

REFLECTION OF THE PAST



As a prelude to the ASPRS 75th Anniversary, we are running this column to see if you can identify your ASPRS colleagues from their experiences in the industry. The following material is an abstracted version of an interview conducted by Charles E. Olson, Jr., ASPRS Emeritus Member and Fellow, as part of the Eastern Great Lakes Region's Oral History Project. Some questions were used to stimulate the person interviewed. From what is printed below, can you identify the person interviewed? The person will be identified next month.

Question: "How, where or when did you first become involved in remote sensing and GIS?"

Answer: I'm probably one of the least likely people to ever become a photogrammetrist. No one in my family had gone to college; in fact, a lot of relatives never went to high school. I worked my way through college playing a tenor sax, earning \$7 per week, with ROTC paying me \$30 per month, plus whatever I could earn with odd summer jobs. I had a budget of \$750 per year to attend the Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy, later renamed the University of Missouri - Rolla, again renamed as Missouri University of Science and Technology in 2008.

I graduated in 1961 with a BS degree in Mechanical Engineering, specializing in Power Production Engineering. After graduation, I went to work for Union Electric in St. Louis, as a Vibration Engineer balancing huge steam turbines that rotated at 60 cycles per second. That had nothing whatsoever to do with mapping, except that I would subsequently run some rather-violent vibration tests on a prized mapping camera at Ohio State.

Shortly after graduation and marriage in '61, I was called to active duty a year ahead of schedule because the Berlin Wall went up in August of 1961. The Army said they needed me immediately and my 30-year military career roughly paralleled the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall. I was initially a Combat Engineer (Sapper); but, in 1963, I was sent to Germany as a Topographic Engineer in an Army Field Topographic Unit where I gained a lot of hands-on experience in terrain analysis, geodetic surveying, mapping, cartography, map reproduction and distribution. I liked making maps. It was a lot better than being a Combat Engineer, and if it had not been for my love of map-making, I never would have stayed in the Army.

In 1966, I was transferred to the U.S. Army Vietnam (USARV) headquarters. I was the Map and Weather Officer there for General Westmoreland, working for the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (ACSI), and I rarely actually saw "Westy." To support combat operations, I asked the Army for something that came to be called "pictomaps" and "ortho-pictomaps." Pictomaps were rectified aerial photographs, annotated with the names of villages, highway names or numbers, names of major rivers, etc. Subsequently, the Army Map Service made something called "ortho-pictomaps" where they used optical/mechanical procedures to ortho-rectify those pictomaps, and UTM coordinates were much more accurate. Those products were preludes to today's ortho-photos.

Question: "What prompted you to join ASP or ASPRS?"

Answer: In 1967, I was told that if I stayed on active duty, the Army would send me to The Ohio State University to get a master's degree

in Geodetic Science and Photogrammetry. It was there that Dr. Dean Merchant got me to join ASP in 1968. Dr. Merchant had a summer field course on planning, surveying, loading a camera, flying and acquiring the film, processing the film, performing aerial triangulation, and producing a map of the OSU campus. I got to briefly become a ground surveyor, aerial photographer and photogrammetrist. That's the most valuable course I ever took. For my master's thesis, Dr. Merchant actually allowed me to use his prized, new Zeiss camera in vibration tests at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. I put that camera through rigorous vibration testing at Wright-Patterson, vibrating that camera through the broad range of vibration amplitudes and frequencies that they said was the range of vibrations that existed in the belly of a C-130 airplane. Those vibrations were far more severe than I anticipated. To this day, I shudder at the thought of what would have happened if that camera had vibrated to pieces. I had merged my Vibration Engineer background, from my brief period working for Union Electric in Missouri, with my study of photogrammetry.

Question: "Who were some of the more influential people in keeping you in ASPRS?"

Answer: The Army offered me the opportunity to return to Ohio State to get a PhD and I returned to OSU and took every remaining course taught in photogrammetry and geodesy. I published a paper in *Photogrammetric Engineering and Remote Sensing* in 1976, based on my dissertation, and that article won me the Talbot Abrams Grand Award from ASPRS in 1977. After receiving my award, Talbot Abrams invited me to the bar to buy me a drink. While we were sitting on bar stools, Mr. Abrams opened up his wallet and showed me his pilot's license signed by Orville Wright!

Several years passed in different Army assignments, including: Topographic Plans Officer, Headquarters Department of the Army, in the Pentagon (1977-78), Inspector General of DMA which is now the NGA (1982-85), Director of the Defense Mapping School (1985-88), and Director of the U.S. Army Topographic Engineering Center (1988-91). I regularly preached the benefits of ASPRS membership and encouraged others to join.

I've always been pleased with what ASPRS has done for me. Thank you, ASPRS, for being such a vital part of my life. It has truly been an honor and privilege to work with other ASPRS members in the imaging and geospatial information profession.



Did you identify the person who was profiled in the August issue? It was Bill Hemple, ASPRS Past President (1983).