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

Description

In Part II, more details of my â€œhobbyâ€• developed, assisted by about 15-20 devotees to the cause of the Apple][series personal computers.

I learned, by rapid immersion, the process of editing and producing a newsletter. It was great, as I had the collected archives of Washington Apple Pi and the big Apple club in Dallas. Now, the practical matter, as with other club type organizations, many have ideas, in this case for articles, but few every find the roundtoit to type it up and pass it along. I wrote some of my own, I cut and pasted many from other Apple clubs (allowed for giving credit and sending our newsletter to them) and for about a year, I was an editor of a documet. Page layout, limited at best, was a skill I developed. Then there was the hours standing at the Xerox machine, clearing the jams, collating and peeling and sticking the mailing labels from the roster generated by the Club Secretary.

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The closing of the story comes about a year after I began, when I was to be uprooted and head off for school in Newport, RI. I announced, during â€œnew businessâ€• time that I was resigning. The discussion that ensured began with a lady standing up and saying it was a terribly done document, and not worth much. I sat quietly until she paused, then I announced â€œSounds like a volunteer to me!â€• There were a few chuckles and then she got voted to take job. Ah, sweet justice. Also, that certainly was the first time anyone told me it wasnâ€™t any good. Oh, well.

During this time, I had the idea that I could make the computer work for me. Novel concept, and I discussed it with my boss, LCDR David Jones (no kidding, that was his name). He thought automating such things as the tasking weâ€™d recently received to account for all of our dayâ€™s projects at the training command, as the Chief of Naval Education and Trainingâ€™s (CNET) manpower review team was headed our way in a few months, armed with shapened pencils. LCDR Jones championed the plan to buy two Apple][+ computers, and the StoneWare Data Base Manager software.

Dave Jones was a smart guy. His plan was to capture the daily travels of those of us in the entire department (he was one of the branch heads â€“ the step below the Department Head), which, I seem to recall amount to 287 billted postions, most of which were full. Daveâ€™s branch was the NTDS training shops, to include the various cruisers, detroyers/guided missile destroyers and guided missile frigate platforms, where replacement operators and new crews were training in their specific shipboard Naval Tactical Data System console operations. Other branches were the TACDEW (the great big simulaltor lash up for training, the predecessor to the Battle Force Tractical Trainer), and the branches that conducted tactical training courses such as the Tactical Action Officer (TAO) and the air controller (ASAC and AIC) classes.

Daveâ€™s greatest idea, and a lesson well learned was: If you want data inputs, tell people how to give it to you, so you arenâ€™t the one trying to align it all and make sense out of it. We made a stadnadrd form and all staff were issued a clipboard and a handful of forms. As you worked each day, you wrote the time you started, the activity, the project/course number, then the time you finished. Each day, the forms were turned into the two yeoman and they would then crank them into the database on

the Apple][+ computer. We did this about 8 months, and I had set up the database structure and trained the yeoman on the data input. Together, we (Dave, the yeomen and I) learned about generating reports along the way.

The CNET auditors arrived and the schedule of interviews was published. Our department head chose to send Dave in his stead to the meeting for our department. I recall it was a multiday affiar, with Dave calling for reports in varous formats and sorts, which the yeomen cranked out quickly and delivered them to the classroom in Gallery Hall, where Dave was being grilled. Well, the truth was, he was rocking the auditors back on their heels, as they came to the base with direction to cut billets. Dave kept producing the empirical data, quickly and legibly, showing the department was overworked, and, while some tasking was â€œout of the box,â€• he calso could show it was, more often that not, done at the specific direction of either a BUPERS office, or our own next higher command, Commander, Training Atlantic (COMTRALANT) staff, who had over-ridded standing guidance to not add any courses/course material, unless something was deleted as compensation. He had done a fine job in documenting that aspect of the manpower use, as well.

The bottom line: Our department was plussed up 9 billets, while almost every other department on the base was cut, or at the least, left alone. No other department gained even a single billet. The audtiors, initially came across very rough, but realized Dave had not used the computer to make stuff up, but had used it to capture an accurate picture of the workloading of the department.

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This was the first fallout of my â€œhobbyâ€• in my career, and how the development of two smart guys in a garage in California made a difference for the Navy.

Next: HP Plotters and the Training Aid Graphics Generator (TAGG) project â€“ Your tax dollars that worked!

Category

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