

Obituary - Horace Dainty MBE (1916 –2006)



The death of Horace Dainty on 4 December 2006, at the age of 90, brought to a close a remarkable era of radio engineering in South Africa. He pioneered and built the first radiograms to be made in the country in 1935; designed the first military radio sets supplied to the Union Defence Force at the outbreak of WWII; produced the first solid-state manpack radio in the world; and was the MD of a small Durban-based company that shot to international prominence when it joined forces with Racal (UK) and led the world in the development of certain types of military communications equipment.

Horace was orphaned at the age of 13 and had to leave school just to survive. But guts, grit and determination were very much part of the Dainty make-up, as was a positive outlook and a remarkable way of getting on with people. Radio, or wireless as it was in those days, was his hobby and it soon became his career. He

survived the Great Depression with much initiative and not a little luck.

By the age of 18 he was running a business in Johannesburg and turning out Viking radiograms of his own design. Four years later, at the outbreak of war he informed the authorities in a telegram to Pretoria that he could "make transmitters". That skill catapulted his little company into the local limelight and soon the South African Air Force as well as the army were using equipment designed in Durban by Horace Dainty. In 1943 he too was in uniform as a T & M officer in the 17th Armoured Brigade Signal Squadron of the 6th South African Division. By the war's end he'd been awarded the MBE for his services in North Africa and Italy which, clearly, must have been out of the ordinary.

By the early 1950s his company, now known as SMD Manufacturing, was the largest manufacturer of domestic radio receivers in the country. It had also made the first six production models of the famous Wadley receiver that became the RA17 when Racal in England developed it for the Royal Navy. |

It was soon recognised as the finest communications receiver in the world. Then, under Dainty's leadership, SMD developed the world's first SSB manpack, the RT14 that became the TR28, which went into service with the Portuguese and Rhodesian armies and revolutionised portable high frequency communications.

Again Racal (UK) saw its potential and turned the SMD design into a highly successful product that sold in thousands around the world. Soon Racal and SMD teamed up and the Durban company moved to Pretoria.

By 1965, the organisation had grown considerably and Racal SMD became Racal South Africa or RESA with Horace Dainty as MD. He became its chairman in 1972 and finally retired in 1976 by which time RESA had built up a formidable reputation for its inventiveness in the field of military high frequency radio communications.

Horace Dainty returned to Natal in the late 1970s and became a most successful sheep farmer but all the while his interest in radio was maintained through being an avid amateur radio operator, especially on VHF.

He was undoubtedly the man who brought radio engineering to South Africa and thereby ushered in the era of electronics. He will be mourned by all who knew him.

Thanks to Brian Austin for providing this obituary.

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