

Report on Memorial Ceremony for Charles P. Ginsburg

Charles P. Ginsburg, the leader of the team that developed the world's first practical videotape recorder (VTR) and a major force in the development of video engineering standards over a 30-year period, died in April 1992. According to some historians, the development of videotape recording, including digital video, would have taken some very different — and delayed — turns without the work and influence of Ginsburg.

On June 17, 1992, at a special memorial event at the Ampex Museum of Magnetic Recording and Ampex Corp. headquarters in Redwood City, Calif., 400 of Ginsburg's friends and acquaintances, as well as others interested in the history of the VTR, celebrated his life and shared personal memories. The event turned into a happy reunion of many of the people who helped make video-recording history.

Event organizer Peter Hammar, a Western Region Governor of the SMPTE and the creator of the Ampex Museum of Magnetic Recording, began the program with a eulogy of Ginsburg, followed by several people who gave moving speeches about the man and the positive effect he had on their lives. Three members of the original six-man VTR research and development (R&D) team shared their memories: Ray M. Dolby, Charles E. Anderson, and R. Fred Pfof. Each man spoke in the order in which they originally joined the team. The other two surviving team members, Alex Maxey and Shelby Henderson, were unable to attend. Vernon L. Kipping, SMPTE San Francisco Section Chairman, represented the Society. Bob Day, a Bay Area TV pioneer and later the "Voice of Ampex" in company promotions; Ampex Video Engineer Fraser Morrison; and Ampex President Robert Atchison talked about the effect of the man on their lives, their colleagues, and the television industry as a whole.

Hammar concluded the program with a 25-minute excerpt of a videotaped interview of Ginsburg from 1984, in which the engineer talked about important events in his life. Some commented how appropriate it was that the fruits of Ginsburg's life



Speakers at the Charles P. Ginsburg Memorial Ceremony included (from left) Vernon L. Kipping, Robert Atchison, Fraser Morrison, R. Fred Pfof, Ray M. Dolby, Charles E. Anderson, and Peter Hammar. Missing from the photograph is Bob Day.

work — the VTR — allowed them to experience his charm, warmth, and wit all over again.

In his opening statements, Hammar said, "Charlie was the glue that held the Ampex videotape recorder R&D team together for more than four years, from 1952 to 1956, a disparate group of talented individualists. His life was not only filled with technical achievements, good friends, and *lots* of golf, but was also heroic on both a personal and historic level. Charlie was one of the longest-living survivors of childhood-onset diabetes in American medical history. Insulin wasn't widely available until 1923, when Charlie was still a small child. When it came to staying alive and continuing to find meaning in life, Charlie was one of the most tenacious people I have ever met, a real survivor. He was an inspiration to me and to the many others who knew him to find the meaning and humor in life and stick around to enjoy it all." Hammar then repeated the Ginsburg family's request for donations in any amount in Ginsburg's honor to the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, 1806-A Union St., San Francisco, CA 94123, a charity that meant a lot to him.

The first person Ginsburg hired to join him in the development of magnetic video recording, Ray M. Dolby,

said "Charlie was a 'people person' and this was the secret of his success in leading the team." The two met in the spring of 1952 when Dolby was 19 years old and a fledgling engineer in the Ampex audio division. Dolby was immediately drawn to Ginsburg by his wit and ready grin. "Charlie took an interest in me. He made sure I was being paid enough! He was very interested in the human condition. We saw each other after work and speculated about things far and wide," Dolby recalled. "Charlie gave me useful advice on economics and how to handle my girlfriends. He saw work as a useful tool to get a job done and not as something to be worshipped for its own sake. He knew how to moderate work and how to stay in balance."

