



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

www.theBDR.net

... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

Ken Branton

1932 – 2021

If you ever tried to get help to repair a transmitter in the middle of the night, you have likely spoken to Ken Branton, the kindly, calm, and expert voice at Collins (later Continental) Technical Support. Ken passed away on June 17th; He was 89 years old.



Marion Kenneth Branton
February 13, 1932 – June 17, 2021

Marion Kenneth Branton was born in 1932 in White Bluff, Mississippi and graduated from High School just in time to enlist in the Marines and to ship off to the Korean War. When he got home from Korea, Ken attended LSU, where he got a degree in Electrical Engineering.

During the Vietnam War, Collins Radio sent Ken to Vietnam to help maintain the armed services' radio gear – and where he met his wife, Trang. Despite the chaos of the final days, Ken and his family were able to escape from Vietnam on one of the final evacuation planes, thanks to the co-pilot who knew Ken and literally pulled him and his family on board.

Back in the USA, Ken joined the Collins Broadcast Field Service office and, along with Dave Chenoweth began a tradition that extended to Continental Electronics when that company purchased the Broadcast Division from Rockwell-Collins in 1980. Their level of technical support was widely acknowledged as the Gold Standard, and other companies have tried to emulate it in the years since.

A family man, although he did travel some – to many places around the world – Ken preferred to stay at home and dispense assistance from his office while Chenoweth did more of the on-site work. That is why a 3 AM phone call more often than not connected to Ken's calm re-assuring Southern tones. Even if you were off-air, when talking to Ken, anxiety immediately started to fade.

“Now look,” he would say, “someone built this thing and we can fix it.”

With his help, a whole generation of engineers was patiently taught and walked-through maintenance of their transmitters – or as Ken would say “radios.” It was not unusual for him to say something like “on

the back wall of that radio, about 18 inches from the left side, you will see the capacitor. We will fix that and the radio will be right back on the air.”

Some folks found it surprising to learn how Ken knew each and every wire and component in the “radio.” His ability to visualize and trace circuitry was so good, he often would turn out the lights and close the door to his office as he guided engineers through the electronic and mechanical systems.

Ken’s willingness to follow up and trace problems was even shown behind the scenes. Co-workers relate how he would sit behind a transmitter in the dark for hours, just waiting to see an arc. He and Dave also spent a lot of time to solve the “Crystal Gayle” problem – a low frequency tone burst that would knock a Power Rock (5 kW transmitter) off the air.

As the industry consolidation gathered speed in the late 1990’s, Ken particularly noticed how local engineers were stretched ever thinner even as transmitters become ever more computerized. “With the way it is now, engineers don’t have the time to go play with their transmitters even if they wanted to know how they work,” he says.

Ken retired from Continental in 1997, but continued to respond to calls for help, often coming down to the company’s offices, turn off the lights, and troubleshoot with the local engineer.

Despite having a low profile in the industry – Ken never really sought recognition and many only knew his voice, not even his name – in 2008, **Radio Guide Magazine** elected Ken to the Radio Guide Hall of Achievement, and presented a plaque thanking him for his contribution to so many in the business.

MORE THAN RADIO

As he segued from Continental, Ken’s passion for fixing things, including cars, led him to build a small chain of quick-lube oil-change shops that he purchased with a partner. The operated the shops for 20 years.

Always close to his family, Ken put all four children through college and watched them become successful in their pursuits. He especially loved seeing and spending time with his granddaughters.

Marion Kenneth Branton is survived by his wife of 50 years, Trang, his four children Von, Thuy (Mark Sherman), Steven, and Mark Branton, his brother Jehugh and sister-in-law Billie, and grandchildren Macy and Bailey Sherman – and his dog, Biscuit.

We would like to sincerely thank John Abnour for his help and comments on how Ken Branton made life better for many broadcasters.

[Return to The BDR Menu](#)