

Joe Chambliss Comments on Al Heath

I worked with Al during research on Gamma-ray astronomy. At that time; it was frontier astronomy. I joined the project under Dr. Robert Haymes direction. I had two degrees in Aerospace Engineering prior to joining the gamma ray observation team. That probably got me considered the engineer of the team and I got assigned design and development parts of the project. That meant that I worked with Al Heath a lot since he was the technical "go to" part of the team.

Al was always on the job and building and implementing the concept for the telescope. I had parts of the project; but Al implemented the concept focusing on the electronics parts for detecting the pulse of energy deposited in each of the array of crystals. Then we would process the information and determine what we had seen from the target objects. We worked with Professor Don Clayton on the theory about what was happening at the target systems.

Once ready; the team went to Palestine, Texas to launch the telescope via very large (largest ever used at the time) balloons (to get the telescope above most of the atmosphere). Al was the glue that held the team together by making sure everything was coming together and that the technology was ready. I enjoyed trips with Al to a variety of places to recover the telescope and get it back to Rice for reuse.

It was a great hands-on experience that translated the needs of Physics to detect gamma-rays and how to implement it in a practical "Applied Physics" way to get information that had never been obtained before on energetic processes in the universe. Al provided the real world "how to make the electronics work together". It was a pleasure to work with Al.