MEMOIR OF NAVAL SERVICE

LT. ROBERT B. STOUT, USNR (Ret.)

PRELUDE:

I graduated from the University of Houston with a Bachelor of Science degree in Economics in May of 1968. It was a BS degree, because I had more credit hours in science, mathematics and engineering than I had in economics. This may have played a role in my future Naval service assignment.

I had worked my way through college (mostly in engineering design drafting) and because of that fact and my change of majors, my degree had taken considerably more time than the standard four years. For that reason, my college deferment of military service had been used up by the time I graduated.

The Reserve Officer training programs of the Navy and Air Force were filled by the time that I graduated. This was during the Vietnam War.

I went to see the Navy recruiter, presented my draft notice and asked, “Can you beat it?” The Chief Petty Officer recruiter said, “ My quota is full for this month.” But, he said, “ I have one young man who is not in any danger of being drafted and who wants to go deer hunting before reporting. Let me call him and see if you can go in his place.” The answer was “Yes.” Soon I was on an airplane for Navy boot camp at San Diego, California.

BOOT CAMP:

Because my first year of college had been at Texas A & M University, I had previous military training as a member of the Corps of Cadets. So, I found Boot Camp to be no challenge at all. However, there were young men just out of high school who found it to be very stressful. There was one reported suicide and there was one youngster in my company who talked of suicide. I counseled him on several occasions to the effect that “all you have to do to succeed is do exactly what you are told to do, it is that simple.” He did not attempt suicide and I like to think that my paying attention to him helped.

Most of the boot camp company commanders were Chief Petty Officers, but my company was commanded by a smart Petty Officer First Class. He realized that because he had several college graduates in his company, he had a good opportunity to garner the award of Academic Company, which would reflect well on his record. He enhanced the probability by arranging the company so that the college graduates and bright high school graduates would all be on the front row of the testing room when the company filed in. The answers to the test questions were multiple-choice: “A, B, C or D.” So, our company commander instructed the front row to lean slightly to the left if the answer was A, lean slightly to the right if the correct answer was B, lean forward if the answer was C, and sit up straight if the answer was D. Those behind in each row were to mark their papers accordingly. He knew that there would be enough test takers behind the front row who would not understand the signal being sent, or would have forgotten the instructions, to introduce some randomness to the answers. Also, the test would be graded by an electronic scanner (fill in the bubble for the correct answer) which would not know who was on the front row. Yes, he attained the desired award. It must have been a new system that he had devised because we had been told that all of the cheating systems were known and would be detected.

However, there was a consequence for me, personally: I was the “old man” in the company. So some of the youngsters decided to take me down a notch before the final test. They rigged my upper bunk with string to support the mattress. So, at lights out, when I flopped down into my bunk, I went crashing down to the lower level. Great laughter came from out of the darkness! However I had the presence of mind to yell into the night, “OK you guys, I’m not going to lean tomorrow.” The laughter died instantly. However, I did not follow through on my threat.

There was another consequence of my being the “old man”. When we graduated from boot camp, we were eligible to use the enlisted club for the first time. So we took advantage of that opportunity. At the entrance, there were two Chief Petty Officers checking ID’s. If one was 21 or older, he was stamped on the back of the hand with UV glow ink so that he was eligible to order at the bar. Otherwise it was soft drinks only. When my turn came, the first CPO exclaimed to the second one (who was doing the stamping) “Stamp this man’s hand quick, he needs a drink!”

