Otis Boykin

Otis Boykin invented a type of electronic resistor that became commonly used in both guided missiles and computers. Thanks to his inventiveness, production costs for radios and televisions lowered. In all, he invented a total of some 26 electronic devices, including a thief-proof cash register and a chemical air filter. He also invented an electronic regulating device for the first heart pacemaker—perhaps his most important invention of all.

Boykin was born on August 29, 1920, in Dallas, Texas, to Walter Benjamin Boykin and his wife Sarah Boykin. As a young man, Boykin attended Fisk University, in Nashville, Tennessee, where he earned a bachelor of science degree in 1941. After graduation, Boykin took a position at Majestic Radio & TV Corporation in Chicago, which he left in 1944 to become a research engineer with P. J. Nilson Research Labs of Oak Park, Illinois. He returned to school at the Illinois Institute of Technology from 1946 to 1947, while working for Nilson Labs. Leaving Nilson after five years, Boykin worked for a variety of firms in Illinois and Indiana from 1949 to 1964, always gaining new experience in radio technology and related fields. Beginning in 1964, he became an independent consultant to numerous electronics firms in the United States and Europe.

Early in Boykin's career, he invented a type of resistor used in computers, radios, television sets, and many other electronic devices. He succeeded in lowering the cost of producing electronic controls for radio and television, which enhanced the cost effectiveness of producing these devices for both military and commercial uses. Boykin also invented a resistor used in guided missiles, as well as a type of small-component thick-film resistors for computers, a cash register that resisted burgling, and a chemical air filter.

The Boykin invention that touched more lives more deeply than any other, though, was his improvement on the regulating device for the cardiac pacemaker. Since a pacemaker's purpose is to maintain a regular heartbeat by "setting the pace" through the use of electrical pulses, the regulating device holds a prime importance. At age 61, Boykin died of heart failure in Chicago, Illinois, in 1982—an ironic ending for the life of a man who improved the cardiac pacemaker. His legacy of innovation, independence, and ingenuity remains, however.

References and Further Information

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