND ROASTERS

NOT JUST A JOB

Vendor warehousing, electronic data interchange and complete computerisation are a far cry from the early days in the purchasing office for Senior Purchasing Officer Barry MacFarlane.

Barry commenced in 1961 just prior to the start-up of the Imperial Smelting Furnace, as an Electrical Fitter with the Smelting Department. In 1962 Barry grabbed an opportunity to work day work in the Purchasing Department as an Assistant to the then Purchasing Officer, Len Brady.

"In those days staff positions were keenly sought after because staff conditions (annual bonuses, interest-free housing loans and non-contributory superannuation) were so much better than the conditions for wages employees," Barry explained.

"It was the goal of nearly every wages employee to get onto the staff."

Barry went on to complete his engineering qualifications, fully intending to return to engineering at a later date.

Barry's career prospered in the Purchasing area and he achieved the role of Senior Purchasing Officer in 1981.

Remembering back to the "bottom office days" when the purchasing department was located near the gym, Barry noted that work wasn't as busy or hectic as it is today.

Barry explained that computers were virtually unknown then, everything was hand written, even store transactions were recorded manually.

"Sales representatives called regularly and took up a lot of our time - a different atmosphere and work ethic than what we experience today," he added.

"I also remember the guiding influence of Len Brady and the principles he instilled in me. Working together for twenty years, we had the kind of working relationship that was very comfortable," Barry said.

Barry explained that the Purchasing Department must provide the service that is needed by various departments.

"To achieve good service you need good working relationships both internally and externally, and I'd like to think that our department has succeeded in that area."

During Barry's thirty three years with Sulphide, the last four years have resulted

in the most significant changes for the purchasing area under the reins of General Manager Alan Roberts.

"The emphasis on supply has been properly recognised and given full support by management," Barry said.

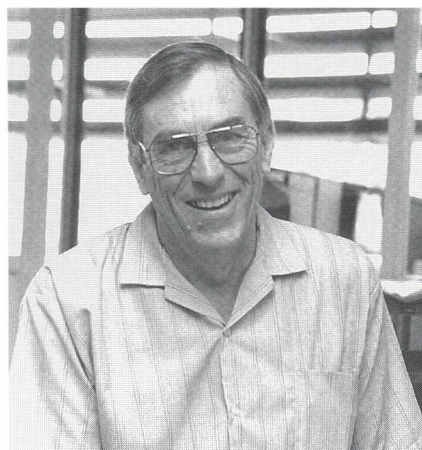
The arrival of "Matman" (the computerised materials management system) had the biggest single impact for the Purchasing Department.

"We now fax through our orders, price enquiries and expediting lists with the push of a button," Barry explained.

Barry is the "principal user" of Matman and spends part of his time managing the system, housekeeping, problem solving and educating users.

Looking to the future, Barry sees the next two to five years as a period of significant change. The transition to vendor stores, where suppliers will be relied upon for day-to-day requirements, and the computer technology of electronic data interchange (EDI) which will provide a computer link to suppliers for direct ordering, will hasten the change.

Reflecting on his career, Barry said "Sulphide is a fair company to work for, you are treated with respect and consideration and I have always felt comfortable and secure here. It's not been a job to me, it has been a career."



Senior Purchasing Officer, Barry MacFarlane recalls the "early" days of the purchasing office.

The honour of longest serving employee at Sulphide sits well with George Chalmers. Grinning at the comment, George remains proud, but reticent.

Like many of the men who are long serving employees, George talks with pride about his career at Sulphide, and has weathered the many changes with a degree of fatalism.

George not only belongs to the class of 61; he is a survivor of the "class of 49".

When asked about his "early" days with Sulphide, George explained that when he left school he was offered a trade at BHP.

"I visited BHP. I was pretty young. The place scared the hell out of me, so I joined Sulphide instead," George said.

Only months after joining, George, and indeed his co-workers were laid off work for several months due to the "great coal miners strike of 1949".

"There was no coal to make electricity, so the plant closed down. I went rabbit shooting in the country to survive. Didn't do too bad either," he added.

George remembers a three month stint in National Service and training in the Citizens Military Force during his early years at Sulphide. He was in the signal core; training in radios, telephones, battery charging, laying phone lines and putting radios in convoys.

From working on the Ferrari acid pumps which were used to send acid to the fertiliser plant, George then worked on the barrier roasters.

He regarded the working conditions as "pretty good" and commented that any job is dangerous if you don't do it right.

George progressed to the position of certificated boiler operator for the chemico contact acid plant.

"We used boilers to generate electricity to run the whole plant," George explained.

George worked in a variety of roles, in the fertiliser plant or calcine pellet plant if the TL Roaster was off line; or assisting fitters in the ISF or sinter plant, and sometimes working on C plant or D plant.

The biggest changes George has experienced is the introduction of computerised controls systems.

"Now the controls are under your fingers, and there isn't the need to manually move valves, for example."

"Multi-skilling too is a change. A good idea I think. But I still believe you need highly skilled people to do some jobs otherwise it can be very dangerous," George added.

George is currently a control room operator in D Plant (Acid Plant) and says he really enjoys the work he does now.

"My best memories of this place are when we've been in real trouble and everyone has pitched in to help. That leaves you with a real good feeling; a feeling of mateship."

"There have been a lot of real good blokes work here over the years, but the place now is a lot quieter, a lot more stable. It's a good place to work," he added.



D Acid Plant Control Room Operator, George Chalmers in "the nerve centre of the acid plant".