Setting up the Basis for Region 8

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I. INTRODUCTION

What follow are my personal recollections[1] (fifty years old and more) of IRE/IEEE activities to which I participated:

- The creation of Fairfield IRE Subsection in Connecticut
- The creation of IRE Sections in Switzerland and France
- The creation of IEEE European Region
- My term as IEEE Director (1965–66)

II. BECOMING STUDENT MEMBER OF IRE (INSTITUTE OF RADIO ENGINEERS)

In 1949 I was still a student for my diploma of Radio Engineer at Sup'Elec. I was often going to the library of a French Corporation in Paris (boulevard de Breteuil). I was reading the Proceedings of the IRE useful for my studies (mostly synchronization problems of oscillators).

Hence as soon as I was a graduate student at Computer Cruft Laboratory of Harvard University (for my Master in Applied Physics) and working at two laboratories of MIT (Acoustic Lab and Servomechanism Lab) as a student paid by the MIT Division of Industrial Cooperation, I became around 1952 Student Member of the IRE.

III. AS APPLIED PHYSICIST AT SCHLUMBERGER (RIDGEFIELD, CONNECTICUT)

I went regularly to Boston for NEREM (New England Regional Electronic Meeting). I met my friends of MIT and people trying to sell me mostly measuring equipment useful for my job.

Around 1956 (or 57) I was offered to join the board of the IRE Connecticut Section as Program Chairman. I invited Dr. Ronald McFarlan as speaker. We became great friends.

During the next years I was appointed Vice Chairman. I launched the Connector, a monthly publication of the IRE Connecticut Section. When I became Chairman of the Section, Dr. Ronald McFarlan was President-Elect of IRE. He suggested that I create the Subsection of Fairfield County within the Connecticut Section. In February 1960 my family and I returned to Europe.

[1]As it often happens, recollection of dates may be wrong; accept my apologies for that.

Figure 1. At the banquet during a NEREM (New England Regional Electronic Meeting); may be in 1956.

IV. IN SWITZERLAND AND FRANCE

Arrived in Switzerland in 1960, I contacted members of the IRE. One of them, John Gayer working at the ITU (International Telecommunication Union in Geneva), was particularly helpful.

Without any doubt it is Dr. Ronald McFarlan, with whom I had kept in touch, who encouraged me to create the Swiss Section of the IRE. With my Swiss friends it was easy to do it.

That's when Dr. Ronald McFarlan became President of the IRE. Knowing that I was a double national of France and Switzerland, he suggested to me to create a French Section. The only two top members of IRE who I knew in France were Aubert (Thomson CSF) and Jean Vieillard (Founder of ISEP, *Institut Supérieur d'Electronique de Paris*). I had met them in Connecticut at the occasion of one of their trips to America. Immediately they advised me to contact Dr. Georges Goudet. He and I decided to get together those IRE Members who were also members of the SFER (*Société Française des Electriciens et Radioélectriciens*: i.e., French Society of Electricians and Radioelectricians).

Dr. Goudet mailed to my chalet in Switzerland the list of members of the SFER. I did compare it with the directory of the IRE. If a person belonged to the two (IRE and SFER),

we sent an invitation for a joint meeting with a drink in the late afternoon. Since I had no more "pied à terre" in Paris, that was going to take place at my folks apartment, Mr. and Mrs. Claude Lebel, 46 Rue de Bourgogne, 75007. Over forty came. An American member named Pernice offered to help us.

The President of IRE (Dr. Ronald McFarlan) scheduled a trip to Paris. After our meeting between members of both Societies, Dr. Goudet and I arranged that Dr. McFarlan meet with the President of the SFER, Mr. Abadie.

At this meeting the SFER accepted the creation of the French Section of the IRE. But there was an important condition: the meetings of the French Section of IRE should be conducted in English. IRE accepted. The official reason was that this opened the doors to English-language speakers (but it also avoided any competition with the SFER).

Goudet thought that Pernice, an IRE member, American, living in Paris, should be the first President of the French Section of the IRE. Goudet became President-Elect and I took the secretariat.

The "French Section of the Institute of Radio Engineers" was born in 1961 with 300 members.

V. IEEE: INSTITUTE OF ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEER

The merger of the IRE (Institute of Radio Engineers) and the AIEE (American Institute of Electrical Engineers) took place in 1963. It is documented in Ref. [1, Section IV]; see also the paper by Martin J. Bastiaans, "Researching the Roots of IEEE Region 8" in these HISTELCON proceedings, Section VI.

VI. CREATION OF THE EUROPEAN REGION

In 1961 the IRE was organized in 7 Regions (6 for the U.S.A. and 1 in Canada). In 1962 an IRE member, a good friend who had moved from Paris to the Netherlands, called me a little nervous: "John, that merger between AIEE and IRE may disturb us. We may have problems with our old idea to have a European Region." I assured him of the full support of the "French Section of IRE."

He and others have then created in 1962 the European Region – i.e., IRE Region 9 – which is now IEEE Region 8, see Refs. [1, Section III] and [2], and the aforementioned paper by Martin J. Bastiaans in these proceedings, Sections III and V.

Meanwhile the "French Section of IRE" changed its name to "French Section of IEEE."

Ir. Rinia, of Philips, was elected for two years (1963–1964) as the first "IEEE Director of Region 8." He was to represent IEEE Region 8 on the board of the IEEE.

At his suggestion I applied at the next election of the "IEEE Region 8 Director." Elected without difficulty, I began two years (1965–1966) of very interesting work.

VII. IEEE BOARD MEETINGS IN NEW YORK

There was every three months an IEEE board meeting, usually in New York. The majority of board members were not in favour of this European Region.