The two most interesting things being taught at boot camp were fire fighting and rifle firing. Having read a lot of military history while in high school and college, I was aware of how important naval fire fighting is. So, when they lit off the concrete building simulating a ship interior, I was truly interested. Later we were bussed to Miramar Naval Air Station where there was a large rifle range. While waiting my turn at the firing line, I watched the F8 Crusaders coming in for landings overhead. They made quite a racket with their wing assembly pitched up and the flaps down for landing. There must have been 500 marines and sailors shooting that day. In my memory, we were firing WWII vintage M-1 rifles and the range to the targets was 100 yards or more. The Marine Sargent running the firing that day announced over the PA system that he knew before the firing started who would be the top scorers. In first place would be a guy from Texas and in second place would be someone from Arizona. When it was all over, in first place, among the sailors, was a guy from the San Antonio area of Texas. In second place was a guy from Tucson, Arizona. I was in third place. Having grown up on a ranch in central Texas, I first had a rifle in my hands at age eight or nine. My parents had given me a new Winchester .22 for my tenth birthday. I had gone deer hunting with a Lee-Enfield 30-06.

I had applied for Officer Candidate School early in my time in Boot Camp. When I graduated from boot camp, I was ordered to administrative hold pending evaluation for OCS. All who were in that category were assigned to work in various offices on the base, pending decision. I was assigned to a job of running IBM tabulating machines, which were identical to the equipment that I had operated when employed by the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company as I worked my way through college. (I don’t know if my assignment was intentional or accident)

The OCS candidates were assigned to the same barracks. Since we were working in various offices on the base, each evening there was an intelligence debriefing, principally regarding how many had gotten orders to OCS and what their qualifications were. We figured out that about one in ten were being accepted. I was delighted to get orders to OCS at Newport, RI.

OFFICER CANDIDATE SCHOOL:

Generally, I was a bit disappointed because I did not think that we got adequate training in plotting ship position, maneuvering board drill, navigation and ship handling. In 1968-69, the procedures were essentially of World War Two vintage, as were many of the ships in the fleet.

The equipment at OCS, was, in my view, old and inadequate. The simulated combat information centers and the exercises therein were primitive. There were only enough Yard Patrol boats (YP’s) for each of us to have only one opportunity to experience ship handling. (15 minutes). Consequently, I felt very inadequate to go aboard a ship and try to qualify for under way OOD in competition with Naval Academy graduates, who had much more time with YP’s and other equipment. I felt that I would be at a definite disadvantage.

In my one opportunity with a YP, I did the man overboard drill perfectly, making the circle back to the position of man overboard and placing the simulated man (life jacket) right alongside, but I did not order “all back one third” to stop the relative motion between life vest and the YP. As it was, the sailors with the boat hooks failed to snag the life vest even though it was bumping against the hull. I felt like I ought to have had, at least, an opportunity to do it again.

We did have some good instructors, however. I especially remember one Lieutenant who was particularly good. I regret that I cannot recall his name.

There was fire-fighting school, again. Also, there was rifle-handling drill (drill and ceremony). I was particularly good at it and was detailed to give individual instruction for those who were having difficulty. There was no rifle shooting at OCS. However, we could go to the in-door pistol range when we had time-off, and I took advantage of that whenever I could. I was firing the 1911 Colt semi-automatic pistol in, .22 caliber instead of the standard .45 caliber.

Some interesting things occurred that were not a part of the curriculum: In the early spring of 1969 there was a big New England snow storm that completely closed OCS, while the snow was cleared. During those two days we were confined to the barracks, watching Victory at Sea movies. I had enjoyed that television series as a child and was glad to see it again.

When the snow was cleared, we resumed marching to class and to other training assignments. But, the overhead power and telephone lines were still covered with a thick cylinder of ice. As we were marching along, we encountered the Catholic chaplain approaching. We rendered a salute, and just as he was about to return the salute, a very big chunk of ice let go of the overhead wire and slammed down on the cars parked underneath, alongside the chaplain, with a very loud bang. The chaplain jumped and cried out “Jesus Christ!” We just couldn’t help but laugh.

When granted liberty, we explored Newport and the “cottages” of the 19th century “Robber Barons”. On one occasion, I, and some of my new OCS friends, took a brief New England tour, including Boston. As a son of Texas, I was amazed that we could be in three states in the course of an afternoon.

