

In Memoriam

Alastair M. Heaslett, AES fellow, died of esophageal cancer at Kaiser Hospital, Redwood City, near his home in Palo Alto, California, on Jan 7. He was 57 years old.

Born in Southport, Lancashire, UK, in 1941, he was educated in the UK and South Africa. He earned his B.S.E.E. degree in 1965 from London's Borough Polytechnic University, while working as an undergraduate for the English Electric Control Gear Division and for Ampex in Reading from 1962. After graduation he began a full-time career with Ampex. He initially concentrated on a professional battery-operated recorder, the AG-20.

For the next five years he was involved in a variety of custom engineering tasks, including a double quadraplex head recorder for video tape evaluation and an online automated quality control system for audio duplicators. In 1970 he moved to the USA when he was transferred to the Ampex facilities in Redwood City, CA, where he worked on advanced audio editing systems, digitally controlled attenuators and console automated systems. He was also involved in the CD 200 system and the first 24-track MM 1100 master recorder. From 1973 to 1976 he was on the project team for the ATR-100, with responsibility for the signal system and head tape interface, for which he was given the Alexander M. Poniatoff Award. He was senior staff engineer of the audio products group in the Audio Video Systems Division of Ampex until 1983. In 1985 he joined Siemens Business Communications Systems in Santa Clara.

He was named inventor or coinventor on five issued patents, presented numerous papers at AES conventions as well as NAB and IBC meetings, was a consulting member of the U.S.



Alastair M Heaslett
1941-1999

National Commission to the IEC TC 60 Working Group, and was involved in the early work of the Digital Standards Committee of the AES. Because of Heaslett's pedagogic skill, his paper presentations at AES conventions were always well attended. Everyone present, from novice to expert, learned something.

Despite the fact that Heaslett was a perfectionist, he remained very patient and accessible to colleagues. Associate Phil Sutterlin reports on having the privilege of learning from him as they worked together on the audio cards for the ATR-124. Despite many late nights and a couple of all-nighters, he was always willing to pause and answer questions. He sometimes would break the tension of a late evening by doing something funny. "I remember how excited we were when we made the first ATR-124 recording late one night," recalls Sutterlin. "After a number of days of working on grounding issues, each channel of the machine sounded fairly good. Alastair got out a whole bundle of XLR cables and began to wire the output of channel 1 to the input of channel 2, not stopping

until all 24 channels were in series. At first the output of channel 24 sounded awful, but after a number of weeks' work it sounded very good, and the single channel sounded great."

After the demise of the Ampex audio department he went on to have an impact in the telecommunications field. As with his work on magnetic recording, he became a leader in the field, contributing to many innovative communication products, such as the Rolm digital phone.

Alastair was brilliant both in his audio work at Ampex and in his communication work at Rolm (later IBM, then Siemens). But even more significantly, he was a tremendously giving friend. Many colleagues and associates in audio

commented on how invaluable Alastair was to them in their careers. Two former technicians with B.S.E.E. degrees said they would not have been able to earn their degrees without his help. They spoke of his sincere caring about the people he managed and mentored and of the great loss they feel.

As a devoted husband and father, Alastair enjoyed sailing, traveling, and summer vacations with his wife and three children at Lake Almanor in California for many years. His recent passion was astronomy. He and his daughter Anna would spend countless evening hours in the driveway of their home with their telescopes looking for planets and nebulas.

When he was diagnosed with cancer in July 1998, he was optimistic about beating the disease despite the 5% survival rate. "He faced treatment the way he faced life," says daughter Anna: "with determination to get the job done with the least amount of inconvenience to everyone involved."

He is survived by his wife of 33 years, Joan; two daughters, Anna Heaslett-Watkins and Samantha Wood; a son, Alex, and five grandchildren.