



Smithsonian

*National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center*

## Guide to the Ralph Baer Innovative Lives Presentation

NMAH.AC.1179

NMAH Staff

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
<b>Title:</b>	Ralph Baer Innovative Lives Presentation
<b>Date:</b>	2009-08-15-2009
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAH.AC.1179
<b>Creator:</b>	Baer, Ralph H., 1922-2014 Harrison, William Jerome and Dorothy Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation.
<b>Extent:</b>	0.15 Cubic feet (1 box)
<b>Language:</b>	English .

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## Administrative Information

### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Jerome and Dorothy Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation.

### Provenance

Created by the Lemelson Center, National Museum of American History, for its "Innovative Lives" program. Collection transferred to the Archives Center from the Lemelson Center in 2009.

### Processing Information

Collection unprocessed.

### Preferred Citation

Ralph Baer Innovative Lives Presentation, August 15, 2009, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

### Restrictions on Access

Unrestricted research access on site by appointment.

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## Biographical Note

Ralph H. Baer (1922-2014) was born in Germany and immigrated to the United States with his family in 1938. A graduate of the National Radio Institute (1940), Baer worked as a radio technician in the New York City area, servicing all types of home and auto radios. During World War II, Baer served in the United States Army, one year stateside, and two years in Europe. He was assigned to Military Intelligence and became an

expert on military small arms. Baer returned to the United States with eighteen tons of foreign small arms for use in exhibits at Aberdeen, Maryland; Springfield, Massachusetts Armory; and Ft. Riley, Kansas.

After the war, Baer attended the American Television Institute of Technology in Chicago, graduating with a BS in television engineering. In 1949, Baer joined a small electro medical equipment firm, Wappler, Inc., as their chief engineer. He designed and built surgical cutting machines, epilators, and low frequency pulse generating muscle-toning equipment. In 1951, Baer moved to Loral Electronics of Bronx, New York as a senior engineer, designing power line carrier signaling equipment for IBM. During 1952-1956, Baer worked at Transitron, Inc., in New York City as a chief engineer and later as vice president. In 1956, Baer joined Sanders Associates in Nashua, New Hampshire building airborne radar components. He became manager of the Electronic Design Department at Sanders and eventually Division Manager and Chief Engineer for Equipment Design. Baer retired in 1987.

At Sanders in 1966, Baer began an independent project experimenting with ways for consumers to interact with standard home television sets. Development of interactive TV Game (TVG) ideas became a company-supported project continued by Baer and assisted by William H. Harrison and William T. Rusch (download the TV Game chronology prepared by Ralph Baer in 2006). By mid-1967, ping pong videogames were played inside Sanders, patent disclosures were applied for, and hardware was designed. Baer and his associates called the devices they were developing "boxes" and numbered the various versions one through seven. In 1971, Magnavox became Sanders Associates's first videogame licensee. Between 1972 and 1975, Magnavox produced and sold over 700,000 units of Odyssey, a set of games played on its television receivers. Atari became a licensee in 1976 after the first of many lawsuits won by Sanders in pursuit of patent infringements.

During his tenure at Sanders and thereafter, Baer was a prolific inventor. His creations included many electronic toys and games and other consumer electronic products. Among the better known products based on Baer's work are Milton Bradley's Simon, Galoob's Smarty Bear Video, and Kenner's Laser Command. In 2004 President George W. Bush awarded Baer the National Medal of Technology.

Baer married Dena Whinston in 1952 and they had three children, James, Mark, and Nancy. Ralph Baer died on December 6, 2014, at the age of 92.

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## Scope and Contents

In a moderated conversation about his life and work, Baer reenacts, with his partner William Harrison, the first time he played "Odyssey", the first home video game for the consumer market, which he invented, and answers questions from the audience.

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## Arrangement

Divided into 3 series: Series 1, Original video (born digital); Series 2, Master videos; and Series 3, Reference videos..

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Games
- Inventions -- 20th century
- Inventors -- 20th century
- Toys -- 20th century

Video games

Types of Materials:

DVDs