

A Story of Two Flags

Submitted by Dan McMillin

The story goes that in 1952 a field trial was undertaken between a cooperating U.S. sub and Bell Labs designed LOFAR equipment attached to a prototype hydrophone array installed in the Atlantic by the Western Electric Co. This early test program was known as Proj. Jezebel and later labeled CAESAR, the production phase of SOSUS. The initial submarine detection trials were so successful that the cooperating submarine returned to port flying a large Bell System flag from its periscope. I was told that this was an unorthodox and unauthorized demonstration on a military boat. The flag was given to a Bell System team representative in appreciation of the rapid development effort. I don't know how true the story is, I wasn't there, but it came from a very reliable source. I liked this story because it demonstrated the spirit and cooperation that existed between the military and the Bell System on this Program.

I told this story many times. On one occasion in early 1974, I repeated the yarn at a joint COSL/COSP/Bell Labs, Evaluation Center (ECDAPS) design workshop at the Guilford Center in Greensboro, N.C. I ended the story by saying that since 1974 was the 20th Anniversary of this collaborative effort it would seem only fair that Bell Labs fly a Navy insignia of some kind over a Bell System installation in an "unauthorized" show of our continued commitment to the SOSUS Program.

The Operations Officer visiting from COSP, LCDR Don "Cliff" Clifton spoke up and said he would provide a suitable flag if I would see that it was flown in the fall of 1974 representing the IOC date of the NAVFAC at Ramey Field, Puerto Rico. Some days later a package arrived with a note from Cliff asking that photos be sent to him to show that my promise to fly the flag had been fulfilled.

One morning in November, I arrived early at the Guilford Center just after the guard had hoisted the U.S. and Bell System flags. Knowing that he went to the cafeteria after this I lowered the Bell System flag and attached the "Three-Star" flag Cliff had procured for the ceremonial occasion.

The flag was flown a second time when Cliff visited the Guilford Center a year or so later and, in his honor, I declared him a "Three Star" for the day. The flag was retired in 1993 after flying briefly over the Eagle manufacturing plant where system components were in production by the AT&T/Bell Labs team. It remains in my office, a treasured symbol of the teamwork that brought SOSUS into being.