

5/14/2024
Edited 5/4/2025

Chapter 17b Idaho Falls 1982-1984

My New Job

Beaverton, Oregon and my job at Floating Point Systems is history. I returned to EG&G, Idaho mid February, 1982.

I reported as staff to my old boss, Dick French. He was the Division manager of the computer center and software development for all small computers scattered around the site.

I was not back for long and he asked me to be the Branch manager over a small group. They developed software for projects on the desert. They were professionals that would be easy to manage, and I accepted. The group had been wrestled away from the Physics Department in a power play. The Physics Department held a grudge. There was a lot of politics in play.

I was sitting at my desk one afternoon and the General Manager of EG&G, Ron Kiehn, walked through the door. His office is across the river and he never shows up in the TSA/TSB building where I was located.

He had to walk through a maize of cubicles to get to my office. Everyone was speculating. My secretary was in the cubicle outside my door, and he went right past her. She thought I must be in trouble.

I was surprised to see the General Manager and flabbergasted when he asked, "What do you advise me to do with my Floating Point Systems stock"? Whew, that was a relief. I advised him that based on what I know get rid of it. He thanked me and departed.

I discovered later that Dick French, Jim Zane, and Ron Kiehn, bought FPS stock based on my reports of what a great new computer FPS was coming out with. Evidently, I had done a good job selling them when I went to work for FPS.

During this time personal computers were evolving with the DOS operating system. Mini-computers were proliferating in engineering/scientific applications.

Unix was the preferred operating system which was cryptic in the style of engineers. The user interface for entering commands for DOS and UNIX was a keyboard. A few of us sat around discussing the need for an operating system that was graphics based and user friendly. We discussed developing such a system in our afterwork hours and then selling the product. However, there was a problem. Vendors supplied software free to sell computers.

We concluded that nobody would pay for software, and went no further with the idea. Bill Gates came along later with Microsoft's Windows 1. The rest is history.

I was in the job about a year when there was a big reorganization. Ron Kiehn retired and Jim Zane replaced him as General Manager (GM). My boss, Dick French replaced Jim Zane as Associate General Manager (AGM) over all site services.

The group of people that I managed returned to their former organizations. My new job would be Staff to Dick French. When Dick was on travel, sick, or on vacation I was the Acting AGM. When acting I would be one of the four AGM's attending the weekly Senior Staff Meeting. I was up in the world.

I was heavily involved in advance planning for computers as well as projects around the site. The INEL had a bus fleet of about 40 to transport workers to the site. Most were more than 30 years old.

Dick French had me work on a replacement program for the entire fleet. I put together a proposal and presented it to DOE Idaho. Since there was no advance planning or funding for bus replacement we were told to go away. However, the seeds were planted, and it eventually happened.

The DOE realized that security at the National Labs and nuclear reactor sites needed upgrading to prevent terrorist acts. Security had an open checkbook.

I would hear what was being done in the weekly staff meetings. The INEL was spread over 890 square miles and upgrading security was getting a lot of attention. It was funny at times. Swat teams were trained, and they would need 4x4 SUV's. A fleet of black vehicles was quickly procured. They arrived with shiny chrome bumpers and trim that would give them away at night. The solution was to paint

the chrome black. Cold weather came and when the vehicle hit a bump the black paint fell off.

An armored vehicle with a big gun was brought in. During a training exercise they fired the gun as they were descending into a ravine and shot through the radiator.

We were in a staff meeting and the head of Security reported on the pending procurement of two helicopters. He planned to sole source two German Messerschmitts. Discussion went around the room and then it came my turn. I questioned why he was buying German helicopters. Bell made excellent helicopters.

It seems that Dick French used me as the devil's advocate in his staff meetings. The managers of various functions on the site were accustomed to telling the boss what he wanted to hear. I called them "yes" men.

I always sat on the left side of Dick in staff meetings. He would present an idea or solution to a problem and ask for comments. He would start with the manager on his right and then go around the table. The managers would agree with him. When it came my turn I would give my opinion, which was usually not in agreement. I believe he did it on purpose to get the managers to think rather than agree with him. It seemed to work. We got two American Bell Jet Ranger helicopters instead of German Messerschmitts.

The Cyber 176 I orchestrated with Control Data was running at full capacity due to the Three Mile Island incident. We needed more capacity quickly and started looking for offsite resources. Control Data operated Cybernet computer centers that sold time to outside users. We needed to take a look at what they had to offer. One center was in Sunnyvale, California and the other was in Los Angeles. Rockwell had a facility in Seal Beach that we would evaluate also.