There was a Catholic girls college in Newport. Somehow, I, and others, got invited to a dance at the college. It was held in the “cottage” of a 19th century railroad baron, which had been a gift of the baron to his wife. After dancing with and having conversation with some of these young ladies, I concluded that they must be the daughters of wealthy parents, and that they had been unable to gain admission to any other college. They were the most empty headed young women I had ever met.

There were some field trips. One of the most interesting was to the submarine school at New London, Connecticut. There, for a few minutes, I got to fly a nuclear attack sub simulator. Another one was to a guided missile frigate. It was cold standing on the deck while listening to the weapons officer as he explained the ship’s armament. The ship was tied up in the harbor, but soon the OC standing next to me tapped me to get my attention and said, “Bob, this ship is moving!” I looked at him and he was green. I said, “Frank, don’t be ridiculous, this ship is tied up”. “No”, he said, “Look at the bow, it is going up and down, up and down!” Fortunately, Frank did not get sea duty.

There was an incident that impressed me. As graduation approached, one had to demonstrate that he possessed the required physical fitness. As a part of the test, one had to demonstrate that he could do a shuttle run (from one end of the gym to the other, and back, several times), within the required time limits. The shuttle run was done as a company. My company completed the shuttle run and we were watching the following company do the run. In this company was a friend of mine. As his company was running in a line across the gym floor, my friend, Bill, was falling behind. At that point someone in his company yelled, “Guide on Bill.” The company dropped back in line with Bill and completed the run that way. I happened to be standing next to the lieutenant who was timing the event, and I saw him click off his stopwatch when the company dropped back to guide on Bill. I could only conclude that the lieutenant was impressed that the entire company had such respect for Bill that they would risk not passing. I thought that it was a great example of teamwork and of a respect for teamwork.

NAVCOMSTA - Honolulu

Upon completion of OCS, I received orders to Naval Communications Station, Honolulu (NAVCOMSTA – Honolulu). En-route, I was ordered to communications officer school in San Diego, California. I was delighted with the orders because, in my naval history reading, I was particularly fascinated by the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor and had always wanted to see the site of the attack, and Hawaii in general.

NAVCOMSTA Honolulu is not located in Honolulu, but near Wahiawa in central Oahu. I was assigned as a watch officer in the control building, as were all of the junior officers who were newly reporting. We were on a rotating watch assignment of two-day watches, two mid watches and two evening watches (if I remember the sequence correctly) then with time off. In those days messages were encrypted and decrypted electronically and appeared as a stream of punched paper tape. These messages had to be relayed to the ultimate addressees by tearing off the tape and routing it to the correct tape reader for forward transmission. This was known as torn-tape relay.

Although, there was still a receiver site at the NAVCOMMSTA to receive radio Morse messages from ships at sea, most messages were via AUTODIN (Automatic Digital Information Network), a computer driven military communications network. NAVCOMMSTA Honolulu was one of the nodes of this network. In reality, AUTODIN was a precursor of the Internet. The messages were like today’s email (except that the encryption was better).

In addition to being overall in charge (and responsible) during the watch, watch officers were responsible for decrypting Officers Eyes Only messages. These were double encrypted, first by World War Two vintage rotor encryption machines, and then electronically encrypted. The electronic encryption was electronically stripped on receipt, but the rotor machine decryption had to be done with the WWII era machines, by the watch officer. Since I was no typist, this was the most time consuming and tedious part of my duties.

One of the most fascinating aspects of being a watch officer was the Apollo moon explorations missions of the time. I was on duty, and was standing at the Apollo communications console in the NAVCOMMSTA , when the message from Apollo 13 came in, “Houston we have a problem.” There was an urgency and changed inflection in the voice that caused the radiomen at the console to stand. By my following duty day, CINCPACFLT was ordering ships to all of the projected (by NASA) landing sites in the Pacific. I remember that one ship came back saying, “We do have enough fuel for this assignment.” CINCPACFLT responded, “Go, we will figure out how to get fuel to you later.”

