

## A VISIT TO HALLICRAFTERS

By Chuck Greenslit

May 15, 2003

By 1960 it was becoming evident that the booming business in radar design and manufacturing was coming to a close. The SAGE system was completed, air traffic control systems radar had never been a profitable product leaving only some specialty radars such as the new phased array configurations in the market. Radar had been the mainstay of the government product business at Bendix Radio since World War II requiring a majority of the space at the Division headquarters on Joppa Road as well as substantial facilities at Broening Highway. Faced with the problem of finding new business opportunities in the government sector to fill the predicted shortfall, expanding into the communications field seemed to be a reasonable goal given the available engineering and manufacturing talent. To emphasize our commitment to this new direction the Division name was changed from Bendix Radio to Bendix Communications Division.

Toward that end engineering capability was added in the tropospheric scatter field and a quite substantial contract for the manufacture of MRC-98 mobile tropo scatter terminals secured. Several large bids were prepared for extensive communication systems for the government and although none were successful we were gaining knowledge in the field.

One aspect of the communications business where we had no product experience or teaming contacts was in HF radio. Collins Radio had long dominated this field and in any bid they were more likely to opt to be a competitor rather than a team member. We began to search for companies with HF radio products complimentary to our business aspirations and in the course of this search the name of Hallicrafters came up. [For a short history of Hallicrafters, go to <http://ww1.photomicrographics.com/webpages2/pmi/dd1/history.htm>]

On one my trips to the Midwest I stopped in Chicago and made an appointment to visit the Hallicrafter plant. I was greeted by the founder Bill Halligan and his son Bill. I explained that we were interested in finding either a business partner or possibly acquiring a product line in HF radio and wanted to determine their interest and capabilities in that direction. The Halligans then proceeded to tell me of the woes of their company. Several years before the Sr. Halligan decided to retire and sold the company to an entity that he felt would carry on the name and tradition of building fine radio products. Instead the buying company looted the acquisition and put the remnants back on the market. The Halligans in an attempt to rescue their good name had

bought it back but, although they didn't express it, restoring it to its former position was proving impossible. They had a few government contracts that were not doing well and no proprietary products that I could find. The upshot of our conversation was that they would very much like to sell the whole company to Bendix.

Upon my return to Baltimore I reported this to Ed Foster [Bendix Aviation Corporation VP and former GM of Bendix Radio Division] and got a rather peculiar reaction. I made no recommendation as to buying Hallicrafters and if asked would have recommended against it, which was probably just as well. Mr. Foster seemed quite agitated that I had even talked with them and was obviously not inclined to even ask my opinion on the matter. That was the last I ever heard of it but have since wondered if there had been some unpleasantness between the senior Halligan and Mr. Foster sometime in the early days of radio. They were both in Chicago working in the fledgling radio industry at about the same time which would have made some interaction likely. Based on Mr. Foster's reaction I did not inquire.

In any event the HF radio issue soon became moot with the development of satellite communications. Bendix Radio did get a foothold in the business with a Signal Corps contract to design and build the ground terminal for the first synchronous orbit communications satellite, SYNCOM. Follow-on systems and satellites were commercial developments undertaken for the most part by Hughes and we were unable to profit by our experience.