Dick and I flew to San Francisco through Salt Lake. Western Airlines served free champagne and we had our share. In San Francisco Dick rented a Pontiac Firebird (his choice and not on the list of approved government rental cars) and we drove down to Sunnyvale.

On the way he said he does not travel well and was not sure if he would make the entire trip. We had a good dinner and evening at a restaurant across from the Sheraton where we were staying. The next day we toured the Cybernet center. Dick was not feeling well. I assumed it was due to the night before. That

afternoon he said he was going back to Idaho Falls and that I should continue the trip.

I drove Dick to the San Francisco airport. He didn't use credit cards and had cash to pay for the rental car. He insisted on giving me his cash for the rest of the trip. He would not need any as he would get on the airplane and be back in Idaho Falls by early evening. I returned to the Sheraton in the southbound commute traffic, and it took a couple of hours.

When I got back to the hotel I went to the restaurant and bar across the street for dinner and drinks. It was late when I got back to my room and my message light was flashing. The message was from Dick. His flight was cancelled, and he wanted me to come and get him at the airport. It is about a 40 minute drive in heavy traffic and I was not about to drive up there. I went to bed and the phone rang. I didn't answer.

I finished the trip and dreaded what I would face when I got back to work. I walked into the office Monday morning, he was fine, and laughed about it. He didn't have any money and spent the night in the airport. He was fortunate that he ran into an EG&G acquaintance that bought him something to eat.

Events That Effected My Future

In the late 1970's and early 1980's Control Data continued to lose ground in the supercomputer market. Their new product was the Cyber 180 line aimed at the general purpose market in competition with IBM. It was a bad mistake that cost them dearly.

Cray Research took over the supercomputer market. My friends Chris Christopherson and Bill Gray could no longer justify being based in Idaho Falls and were under pressure to move. I had been working on Bill to join EG&G and he finally did. Chris resigned and went with Network Systems as their salesman based in Idaho Falls.

In September 1983 Control Data spun off a new company, ETA Systems, to develop a new supercomputer to compete with Cray. Startup money and key design and management people was provided by Control Data. More on that later.

Cape Canaveral Proposal

In early 1983 EG&G Corporate in Massachusetts made the decision to bid on the NASA Cape Canaveral contract. Lockheed had been the contractor for many years. NASA put the contract up for bid rather than renew as usual. The contract would begin with the new fiscal year for a period of five years.

The proposal would be prepared utilizing EG&G Idaho personnel working on a moonlight basis and paid by Corporate. I was asked to work on the computer part of the bid after work and weekends.

I would go to a temporary office on 17th Street and work. It was a tough request for proposal and I figured there was no chance of us winning.

My job was to look at the massive array of computer systems and present how EG&G would transform and manage it. I was told to be bold and creative.

Our proposal was delivered and there was a long evaluation period. The winner was finally announced. Our bid won.

EG&G Florida was the new site services contractor for NASA at Cape Canaveral. Several of us that worked on the proposal were invited to transfer to Florida. I turned it down.

After EG&G took over it was a thrill to see the EG&G big red logo when the astronauts boarded the shuttle.

The INEL Contract Renewal

It is ironic that in 1994 the tables were turned. DOE put the INEL contract up for bid. It had been automatically renewed the last four or five contract periods of five years each.

Lockheed bid on the INEL contract and won. September 1, 1994 a Lockheed transition team arrived and took over the top management positions.

November 1, 1994 there was a wholesale replacement of EG&G managers with Lockheed people. It appeared to me that the new managers were Lockheed misfits and inept.

I never liked working for the government, but it was a job that allowed us to live in Idaho Falls. Under Lockheed management it was intolerable. An early

retirement option was offered and I retired January 25, 1995.

Five of us that took early retirement would meet every Thursday at 9am for breakfast at Brady's restaurant. They were still meeting as late as 2023. There were a couple of deaths and a couple of replacements. I would drop in once or twice a year after we moved from Idaho Falls.

Our Life In Idaho Falls 1982-1995

We resumed where we left off when we moved to Oregon. LaRue went back to work with Idaho First National Bank. It ended up later as Westone Bank and then U.S. Bank.

We rejoined the ski club and LaRue golfed and played bridge. I took up running in 1984 to lower blood pressure and cholesterol.

