

DAVID WOLFF

INTERVIEW WITH DICK MITTENTHAL, INTERVIEWEE
BY NANCY KAUFFMAN, INTERVIEWER
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NANCY KAUFFMAN: WE ARE IN CHICAGO. DICK MITTENTHAL IS TALKING ABOUT HIS MEMORIES OF DAVID WOLFF.

DICK MITTENTHAL: Dave Wolff was, as best as I can recall, somewhere in his sixties sometime in the middle of the 1950s, when I first started to arbitrate. It was 1954, I believe. I really didn't know him very well because he wasn't my employer and he was from another generation. I just never had an opportunity to spend a lot of time with him. He was one of those people who began his arbitration was during the Second World War like Harry Platt, who had been appointed to hear disputes and had done a good a job and become an arbitrator after the war, and probably was able to conduct arbitration even during the war, apart from the labor board experience.

But, the two things that I knew about, and it always fascinated me, which made Dave somehow unique, was his umpire relationship. He may have had others, but the two principle ones involved unique circumstances, which were not repeated as to my knowledge in any other forum. There probably were others who adopted the same procedures, but they seemed unique to me at the time, and they still do.

He was the first umpire, I believe, between Chrysler and the UAW. And, he didn't function the way most of us function. I'm sure there were hearings at which he participated, but for the most part, the parties themselves had a hearing. Two people from the union (union management: director of industrial relations, and the head of the Chrysler Department of the UAW) and people from GM (GM had four department heads). They would prepare material, discuss the case thoroughly, and resolve it if they could. If not, then all that material was shipped to the umpire - Cole. All the evidence was written.

There was a certain real suspicion between the parties of having a perfect stranger come in and decide their disputes, They would submit evidence in writing, and he issued decisions

NANCY KAUFFMAN: WE TALK SO MUCH NOW ABOUT BODY LANGUAGE, BUT HE COULD NOT SEE ALL THAT.

DICK MITTENTHAL: I'm sure he got together with the parties to discuss problems, but that was the routine. So, it was distant, in a way. I can't imagine a system functioning on that, under that type of arrangement. But, it did function well for many, many years. And, it continued at Chrysler well into the forties. I say that because I know that GM's umpire dates back to shortly after the collective bargaining process we had between GM and UAW.

NANCY KAUFFMAN: SO, IT'S ACTING MORE LIKE AN APPEALS COURT.

DICK MITTENTHAL: Well, the decision. And they fired this other rep. This is speculation on my part because I wasn't privy to why the parties did any of these things. I can only speculate that ultimately [they] decided that they wanted to have more advocating. The system just wasn't a very sensible one. They apparently decided, because they were going to a different system, they would go to a different umpire. But after maybe twenty years of this, they went to back to the traditional system. They cashiered David. And then Gabe Alexander became the Chrysler UAW umpire and remained in the umpire until the late eighties.

NANCY KAUFFMAN: I CAN LOOK AT THE INTERVIEW FROM GABE TO SEE IF HE TALKS ABOUT HOW HE BECAME THE UMPIRE. HE MAY KNOW. THERE MAY BE SOMETHING IN THERE.

DICK MITTENTHAL: Yes. Gabe was very successful in that job. And, he was quite different, of course. But the more interesting thing is that the major automaker engages in this peculiar arbitration system. And at the same time, a major company in the steel industry the same kind of arrangement evolved the same kind of thing went on at Alcoa a contract with the steelworkers, not with the aluminum workers. They had a different arrangement. They had traditional umpireship, but that was with the steelworkers; they used the same sort of thing. I have no explanation as to why they would have done that.

DICK MITTENTHAL: In the 1958 Proceedings, there's a piece about the Chrysler-UAW umpireship written by Dave Wolff and Howard Cole and Louis Crane. They did one on GM. I don't think there was one on Ford. But, they did them on a few other companies.

DICK MITTENTHAL: Wolff often wrote decisions in a rather peculiar way. There was a good deal of the party's position, or seemed to be, incorporated in the opinion. He just took it from

whatever documents and put that material into the opinion. And then, of course, it really didn't say anything. Chrysler was different from what others were doing.

NANCY KAUFFMAN: When did you meet Dave Wolff?

DICK MITTENTHAL: In 1954, he was still alive. I always thought, gees, these guys are -- I was 26, 27, and I felt these fellows in the Academy were they were incredible achievers. Any kind of story from this group was always great news. What did I know? And, it all seemed so strange that the fact was that the Academy itself had been formed only 1947. Seven years before. Everybody seemed like they were ancients and saviors to me.

NANCY KAUFFMAN: RIGHT. EXACTLY.

DICK MITTENTHAL: And some of them were, but, Dave Miller was more my contemporary.

NANCY KAUFFMAN: Thank you for sharing your remembrances about Dave Wolff with us.