Valley of the Giants

Roland P. Koehring (1897 – 1987)

Roland P. Koehring was born in Richmond, Indiana, in 1897. He attended Richmond High School and Earlham College.

Mr. Koehring joined the General Motors Research Department in 1920, where he worked for Charles F. Kettering. While working at GM, Mr. Koehring recognized the uses of powdered metals in industry. He conducted experiments with powdered metals by filing down metal bars. His work at GM included the development of 42 patents that advanced the automotive industry. He retired from GM in 1961, while head of research and development at Moraine Products.

After his retirement, Mr. Koehring worked as a consultant to firms in the U.S. and Japan. In 1961, the Metal Powder Industry Federation awarded him its first annual Pioneer Award for his work in research and development.

His professional activities included Honorary Chairman of the American Powder Metallurgical Institute, the American Society for Metals, the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers, a founding member of the American Society for Testing Materials, a member of the Powder Metallurgy Committee, Chairman of the Dayton Chapter of the American Society for Metals, the Society of Automotive Engineers, the American Chemical Society, the American Ordinance Association, the Electro Chemical Society, and a 50-year member of the Engineers Club.

It is with great pride that we place Roland P. Koehring in THE VALLEY OF THE GIANTS.

I WAS THERE!

by William E. Dirkes

This story came to mind when I saw in *The Engineer* that Major General Fred Ascani was one of the "Eagles." When we first met, he was a Brigadier general and the program manager for the XB-70, the first supersonic bomber. We had met a number of times in both work and social settings.

While I was chief materials engineer at Wright Field in the early '60s, I was assigned to an assistant secretary of the Air Force for Research & Development team to review the technical status of the XB-70. This development project was behind schedule and was way over projected costs. When the government-industry review team met at North American Aviation, we were informed that Brigadier General Ascani would conduct the review for the assistant secretary, for he was unable to attend. While the program was in such deep trouble that it required an assistant secretary's review, the task was turned over to the program manager.

I was assigned to the manufacturing panel, which consisted of about two dozen people. After a program overview, we were assigned to sub-panel discussion rooms. Our room had a long, narrow table with chairs on each side, and the North American representative at the end of the table. There was a row of chairs against the wall behind me. I was seated across from a senior engineer from Boeing Aircraft Company. The Boeing engineer was asked about his view of the design, which included a 100-foot weld to join each wing to the fuselage. He said, "At Boeing, we would not consider a 100-foot weld a 'fail-safe' design."

I was asked to comment, and I asked about the many shear clips that had to be mated before the wings were welded. I looked to the North American representative and asked, "How can you be certain that all of those shear clips are properly seated before you begin the welding?" A voice behind me started to talk before the North American rep had time to reply. I didn't need to turn around to see who was talking, for I recognized that voice. It was General Ascani. He talked for what seemed like five minutes, and he closed with, "Are you satisfied, Mr. Dirkes?" He had talked all around the question without really answering the question asked. I didn't turn around, but just said, "Yes, sir!" The Boeing engineer across the table pointed his finger at me and said, "He is not! Look at his face!" Thankfully, the North American rep jumped in quickly with, "Are there any other questions?"

The XB-70 was safe to fly, but the state-of-the-art in sealants limited this expensive airplane to just 500 hours at supersonic speeds. The XB-70 that is now in the Air Force Museum is the one that I saw under construction. The air intakes are so large that a person could walk inside all the way to the engine, and I was given the opportunity to do that. I was there!

We would like to take this opportunity to send our condolences to the family of Dorothy Westendorf, especially Richard, who has been a member for 53 years; and to the family of Susan Wright. Sue had been a member since 1988.