LIVING ON OAHU

I found a house to rent, at Nanakuli, on the western coast of Oahu near the NAVCOMMSTA transmitter site at Lualualei. The transmitter site on the coast was connected to the control building near Wahiawa via a microwave link through Kole Kole Pass. So I drove from Nanakuli to Wahiawa and back for each watch assignment via Kole Kole Pass through the Waianae mountains. In my time off, I joined a group of people who were bent on restoring to operating condition, a historic Hawaii steam locomotive. I became one of the principal restoration workers. We succeeded, and I got to see

Waialua 6 run under steam before I departed. Consequently, there was not much time for Honolulu nightlife!

SATCOM – Hawaii, at Helemano

In my initial tour of the NAVCOMSTA facilities, I was particularly fascinated by the prototype satellite communications facilities at Helemano, which was across the gulch from the NAVCOMSTA proper. After about a year of watch officer duty, I learned that Lt. Ebel, who was in charge of the SATCOM site, was departing. I had just been promoted to LT. JG. So, I sucked up my courage and went to see the Communications Officer, Lt. Commander Yarborough. I said, “ I would like to be considered as the replacement for Lt. Ebel at SATCOM.” He said, “OK Stout, I will think about it.” A few days later, he called me to his office and said, “Stout, you are going to Helemano.”

SATCOM was the initial attempt at satellite communications by the U.S. military. There were some 30 small satellites in sub synchronous orbits about the earth. Since the orbits were sub synchronous, the satellites drifted (moved in an west-east direction) in respect to any fixed position on the surface of the earth. These satellites were about 30 inches in diameter and the surface was covered by solar cells to provide electric power. The signals were received and transmitted from omnidirectional antenna projecting from the surface of the satellite at various locations. (No dish antennas) The multiple antennas were necessary because the satellites were not stabilized in orbit. As a result, the signal received on earth was very, very weak. These satellite limitations had major implications for the earth station terminal. As the satellite approached the horizon, the signal was lost. Another satellite had to be acquired to continue the communications link.

The earth station terminals were built by Hughes Aircraft Company and were designated ANMSC-46. The MSC stood for Military Satellite Communications and the 46 stood for the diameter, in feet, of the dish antenna. There were 12 of these terminals. There were also some small terminals designated TSC-54, which were intended as tactical satellite communications terminals with a 54 inch dish, but because of the small strength of the signal from the space craft and the small diameter of the dish, they did not work very well (or at all). There was an attempt to install a small terminal on a ship, but because of the ship’s constant movement in three directions, the experiment did not work.

The large dish terminals, ANMSC -46, were supposedly mobile. Accordingly, most of the equipment was located in truck trailers. However, the Hawaii terminals were unlikely to move because if one does not have terminals in Hawaii, one does not have satellite communication across the Pacific. Accordingly, much of the control equipment had been removed from the truck trailers and installed in a control building. The large terminals, (ANMSC-46) were operated by both the Navy and the Air Force. The terminals in Hawaii and Guam were Navy terminals. The terminals at Brandywine, Maryland and in Saigon, South Vietnam were operated by the Air Force. The locations of the other terminals I was not familiar with, although I believe that there were some in Europe.

At Helemano, there were two of the ANMSC-46 terminals. As far as I know, we had the only two terminals at any one location. I had terminals serial numbers two and number eleven. The two terminals were required to span the broad Pacific. Two hops are required, with Hawaii in the middle. So, our two terminals usually worked back to back. The usual end points for our terminals were Brandywine, Maryland and Saigon, Vietnam. Occasionally, we would link with Guam. Brandywine served Washington, DC. We were the relay point from Vietnam to Washington, and the reverse. One terminal was assigned call sign HHON, for Hawaii-Honolulu and the other was designated HHEL for Hawaii-Helemano.