But there were a few board members who felt it was a unique opportunity for the development of IEEE. On the board was the former director of the Electrical Engineering Department of MIT, Dr. Gordon Brown. He had hired me 15 years before as a Staff Member of the MIT Division of Industrial Cooperation.

VIII. REGION 8 BOARD MEETINGS

Board meetings of IEEE Region 8 were held once or twice a year. Usually the premises of ITU (International Telecommunication Union) were made available to us in their Geneva headquarters. John Gayer and the Swiss Section have been very helpful in those occasions.

Region 8 covered the territory of the European Broadcasting Area extending up to Israel and Egypt. Both countries were represented. I had to use a little tact to have them at the same table. First I sat them at the two ends of the table. Both of them were very cooperative and everything went smoothly.

We planned to start new Sections.

IX. VISIT TO VARIOUS EUROPEAN SECTIONS

It was compulsory for the Director to visit the various Sections.

I started with the **German** Section; Dr. Rhode was Chairman. The trip to Munich was very interesting, because I used in my work the laboratory apparatus of Rhode and Schwartz. Then I moved to northern Sections.

The **Norway** Section was created thanks to NIT (Norwegian Institute of Technology). As a private pilot the flight to get there impressed me: at low altitude we entered a fjord at the tip of which was the landing field.

Norwegians received me with great kindness. Knowing my interest in skiing, they had organized a weekend of skiing in the mountains, a few tens of kilometers from Oslo; the sky was clear blue.

Jokingly they said that the Swedes had finally decided to drive on the right hand side of the road. To give the example, on January 1st the Swede trucks would be the first to drive on the right hand side of the road, whereas the cars would do it a few months after.

So I flew after January 1st to **Sweden**. The Chairman of the Swedish IEEE Section picked me up at the airport to kindly offer me a drink at home. On reaching home, he forgot that all vehicles recently had to drive on the right hand side. We both were scared.

Stockholm impressed me with its granite buildings.

Uppsala University gave me the opportunity to talk about the IEEE and its publications.

Denmark was the most crushing defeat of my visits: there was no Section. All my efforts to get them to start one ran into opposition from the president of some local business. Only a few years later, after his death, one of my successors managed to create a Danish Section of the IEEE.

In **Italy** there was a Section of the Po Plain. So I went to Rome to support those who wanted a Section for the south of

Italy: it is mostly students who campaigned for the successful creation soon after my trip.

Spain was still under Franco's regime, which prohibited the creation of groups such as a Section of the IEEE. In Barcelona there were IEEE members, Students who met for conferences, under the pretext of classes. I did encourage them in that way. They told me to go to Madrid to see what was happening at the Telecommunications School. Of course there was no Section. But Hewlett-Packard had sent a huge amount of equipment. It was stored in a basement, completely unused.

Israel, as I explained above, was part of Region 8. For my trip there, I took my two passports: the Swiss and the French. So I could go to an Arab country with one and to Israel with the other. I did not have to do it.

In Jerusalem the Chairman of the Section (he created an electronics company) offered me a stay in a hotel, 100% Jewish. As a Christian, I felt alone in the dining room. I then realized what it is like to be alone of its kind.

The next day, always alone, early in the morning I went out in Jerusalem. To use my Jerusalem map which had Hebrew characters, I compared them with the Hebrew signs of street names.

Driving towards the Dead Sea, I went near Beer Shiva. I stopped along fences preventing access probably to a nuclear site. No photographs!

On the evening of the same day, the Israel IEEE Section wanted me to see a show (in Tel Aviv). To cut the crowd I had to be very close behind a horse. The show was a reproduction of the recent six-day war: deafening gun fire, caterpillars of tanks materialized by men; in short, the big show for the IEEE Director!

I went to **Turkey** (American University of Ankara) where I met with students.

X. Welcome to IEEE Presidents traveling to Europe

When a President of the IEEE was traveling to Europe, I had to take care of him.

I took President **Dr. Barney Oliver** and his wife to the *Aiguille du Midi* (3'778 m) by cable car from Chamonix. From there we went, by another cable car, through the *Glacier du Géant*. During stops we could admire beautiful crevasses and *seracs* (huge blocks of ice). There was a restaurant below the arrival in Italy at point *Heilbronner* (3'466 m). After lunch, Dr. Barney Oliver suffered from lack of oxygen going up the stairs from the restaurant.

When prominent IEEE members were traveling to Switzerland, I flew them with a Pilatus Porter piloted by Hermann Geiger. We landed on glaciers between 3'000 and 4'000 m.

Figure 2. Three IEEE VIPs – in front of the airplane – and myself; probably taken in 1965.

XI. Student contest

With Professor Jespers at the University of Louvain we created the European Student Contest.

Branches of Students from various universities were born soon after the creation of Region 8 (Europe).

Students in each branch were competing to choose a candidate for their country: he would be sent to the European Student Contest. The winners met for a day in a university organizing the contest. It was a good opportunity for students from various Sections of the IEEE to meet others. The winner of Region 8 competed with the winners of seven other Regions, another intellectual enrichment.

After the end of my term as Director of Region 8, I have not done much in this area.

XII. Gentlemen's agreement with the English Section

My successor Bob Williams (of the English section) realized that the Director could always come from the English Section which had a majority of votes. We concluded a gentlemen's agreement: this Section would not present a candidate in every election.

References

[1] Jan Biemond and Bruce B. Barrow, "The Benelux Section and Early IRE/IEEE Activity in Europe," in *Proceedings of the 2009 IEEE Conference on the History of Technical Societies, Philadelphia, PA, 5–7 August 2009*. The article is available in IEEEXplore at http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/HTS.2009.5337847.

[2] Robert C. Winton, "The Start of Region 8 and its Sections," in *Region 8 Centennial Review,* issued with the IEEE Region 8 newsletter, no. 65, 'The first in a series of four centennial issues,' February 1984.