At first it was jog a quarter of a block and walk doing this over and over again. I gradually built up to where my 5:30am run was 2 miles out and 2 miles back six days a week. In the winter if the snow and ice was too bad I would use the track at Idaho Falls High School. The track was less than two blocks from the house and the school kept it plowed.

We bought bicycles and on a Sunday and good weather I had a 12 mile route.

We went skiing often at Kelly Canyon and a couple of trips a year to Big Sky, which was one of our favorite ski hills. We would stay in the spartan hostel to keep the expense down.

Our favorite routine at Big Sky was to ski the long runs using the gondola and the chair lift to the top of the bowl. It was about 2 miles of different terrain to the bottom. We would do that until late afternoon then take the short lift at the bottom up the south side. At the top there was a run down the back side of the mountain. Or you could bomb down different runs back to the lodge.

One time it was late afternoon, close to closing, and we took the run down the backside. The only way out was the chairlift to the top.

We got on the chairlift to get to the top and ski down the other side to the lodge. By then the day would be over. We were about two thirds of the way up when the chairlift stopped. We were sitting about 30 feet in the air.

A ski patrolman came down and said it would be a while. There was an area power outage. They are working on auxiliary power to get us to the top. An hour or more went by and we were getting cold and the sun was setting behind the mountain.

The lift started moving slowly. We made it to the top and bombed down the other side as it was getting dark.

We hurried back to the hostel to change and get to a restaurant. We were told they would be serving cold sandwiches by candlelight.

It was fun making do. It was pitch black when we got back to the hostel. We had matches but no flashlights. LaRue had me light matches so she could see to get her contacts out. We learned a lesson. After that we always have an adequate supply of flashlights.

Targhee always had a ton of snow and often difficult. Jackson Hole was usually bitter cold. Sun Valley usually lacked snow as this was before snow making.

We went with the ski club to Jackson Hole, hooked up with Kay and Lamon Lott, and Neil and Pat Cox at a nice place for dinner. The Cox's were older and didn't ski, but liked to be part of the crowd. Pat had a sweatshirt with "All Tetons are Not Grand Tetons" on the front. It was funny considering her size.

The Cox's had a funny little houseboat. It was always on the verge of sinking. We went with them and the Lotts to Red Fish Lake. The Cox's departed early with the houseboat and the rest of us would come later. We caught them as they pulled into the Outlet Campground and followed them in.

Neil stopped at a vacant campsite and was trying to back the houseboat in. He was having a bad time. I wanted to mess with his mind and honked and yelled which added to his frustration. He jumped out yelling, then saw who it was.

Another time the outboard wouldn't start at Palisades Dam. We worked and worked to no avail. We went back to our campsite and the Cox's, Lott's, and LaRue played bridge the rest of the afternoon.

I later read there were 10 of those houseboats were built, and 8 sank. It was basically a small travel trailer on pontoons with an outboard motor on the back.

President's Day holiday is one of the few times that LaRue got three days off in a row.

We made it a practice on that holiday to ski in Utah. Over the years we enjoyed Park Valley, West Park Valley, Deer Valley, Alta, and Robert Redford's Sundance.

At Sundance we parked and saw the chairlift was not running due to a power failure. We headed to the lodge and saw a guy sitting on the front steps that looked like Robert Redford. We went by him and into the lodge to look around.

The real Robert Redford came dashing in dressed in ski clothes and yelling instructions about getting the power restored. The guy on the steps quickly disappeared.

An RV Again

On July 8, 1983 my brother, Garry, called me from Jerome. He worked at the Tupperware plant in Jerome and Bonnie taught school. He had seen an ad for a 1979 21 ft Security Traveler travel trailer that was for sale.

What caught his attention was that the trailer was bought new at the Security manufacturing plant in Boise, towed to Twin Falls, and never used. It sat in the guy's driveway for over four years.

I called to see if he would budge off his \$5,500 price. No way and he was firm. We bought it without seeing it. It was just what we wanted in a travel trailer.

We drove down on a Saturday morning and the trailer was exactly as advertised. Labels, tags, and wrapping was still on the appliances. I hooked up the suburban and we towed it to Garry and Bonnie's place after getting air in the tires. We found there was a pin hole leak in the water heater. It was probably the result of the same water in it for years.

When we got home I pulled the tank and took it to First Street Welding. They brazed over the pinhole for something like five dollars. Never a problem after that.

I dug out my journal that I began when we bought our first trailer in Livermore in 1968.

