Personal Computers â€“ 25 Years and Counting â€“ Part VI

Description

In Part V, I described some of the wonderous â€œcutting edgeâ€• technologies, such as a Z-80 co-processor and a 300 bps modem. I paid the bleeding edge pricing, â€˜coz I wanted them.

I had left FCTCL for Dept Head School in Jan-June 83, hauling my trusty Apple][+ along for the geobachelor thing. I kept working on th TAGG program, cleaning it up and writing the manual. AFter some extra schooling enroute, I flew south (way south, as in Chile) to catch my ride as Engineer Officer on USS CONOLLY (DD-979). The shipâ€™s schedule was 3 more months of UNITAS, then home for Chritmas and then off to Portland, ME and 10 months in the new Bath Iron Works facility. My CO, CDR Harry Maxiner, had prepped the ship for the overhaul, by having them get as much material as possible to complete the shipâ€™s force portion of the ROH work package, while we were on cruise. He was another man who thought way ahead. Besides being the Naval emmissaries we had been sent south to be, the work that should have been held off until early February 84, was being knocked out daily. Some readers, if you were along for that ride will recall the installation of extra flourescent lighting in the bilge areas, and the replacement of fasterners with stainless stell ones all over the ship. This project to complete the â€œShipâ€™s Force Work Listâ€• (SFWL) resulted in a few things:

default watermark

We found out COMNAVSURFLANT had a pile of Z-248 computers to be issued to the ships. Having spoken to some of the shipyard and SUPSHIP people about the upcoming yard period, they indicated they had developed a computerized interface for the ROH (regular overhaul â€“ back then every 5 years, stretched from 3) work pacakge. We could update our work for the SFWL via a computer and modem it into the SUPSHIP Offices, and we could get status on all the shipyard and other organizationâ€™s job status in return. Pretty sweet deal. I set about, when we returned from UNITAS, to convince SURFLANT Supply to give us a few of those Zenith computers. We begged, we pleaded, the CO went and knocked on doors around the various offices, butâ€¦the â€œChopsâ€• were not letting us have anything. This adventure gave me my primary education on â€œprogramatics.â€• The computers were bought with funding justified to support an application to assist the shipboard disburing officers, and that was all they could be used for. Handing them over for ROH work package tracking was a non-starter, and would have been a violation of the expediture of public funding. I didnâ€™t â€œget itâ€• for a while, but my later years helped me comprehend this issue much better. Net result: Updates of work lists by handâ€¦

I will say this about the Supply Corps. They didnâ€™t just get a bunch of computers and toss them aboard ships to the DISBO. They contracted for the design, production, support and training for the life cycle of the plan. By centralizing their effort, a lot of standardiztion saved the day. That, I saw them do with programs for the Shipâ€™s Store, the spare parts and one other area (I canâ€™t recall exactly what it was), all were raging successes. The black shoes never had the logic wear off on them for the most of the rest of my career.

The second effect of the early completion of much of the planned work was the free time made available for the crew to train for the end of the yard inspections, in my case, the â€œLOEâ€• (Light Off

Exam). Captain Maxiner wanted to know whare we were in the process and I sat down, once more at the Apple][+, armed with dBase][and designed and programmed an application to track the items to be done for the LOE. It was an early lesson n relational databases, but you have much more manual work to do to connect the different data tables. I would print out the report of all items daily and hang in on the side of the file cabinets forward of my desk in the Log Room. The people responsible. mostly my five division officer, would mark up the status by the end of the work day and Iâ€™d edit the progress/chnages into the computer. Each morning, the CO also got a copy, fresh as of the end of the day before. This helped keep him on top of things without coming down to the Log Room of the Engineering spaces. Not that he didnâ€™t but he didnâ€™t need to come nearly as often. It was a fun project, and helped a lot of us keep on top of the many individual tasks necessary to pass the LOE on the first try. The same POA&M (Plan of Action and Milestones) tracking program was filled out to get us ready for the post-ROH REFTRA (refresher training) in GTMO, where we were also going to have the OPPE (operational propulsion plant exam) Equivalent exam at the end of the 6 weeks down south. Both REFTRA and OPPE went very well, and because we could devote more time to training, and less time to paperwork.

default watermark

Near the end of overhaul, the Weapons Officer, LCDR John Taylor, was being relieved. He turned over the Senior Watch Officer duty to me. This entailed managing the watch assignments for inport, and also the officers when at sea. About this time I had moved up to an Apple][e, but was pretty much like the Apple][+ from a performance standpoint. Using the][e, I did another database project, where I entered the entire crew into the tables, then recorded their status for the seven major watchstanding duties: Command Duty Officer (CDO), Officer of the Deck (Inport), Petty Officer of the Watch (POOW), Duty Engineer, Duty Operations, Duty Supply and Duty Combat Systems. I also recorded their date of achievement, from their service record entries, and I had the computer assign a weighted value by paygrade. This accounted for experience. Besides just then tweaking the major qualifications portion, all we had to do, as we headed into port, was put in the desired inport section assignments. The initial printout then added up the values and gave an overview of the experience any one section had, as well as the body count. If these values were markedly different, it became an easy task to move people between the sections and balance things out. Someone asked me wahy I spent all the time writing that program, beacuse they could do it faster by hand. I told them they could the first time, but every time after that, Iâ€™d win. They got it.

During the ROH, I had the opportunity to pick up my first hard drive, the first one Apple produced. A few days ago, I found a picture of it, but, in amongst the many bookmarks I have, I canâ€™t track it down. It held a whopping 5 megabytes of data and was about the size of a shoebox. That doesnâ€™t seem like much, but given floppies held 134K of data, this was a huge axpansion of capability, not having to constantly dig through showboxes full of 5 1/4â€³ floppies to run anything. Cost (as best I recall): $1200.

I picked up my first paying job near the end of this tour, when a shipmate, who had retired, hired me to come and assist his programmers in getting their dBase][application up and running. I drove for 2 hours to NC, worked most of the day, had the program doing all they wanted it to do, and was paid $200 and a steak dinner. Not bad for one day of work, but it was a result of almost 3 years of creating and managing databases.

Next segment: Auctions, portable computers, SQL before it was SQL, and how to buy smart.

Category

1. History
2. Military
3. Navy
4. Technology
5. Uncategorized

Date Created
October 10, 2006
Author
admin

default watermark