The ANMSC-46 terminals were technically interesting. The 46-foot dishes automatically tracked the satellite, after satellite acquisition, as it moved relative to the terminal location. The dish moved automatically, in both azimuth, and in elevation once the satellite was acquired. At Helemano, the dishes were housed inside large, geodesic domes. The signal from the satellite was so weak that the molecular motion of the receiver parts would mask the signal. Accordingly, the first stage of the receivers were contained in a vacuum flask, cooled by a liquid helium refrigeration plant to within a few degrees of absolute zero to prevent the vibration of the first stage receiver molecules. The first stage of the receivers, were mounted on the back of the dish inside a small equipment room that moved with the dish. The transmitted and received signals were fed to and from the dish by a feed horn as opposed to a reflector feed. All transmitted and received signals were at microwave frequency – seven to eight gigahertz.

The terminals had to be periodically bore sighted to be sure that the dish movement in azimuth and elevation were perfectly aligned with the centerline of the dish and its orientation in space. More simply, did the dish point where it was supposed to be pointing? This was accomplished by mounting a telescope in the feed horn and pointing the dish at a known location. Initially, this was accomplished by lining up on a target mounted on a convenient mountain. Later, it was discovered that a better way was to line up the dish on a well-known star. Radiation from the star could be detected by the dish antenna system. Knowing the position of the star in azimuth and elevation at a particular date and time, the alignment of the dish could be checked without having to install and remove a telescope.

There were seven to nine, 3 kilocycle wide, telephone channels supported by the satellite.

Because of the weak signal from the satellite, when it rained we would have to reduce the number of channels. We could also eliminate the telephone channels and go broadband for data transmission.

There was some equipment that was classified SECRET and there was an operation, which was performed each night that was SECRET. This operation took place in a dedicated secure room adjacent to the control room. Because I do not know if classification has been removed, of either the operation, or of the equipment, I will not elaborate.

PRECISE TIME:

One of the most interesting technical advances that happened during my time at Helemano was the advent of precise time. By precise time, I mean down to the nanosecond. As the Navy advanced into the missile, space and electronics world, the need to measure time down to the nanosecond level occurred. The U. S. Naval observatory has always been the timekeeper for the Navy and so took the lead. The thing is that ships and shore stations around the world need to be synchronized on the same time. Precise time was possible because of the development of cesium beam atomic clocks. So, the question arose, “How does one transfer precise time world wide?” The Naval observatory made a conceptual breakthrough with the realization that one does not need to transfer precise time, but only to compare precise time. Naval Observatory Scientist realized that there was a method of accomplishing this by using satellite communications.

The result was that SATCOM Hawaii was involved. Naval Observatory scientist and technicians arrived at Helemano with two cesium beam atomic clocks for installation in our control center equipment racks. They instructed some of our electronics technicians in the care of the clocks and then borrowed one of the ET’s to accompany them to the next location (Guam, as I recall). After having installed the clocks at locations around the world, and having compared time and synchronized the clocks down to the nanosecond level, it occurred to one of the scientist that there was an opportunity to test Einstein’s theory of relativity by using the clocks. According to the theory, a moving clock will lose (or gain) [I don’t remember which] time relative to a stationary clock. So the Naval Observatory scientists proposed to fly an atomic clock around the world and compare time at each location where they had installed atomic clocks. One of the comparison stops was Helemano. Sure enough the difference in clock time was just what the scientist had calculated based on the theory of relativity.

STATON LEADERSHIP:

During my first few weeks as Division Officer (officer in charge) at Helemano, I just walked around, observed and talked to people. I was impressed by the intelligence of the sailors assigned. I was also impressed by the leadership of my three Chief Petty Officers, especially Chief Stempian (radioman) and Chief Seguenza (electronics technician). The availability of these prototype stations was not great. We were pretty high up on the chart at about 82 percent, but I thought that we ought to be able to do better. There were two contract engineers assigned to the station, Ron Rogers from Hughes Aircraft and Mr. O’Neil from Magnavox Research Laboratories. The radiomen were good at operating he terminals, but the morale of the electronics technicians was low, despite their intelligence. When the equipment went down, the electronics technicians frequently did not know how to repair it, or the needed part was not available. So, they would have to call in one of the contract engineers (depending on what equipment was down) to repair the equipment. Digging a little deeper and talking with the contract engineers, I discovered that although the ET’s had been to SATCOM school, it was classroom only as there was no actual equipment at the school. They had no hands-on training.