Former SMPTE President Charles E. Anderson joined the Ampex VTR team in 1954 with a background in FM radio engineering, still an infant technology then. Anderson went on to conceive and implement the use of vestigial sideband FM signal processing to record the video signal onto videotape, a system that is still used in video recording today. "Charlie Ginsburg's gift was that he was able to take this group of very different and probably fairly ordinary engineers and put them together and get the best out of them. The

sum was greater than the parts," Anderson said. "We owe Charlie a tremendous thank you. He made my life what it is and sponsored me in many things, such as the SMPTE. He was on the committee that nominated me for President of the Society."

R. Fred Pfof came to the group with expertise in magnetic heads and materials. "Charlie worked with people," Pfof observed. "More than the mere technical aspects, he brought people together. We were fortunate to benefit from Charlie's wisdom. When Ampex discovered Charlie Ginsburg and provided the opportunity to grow into TV, the whole world was fortunate and benefited from his technical guidance. His innate personality characteristics allowed him to extract the finest from those who were associated with him. He could also smooth troubled waters that deluged programs, while producing peace among a tribe of prima donnas."

Vernon L. Kipping gave a global perspective of the man. "The work of Charlie Ginsburg on the VTR led to one of the most important inventions of our time. Today's television is possible because of him. The SMPTE took early notice of Ginsburg's achievements by awarding him its David Sarnoff Gold Medal in 1957. This was followed by the Society's bestowal of its premier award, Honorary Membership, in 1976." Kipping said, "In the literature and films about the Old West, 'Town Tamers' were frequently featured as heroes. Until recent years, the composition of many communities and crossroads consisted of one or more gasoline service stations, a grocery store, a bank, and perhaps a restaurant. Today, many of these are gone and have been replaced by video rental stores. Thus the VTR team might be given a new name, 'Town Transformer.'"

Ginsburg's influence was worldwide. His friends in Germany, including current and former engineers from BTS Broadcast Television Systems and other organizations there, sent word regretting they couldn't attend, but had Hammar read a letter expressing their thoughts of sadness about his death along with their joy about the impact of his life and work on their lives and video engineering in Europe and around the world.

Engineering Calendar

The calendar below shows the dates and times of upcoming Engineering Committee meetings and the cities where they will be held.

Those requesting additional information on participation in these meetings, should contact the Engineering Dept. at SMPTE Headquarters, (914) 761-1100.

October

28 Wed.	AHG on Audio Production A12.68 (M. Strong)	Disney Garden Burbank, Calif.
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November

9 Mon.	Committee on Film Technology F2 (S. Champagne)	Metro Centre Toronto
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9 Mon.	Committee on Projection Tech. P3 (G. Berggren)	Metro Centre Toronto
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9 Mon.	Ad-Hoc Group on Revision RP-103 V16.04 (B. Herman)	Metro Centre Toronto
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11 Wed.	Committee on Audio Recording and Repro. Tech. A12 (T. Holman)	Metro Centre Toronto
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12 Thurs.	Committee on Laboratory Services Tech. L6 (P. Bourque)	Metro Centre Toronto
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12 Thurs.	WG on Revision of SMPTE 37M L6.41 (A. Enon)	Metro Centre Toronto
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30 Mon.	WG on Digital Control P18.10 (P. Jarrett)	San Francisco
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30 Mon.	WG on Time and Control Code P18.25 (S. Vigneaux)	San Francisco
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30 Mon.	WG on Video Index P18.41 (W. Miller)	San Francisco
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December

1 Tues.	WG on Editing Procedures P18.27 (O. Morgan)	San Francisco
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1 Tues.	Committee on TV Prod. Tech. P18 (M. Weiss)	San Francisco
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2 Wed.	AHG on Jitter S17.12 (K. Ainsworth)	San Francisco
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2 Wed.	WG on Monitoring and Diagnostics S17.36 (R. Wilson)	San Francisco
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2 Wed.	WG on Advanced TV Production S17.39 (F. Remley)	San Francisco
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3 Thurs.	WG on Ancillary Data S17.10 (J. Safar)	San Francisco
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3 Thurs.	WG on Serial HDTV Interfaces S17.13 (H. Gaggioni)	San Francisco
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