

# THE COLLECTED JOURNEY

## ISSUE 2: THE GOVERNMENT PAYS A VISIT

*As part of our 50th year celebration, I am going to share with you six of the milestone events that have shaped our organization into the company we know today. There will be one new tribal story every sixty days in 2018. Trans-Matic has an interesting history. We have a lot to celebrate after 50 years.*

*Pat Thompson*

# THE GOVERNMENT PAYS A VISIT

It was a cold, snowy morning when I came to work at 6:30am. As I unlocked our office door, a man wearing a business suit got out of his car and asked if I was Pat Thompson, the owner of the business. After acknowledging him, he showed me his official identification from the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD). He said he needed to see me on urgent business.

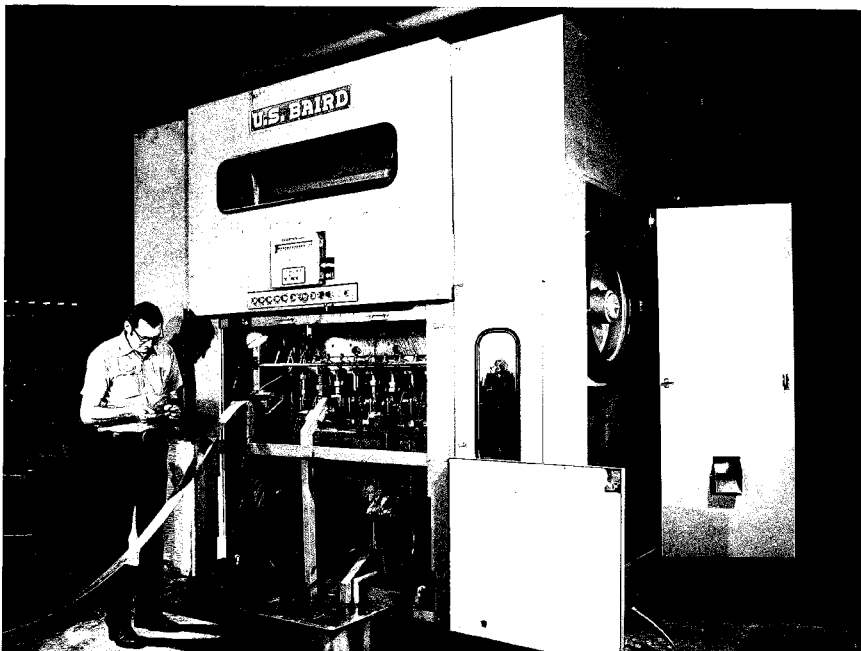
We went into our small, modest office on 22nd Street and after I started the coffee, we sat down for a chat. Everyone knows the joke: I'm from the government, and I'm here to help you.

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It was 1970, and we just received delivery of our first new U.S. Baird 437 transfer press. We had a few new jobs scheduled for new tooling in this machine. One job was a component for Honeywell used in a rifle launched grenade called an Ogive. We had just submitted samples for customer approval.

The government man explained that three companies were working on this new part, but we were the only firm that could control the diameter



dimension. The part was fairly simple to make, but the diameter of the part was out of round after heat treating at our competitors. The part was made from 5052 aluminum and heat treated to T6 temper. Batch quenching in oil at the end of heat treating distorted the part diameter. By accident, we chose State Heat Treating in Grand Rapids, and they had a conveyor production process that dropped each part separately into an oil quench. It was the right production process for this type of part.

The DOD representative wanted to know exactly how we made these parts without distortion. I truthfully explained to him we considered the part fairly simple to manufacture. He thought we were hiding some secret production process since our competitors had been unsuccessful before us. He also thought our new Baird press was the key to making the part.

He then explained he wanted us to begin production immediately and to run the machine six or seven days per week until we were told to stop. I protested. We had other customers with new tool orders that needed some machine time.

In a quiet, but firm voice he told me he would be visiting often and if he ever discovered us not running the Ogive for Honeywell, he would get a court order to take over the machine. He also wanted to talk with our employees about this project. I explained that we had an



evening shift that came to work about 3:30pm. We only had about twenty employees at that time. He would return at 3:30pm that day.

I called the meeting to order out in our shop and introduced the DOD official. Everyone was curious to know what was going on. I can remember this as clearly today as almost fifty years ago. He started out asking all our people to raise their hand if they had a father, brother, uncle or friend fighting with U.S. forces in Vietnam. Everyone had someone in the fight and everyone raised their hand.

He said, "You can help them."

He explained how American patrols were ambushed in jungle firefights by the Viet Cong. Once trapped in an ambush, it was difficult if not impossible to fight your way out because most of the time you couldn't see the enemy in the jungle. M-16 rifles and machine guns were in most cases ineffective. Our guys were taking heavy casualties. They needed a new weapon to fight in this type of environment. The Ogive was used in a new type of rifle launched grenade. Each rifleman could carry several grenades into battle and blast away a pathway out of an ambush with this new weapon.

"Your job, each and every one of you, can help our soldiers by producing as many Ogives as fast as possible. You are our only source of supply for this component," he said. "I'm asking each of you to not waste one day nor one minute. We need these components urgently. It may be your relative or your friend that survives in a firefight by using this weapon."

We need these components urgently. It may be your relative or friend that survives in a firefight by using this weapon.

He was very clear and very direct in his appeal. Everyone got the message, and we worked night and day running several million Ogives before we were told to stop. In our small way, we helped our fighting men in Vietnam. Our people were proud to be of service.

*Pat Thompson*