The parts problem, I discovered, resulted not from lack of parts availability at the manufacturers in California, but because of a broken parts inventory, labeling and record keeping procedure at Helemano.

There was a parts allowance list, but we never knew where we were on that list. Parts were controlled buy a storekeeper assigned to Helemano. I thought it would be an easy fix and devised and established a system that consisted of a complete parts inventory and comparison with the allowance list, and a re-order of all deficient parts inventory. This inventory was to be performed periodically. But more important, I established a system by which every part had an inventory tag attached and there was affixed a box, next to the door of the parts room. The electronics technicians were instructed to remove the card from the part they were taking and put the card through a slot in the top of the box as they exited. The next morning, the storekeeper removed the cards and re-ordered all of the parts consumed in the previous 24 hours.

There was a preventive maintenance system in place and the ET’s did in fact perform the periodic PM, on schedule. But we had to address the down time associated with the equipment failures. Then we could then modify the PM program to address repeated failures.

But that did not solve the problem of ET lack of knowledge and self-confidence. I called in my two contract engineers and told them that I wanted them to leave off coming in at night to repair the terminals, and instead to establish a hands-on terminal maintenance school for the electronics technicians. I told them that I would take the risk of an even lower availability number while the training was going on. The engineers went to it and established the school. ET morale began to improve with the training. It helped that the instructors were people that the ET’s knew and respected. The instructors used terminal failures as hands-on training sessions, and no, the engineers did not stop coming in at night, but the frequency of those nighttime adventures begin to decline. I was charting the monthly availability figures (bar charts) and posting them in the entry hall of the office and parts warehouse building. The availability numbers did not decline by much during the school and soon they begin to climb. Ultimately they climbed to 97 percent available, by far the best in the SATCOM system. In time, I sent the two contract engineers to Guam to give the same school to the people at that Navy station.

ET morale took a huge upward leap. They became enthusiastic and begin to come up with suggestions for improving availability. Just one example: There were frequent commercial power failures on our part of Oahu. Each terminal had three diesel emergency power generators (six total) for just such an event. These generators were supposed to start and synchronize automatically. But every time, one or more generators (usually more) failed to start or failed to synchronize. The ET’s would be running out to the generators, trying to get them on-line. In the meantime the terminals were down.

One day, two of the ET’s came to my office (PO Lincoln and PO Ferrell) and said, “Mr. Stout, we have been looking at the old Caterpillar generator (abandoned on-site from an earlier program) and we believe that it can handle the power needs of the entire site. It wouldn’t start, but we discovered that the reason was a deteriorated leather diaphragm in the primer pump, and now it starts just fine. It would eliminate the synchronization problem. We would still have to start it, but with only one to start to make, the start time would be reduced. We can borrow the load bank from across the gulch to verify its capability. We would have to re-cable the site, but we could do that on a weekend.” I said, “Borrow the load bank and verify the capability to power the site. If that checks out, go to it.” They did and the Cat generator did, and the power delay problem disappeared. Note that they re-cabled the site on their time off.

There was a consequence for me from the high availability numbers. One day the NAVCOMSTA commanding officer (Captain Renn) got a message from a Colonel Oliver at the Pentagon saying that he was making a trip to inspect the SATCOM site at Helemano. No reason was given. The operations officer, Commander Tanner, asked me if I knew what it was about, and I told him that I had no idea. Colonel Oliver arrived and told me that he wanted to look around. I told him to go ahead. “Talk to anyone on site and look at everything that interests you.” After a couple of days, Colonel Oliver came to my office and said, “ Stout, I want to level with you. The reason that I am here is that there are people in Washington who do not believe your availability numbers. The SATCOM program is in doubt because of generally low availability. There are people in Washington who say that the military has no business being in the satellite communications business and that the whole thing should be turned over to private contractors. Your availability numbers put a crank in their position.” Later it was reported to me that at his exit interview with Captain Renn, Colonel Oliver stated that as a result of his inspection, he was going to report that he believed that the Helemano availability numbers are exactly what Lt. Stout says they are. The military satellite communications program survived. I hope that I was of assistance in that outcome.

