PAUL M. COOK

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by
James J. Bohning
at
San Carlos, California
on
2 April 1992
(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)
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PAUL M. COOK

1924 Born in Ridgewood, New Jersey on 25 April

Education

1947 B.S., chemical engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Professional Experience

1947-1948 President, Warren Wire Company

Stanford Research Institute
1949-1952 Chemical engineer
1952-1954 Head, Radiation Chemistry Laboratory

1953-1956 President, Sequoia Process Corporation
1957-1991 Founder, CEO, and Chairman of the Board, Raychem Corporation

Cell Net Data Systems
1991-1995 CEO
1991-present Chairman of the Board

1994-present Chairman of the Board, SRI International
1995-present Chairman of the Board, Sarnoff Corporation
1995-present Founder, Chairman of the Board, and CEO, Diva Systems Corporation

Honors

1985 Member, National Academy of Engineering
1986 Winthrop Sears Medal, Chemical Industry Association
1988 National Medal of Technology
1989 Golden Omega Award, Electrical/Electronics Insulation Award
1990 Member, American Academy of Sciences
ABSTRACT

Paul Cook begins the interview with a discussion of his family background and childhood. When Cook was young, he took an interest in chemistry, developing a laboratory in the basement of his parents’ house. After graduating from high school in 1941, he attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology [MIT], where he studied chemical engineering with Warren K. Lewis. In 1943, after enlisting in the Army, he went to basic infantry training. Cook then enrolled in the Army Specialized Training Program [ASTP], through which he attended Stanford University for two terms, studying mechanical engineering. After a year, Cook was sent to the Hunter Liggett Military Reservation, and then to Fort Benning, where he became an MP. While at Fort Benning, he joined the Officer Candidate School, and shortly after completing the training, was sent to fight in Italy. In February 1946, Cook left the Army and worked for Submarine Signal in Boston. He then returned to MIT, where he completed his degree in 1947. After graduation, Cook started the Warren Wire Company with his older brother. A year later, Cook left the fledgling company to join the Stanford Research Institute as a chemical engineer. There he worked on a number of projects, including the growth of the algae Chlorella and the potential uses of waste fission products. In 1951, Cook founded the Sequoia Process Corporation. Five years later, he left Sequoia to found Raychem Corporation, which opened in 1957. Cook concludes the interview with a discussion of Raychem’s international competition, the growth of the company, his thoughts on managing innovation, and the possibilities of radiation technology.

INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning is currently Visiting Research Scientist at Lehigh University. He has served as Professor of Chemistry Emeritus at Wilkes University, where he was a faculty member from 1959 to 1990. He served there as chemistry department chair from 1970 to 1986 and environmental science department chair from 1987 to 1990. He was chair of the American Chemical Society’s Division of the History of Chemistry in 1986, received the Division’s outstanding paper award in 1989, and presented more than twenty-five papers before the Division at national meetings of the Society. He has written for the American Chemical Society News Service, and he has been on the advisory committee of the Society’s National Historic Chemical Landmarks committee since its inception in 1992. He developed the oral history program of the Chemical Heritage Foundation beginning in 1985, and was the Foundation’s Director of Oral History from 1990 to 1995.
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