

Jimmy Bell's Vast Experience Brings Valuable Input to ORSSAB

ORSSAB member Jimmy Bell's knowledge and many years of experience have provided other board members valuable insight into a number of issues the board deals with.

Jimmy came to ORNL shortly after completing his doctorate in chemistry from the University of Mississippi in 1963. He spent the next 31 years at the lab in various positions. When he retired from the lab he continued to work as a consultant on nuclear issues that took him to countries around the world.

He talked about his career under the shade of a chestnut tree on his 100-acre cattle farm near Kingston.

Jimmy grew up in Hazelhurst, Ga., in the southeast part of the state. "If you draw a line from Macon, Ga., to Jacksonville, Fla., and bisect it that's where Hazelhurst is," he said.

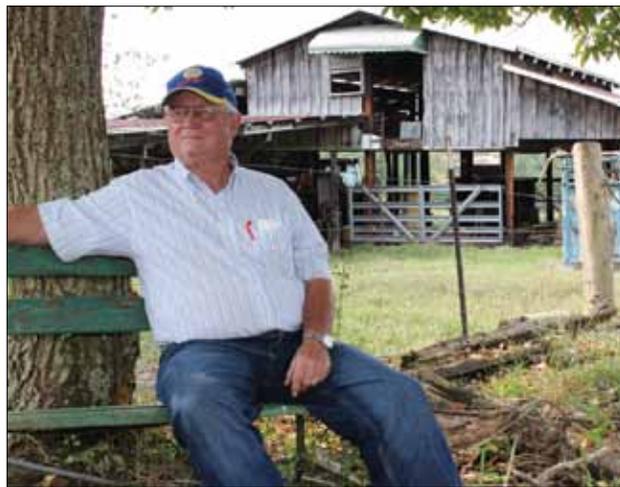
Upon graduation from high school, he entered Berry College in Rome, Ga. "When I was there all the students worked 16 hours a week for the college," he said. "That's how we paid for our room and board."

Jimmy graduated from Berry in 1960 with a bachelor of science degree in chemistry and mathematics. He went directly to graduate school at Ole Miss and was there in 1962 when James Meredith became the first black student to enroll there. "I distinctly remember the day he came." He also remembers all the strife that followed.

Interestingly, Jimmy says the chemistry department had been recruiting black graduate students to the program, even before Meredith arrived. However, when this became known, he said many in the department, himself included since he was teaching at the time, were labeled

as 'integrationists' and some of the professors began leaving. Jimmy said he and his wife, Luci, received a number of threatening phone calls.

In a way, the situation gave him the impetus to accelerate his study. When he learned several of the professors on his doctoral committee were going to leave, he increased his work load from 16 to 20 hours a day, and he finished his work by the end of August 1963. "Luci was a chemistry major, and she was a good writer and editor and typist, so she helped me edit the dissertation,



ORSSAB member Jimmy Bell enjoys one of his favorite spots, in the shade of a chestnut tree, on his cattle farm near Kingston.

and she typed two original copies to give to the graduate dean." Remember this was long before the advent of word processing and computer printers.

Within weeks he had a job offer at ORNL. "I went on one interview and they offered me a job," said Jimmy. "I couldn't believe anybody could be paid that much money."

He started in the chemical technology division doing applied research on reactor chemistry. "One of the things I knew I should do as soon as possible was publish some of my work," he said. "The first 10 years I spent a lot of time publishing the results of the research."

After about two years he was a group leader, and once he was a group leader on two different projects. One was on light water reactors and the other on fusion reactors.

In the late 1970s, he was in charge of all spent fuel processing in the chemical technology division. In 1988 he became the section head for chemical development. That work expanded to study spent fission product releases after fuel has been in a reactor for a time and how the fuel components were affected after being irradiated. He worked in that area until he retired in 1995.

Even while he was at the lab he had a role in the 1980s related to nuclear proliferation that took him around the world to inspect a number of re-processing plants. "That was tremendously interesting work and is probably the most effective thing I've done for this country in my career."

After leaving ORNL, Jimmy didn't completely retire. He did consulting work for a number of firms from 1995 until recently. From 1995-2001 he was co-chair of DOE's Tank Focus Group on how to manage tank waste.

Jimmy came to ORSSAB through the urging of a friend who told him his knowledge and experience would be beneficial to the board. "I'm one of the few still around who helped dilute plutonium with depleted uranium to safe levels that was put in storage tanks in Melton Valley," he said.

Today he spends a lot of his time tending 42 head of beef cattle on his farm. "I usually have about 25 cows and calves, but the growing conditions recently have been good so I have a few more than that now. I grow all my hay for them. I have all the equipment I need to do it all myself.

"People ask why I do it. Well, it's enjoyable and a great way to relieve stress."