MORALE and TEAMWORK:

I learned a lot! There are things that a person in charge can do to promote both. First, be approachable. Second, listen. Third, if one is approached with a proposal or idea, be receptive. Give the green light if it does not have the probability of severe negative consequences. Take a risk. Two Examples:

One day I was approached by a couple of petty officers, who said, “ Mr. Stout, the concrete floors in the radomes are stained. We would like to paint them with Epoxy paint. We can get the paint from navy supply at Pearl Harbor.” I said: “Go ahead” They asked, “what color do you want?” I replied, “ Any color that you think is right.” A small thing, right? But, it paid big dividends in morale and teamwork. By the way, they chose red, and the floors looked great.

Another time I was similarly approached. The sailors said: Halloween is coming up and we have been looking at the radomes. We have figured out that if we blocked off certain Panels of the geodesic dome with cardboard and changed the interior lights to orange, the radomes would look like giant jack-o -lanterns. We would like to bring our wives and girlfriends in to help with the project. I said, OK just be sure that everyone is briefed on safety. No wives or girlfriends on ladders and no alcohol! They were agreeable, and it turned out great. I checked in on their activity the night of the project and all was as I had directed. All had a good time doing the decoration and the radomes really did look like giant jack-o-lanterns looming out of the pineapple field. At night, cars on the road below were stopping to look. A large photo appeared in the ‘Honolulu Advertiser.” What did it cost? Nothing! Having their wives and girlfriends participate gave the wives and girlfriends a chance to see some of what their men were doing and increased the men’s sense of pride. Since nothing in the radomes was classified, there was no security risk.

MANAGEMENT STYLE:

This was my first management experience. I did not know a damn thing about satellite communications, and I realized that fact. It humbled me. I knew that I would have to depend on the knowledge and experience of my people. So, I did not call meetings or issue instructions. I just wandered around, talked to people and observed. As the problems became apparent, I realized that I was in a position to help fix them. We proceeded to address them. I was very fortunate to have excellent Chief Petty officers and two excellent contract engineers on site. They made it possible to address the ET knowledge and morale problem. I found that all of my people were good people. During my entire time at SATCOM, there was only one sailor that I had to find a new place for. It was not that he was not a good person - it was that he was dangerous to himself and others. (Things like testing for the presence of voltage by drawing arcs with a screwdriver.)

So, I developed a management style that was later to be labeled by management consultants as “management by wandering around.” It worked for me, and I continued to use it. I do not think that I could have adopted any other management style and have been as successful. I thank the Navy for giving me that opportunity.

NAVY EXPERIENCE:

I would not trade for my time in the Navy. It was the best thing that happened to me as a young man. I left college with my self-confidence at a low level because I had wanted to be an engineer since about age ten, but found that I could just not hack the mathematics. I changed my major to Economics, and did very well, but my self-confidence was still damaged.

The Navy experience showed me how to succeed and restored my self-confidence. It also allowed me to develop a personal management style that was very successful for me and is now touted by management consultants.

I must have done OK, because I received early promotion to full Lieutenant. It was nice to have two bars on my collar, but it really had nothing to do with my performance. A directive had been issued by CNO (Admiral Zumwalt) to the effect that any officer holding down a position that was billeted for two levels above his or her current rank should be promoted one level. I was holding a position that was billeted for two Lt. Commanders, so I was promoted. The position was so billeted because of the supposed portability of the terminals. If one of the terminals were relocated it would need an officer in charge to go with it. Actually, I thought that one Lt. JG was adequate. However, I did receive the Navy Commendation Medal which was performance related.

Robert B. Stout

20 March 2021