



Some of the Most Famous People No One Has Ever Heard Of

The people you encounter at conventions can be more important — and helpful — than you think. **By Richard Howard, AAADM, CFDAI, CPL, DHC, DHT, ICPL, IQP**

A VERY EXCITING ASPECT OF THE ALOA CONVENTION AND WEEK OF classes there is how many “famous” faces you will see. Leaders in the industry (the most famous people no one has ever heard of, as I like to put it) are everywhere and often visit classrooms during the five days of education. People you may or may not recognize meander in and out of the classrooms throughout the week. Visitors, lost students and the ALOA official photographer are easily spotted. On the morning of my first class (High Security Cylinder Servicing), two gentlemen entered and took seats in the rear of the room. Mr. Lynk acknowledged them, though he did not introduce them to the class. After five seconds, class went on. I and all my classmates soon lost interest in who these visitors were and resumed full attention to the subject at hand.

During the mid-morning break, I approached Mr. Lynk, explained what I was doing regarding my article and asked him to “take a peek” at lunch. His response — more of a reaction actually — was to stretch his arm, point his finger to the rear of

the room and say, “You don’t want me to look at it; you want *him* to look at it.” As I turned my head and looked in the direction he was pointing, the “him” he was referring to was one of the two gentlemen who entered the class earlier: a comely, quite unassuming man in an average unassuming suit and tie.

The jacket may have been tweed, perhaps 15 years old. I was unsure if I was rejected or just merely being cast off to a lesser individual. The man made no real acknowledgement of this odd interposition, and I may have betrayed a hint of



dejection at that moment, as my mind was assuming the latter. I will admit I was more than dejected; perhaps despondent. I really wanted this technical portion of my article to be reviewed for blatant errors, and it seemed as if that opportunity just slipped through my fingers. I had no backup to my plan to get a superior to review my work — if only for a few moments, and just enough to spot any fatal flaws. I decided I would have to be more forward with Mr. Lynk after lunch, as I assumed the mystery man would be long gone when lunchtime came.

Lunchtime came, and the man was still in the same chair at the table in the back of the room, and he was quite alone (though I was just marginally happy to see him sitting there). I would be quite rude, after that earlier introduction by shotgun, to just walk past. I decided I would engage him. As I approached him at the rear of the room, I started feeling as if I had nothing to lose. I realized at least I would have a chance at the second-best person to look at my work. It occurred to me that the gentleman must be at least worthy of some value, and I questioned myself for “judging a book by its cover.” After all, the instructor recommended him.

A Pleasant Surprise

I approached him, introduced myself, stated what my project was and asked politely if he would take a look. In a somewhat muted though thoroughly polite and vibrant tone, he agreed. I opened up my laptop and started nervously explaining to the gentleman what he was looking at. I began with my KBA. I had used the Corbin Russwin Master Ring KBA in a way not shown in the C/R Cylinder Manual. I had studied the portion of the original text for so long that I could no longer be sure of myself.

The man gazed on and was rather still and uncommunicative. I at first thought

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he might be faking interest and being very polite, or perhaps he had no foggy idea what I was crowing on about. At this moment, I began to realize this man was studying my KBA as if to break it, stretch it, turn it over and see if it would fail in the mental tests he was exercising it through. Not wanting to impede the stream of inner thought I was witnessing, it was my turn to be mute.

It was now quite obvious this quite unassuming, thin 60-something-year-old man I have never met was engaged in the process of decoding, possibly grappling with my work as if it was a mind puzzle. It grew very quiet at that table, with just the two of us in that large empty room with the strange patterns on the commercial carpet and the hum of the HVAC. As the long seconds turned into even longer, I started to feel as if I was intruding in this man’s “private time.” Was he sleeping, but with his eyes open? Was my article simply atrocious and my conclusions pathetic?

I finally built up courage and began to stir. But before I could speak, the gentleman said, “I see what you are doing there.” He then asked a couple of clarifying questions. As I answered him, I felt as if all of Niagara Falls just washed away my confusion and self-doubt. He asked pointed and expert-driven questions. I explained how and where I took liberty with the original text, and he seemed to concur that my extrapolations were not “out of bounds.” Most importantly,

nothing negative was said regarding my conclusions.

I thanked him excitedly, mostly relieved. I realized I just consumed 20 minutes of this man’s one-hour lunch break and felt immediately awful for that. He gave me his business card and took his leave. I went to the dining area and quickly filled a plate of leftovers (not a lot of salad eaters at ALOA it seems, as I had the leafy greens all to myself). I found people I knew at a close table and sat down to start as they were finishing. Great! The most technical part of my article just survived — dare I say — “peer review.”

A Few Weeks Later

Fast forward a couple weeks to when I was back home in Florida. I was at my desk and intently focused on studying for the L-08 High Security Cylinder Servicing Elective PRP. This, after all, was the primary reason for traveling to Las Vegas: to learn firsthand what I needed to pass this PRP. That evening, I needed to dig into Medeco deeper. I knew there would be questions on the exam about keying rules regarding master and change keys and their relationship to the cuts on the control key for operating the control lug as the “rules” specifically related to Medeco. “How could there not be Medeco questions on this PRP?” I thought. After all, I was told at that time that Medeco supplied the majority of all North American high-security cylinder work. This made me realize I had better know Medeco theory as thoroughly as possible.

I was studying the textbook provided in Mr. Lynk’s class. As I flipped toward the Medeco section, I noticed a business card. It’s common for me to stuff business cards I obtain at shows, classes or conventions into the books or literature I gather along the way. It was the nice, quiet man’s card that he gave me after

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taking from him 20 minutes of his lunch hour. I looked at it and fondly recollected his patience, then set it aside (Though for the first time, I realized the man was from Medeco). I thought, “That makes sense,” as every interaction I have ever had with Medeco technical support has always been a showcase of professionalism. Looking at the card as I put it aside, I wondered if he went by Peter or Pete and whether or not his wife told him to stop wearing that old sport coat.

I proceeded to read the Medeco section of the class textbook, and the thought came to me to Google search the patent for Medeco³ and review its very cool locking sidebar. I knew the M³ had been around for a while, and I also knew the patent was set to expire relatively soon on this product. I wondered how cool the next evolution of Medeco would very likely be. I wondered how Medeco would expand the platform yet retain backwards compatibility. What would come next for this innovative company?

A Realization

Anyway, patents are an easy internet search and are a crucial step in researching lock technology for the first time. This Medeco patent is not unlike all others in that it is filled with words that do not seem to belong together and has weird numerical references, cross sections, hatch drawing, witnesses’ names and signatures. I always look at the name(s) of the inventor. Neither name seemed familiar but wait... wait one minute! I looked at the business card, then back at the patent and then back to the business card again. I realized that the quiet unassuming man — who very graciously and freely gave me 20 precious minutes of his day — was none other than Peter Field, one of the two inventors of the Medeco³ platform. Well, I’ll be...

This is why you join and remain in ALOA. This is why you participate in education. Every single person I have ever encountered in ALOA is willing to help — even a person who is directly responsible for one of the cornerstone technologies of the company that supplies the majority of high-security cylinders in North America. You will meet some of the most famous people in the world whom no one has ever heard of. Thank you, Mr. Field. I hope retirement is treating you well, and if you ever get to Southwest Florida, stop in. I owe you a full lunch hour, and I am buying. ☺



Richard Howard, AAADM, CFDAI, CPL, DHC, DHT, ICPL, IQP, has 30-plus years industry experience working in distribution specializing in hollow metal, wood doors and commercial hardware. An active member of both ALOA and DHI, he enjoys the ever-changing and challenging field of locksmithing.

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