(Note I started the journal when we bought the 17ft 1968 Golden Falcon in January 1968. I logged every trip we took with the trailer and subsequent trailers. It eventually took two journals with all entries also on a computer spreadsheet "our-rvtravel". The spreadsheet totals the nights and miles towed by year and overall total for every trailer we owned)*

On July 22, 1983 we hooked up the trailer for a long vacation trip beginning with Max and Loa at their cabin in Oregon. Going down the Columbia River Gorge we hit high winds and stopped at Memaloose State Park and stayed for \$5. The next day it was on to the cabin. We stayed four days before heading towards home with a few stops.

We planned on camping at Wallowa Lake near Joseph, Oregon but it was rodeo days, and every campsite was taken. We proceeded over mountain roads towards Hells Canyon and camped at Blackhorse campground for free.

Then it was a steep winding dirt road down into Hells Canyon where we found an Idaho Power campsite for \$3 per night at the Hells Canyon Dam. From there we went through Cambridge to Boise to overnight. It was so hot we could hardly sleep.

Our next stop was Red Fish Lake. We went by way of the mountains through Horseshoe Bend and over to Lowman. I wrote in my log, "Toughest 17 miles to Lowman from Crouch in the world". The washboards in the road were so bad it would bring you to a near stop.

We spent the first night in the overflow area near Red Fish Lake. The next day we got site #23 in Sockeye for \$6 per night. We stayed for five nights. Kathleen came from Boise for two nights. We returned to Idaho Falls by way of Challis, Mackay, and Arco on August 7. Towed the trailer 1,632 miles on its first shakedown trip.

We enjoyed many weekend trips over the years with the trailer to Birch Creek, Stoddard Creek Campground near Monida Pass, Palisade Dam, Victor, Massacre Rock State Park, Craters of the Moon, and Island Park.

In 1984 LaRue's mother, Mattie, had been living alone in Providence, Utah since Morris passed away in 1979. The family decided she needed to be with one of us.

On July 8 we went down and moved a load in the Suburban. We went down the

next weekend for another load and brought Mattie home to live with us. Loi and Val were now in St Anthony and would be close to help out. It turned out she could not be left alone all day and we moved her into an assisted living facility a few blocks from us.

In August we took a one week vacation at Red Fish Lake with the trailer. We were in the Outlet Campground space #47 which is same spot we had in 1975 with the previous trailer. One morning a Lynx came walking through our campsite.

We spent the Labor day holiday with the folks at Summit Creek. Summit Creek is about midway between Howe and Patterson. It is where Richard, me, and Garry ran off the road in a snowstorm in 1949. We came close to not making it out alive.

New Opportunity -1984

Just before Thanksgiving 1984 I slipped away from work to have coffee one morning with my friend Chris. He had an office in the old Rogers Hotel building downtown.

We were visiting and his phone rang. I could tell that it was an old friend from our Control Data days. It was Bob Robertson who recommended me for the job in Switzerland. He was now the VP of Sales and Marketing at the new company, ETA Systems. We knew ETA Systems was recently spun off from Control Data to build the world's fastest supercomputer.

Bob was putting together a sales and marketing staff and invited Chris to come to St Paul for an interview. Chris said he was interested, and that Harry was sitting in his office. Then Bob wanted to talk to me. He invited me to come back with Chris and talk about joining ETA Systems.

Changing jobs was not something I had in mind and laughed it off. The last thing Bob said was to think about it. Chris had made up his mind to go. He started working on me.

Eventually I decided I might as well go along and find out what this new computer was all about. It would be useful information that I could use in advance planning for computing at the INEL.

Later I told Dick French that I would like to take a couple of days vacation and the reason for it. He agreed that it was worth looking into.

Chris and I flew to Minneapolis as soon as we could arrange reservations. Bob put on the full court press when we arrived.

He was a big likeable guy. He was a good old Texas guy, and everyone called him Bobby. We called him Bob as Bobby seemed juvenile. In his college days he was the quarterback for Texas and played against Don Meredith, the quarterback at SMU.

When Bob talked you paid attention. He was looking for former Control Data salesmen that he knew. One for the east, one for the south, one for the midwest, and one for the west, which would be Chris. The salesmen would get a low base salary and work on commission. They could take a monthly draw against future commissions until sales got going, which was expected to be one to two years.

Bob offered me a sales support job. It would be the same as I performed successfully at Richland and Idaho Falls. He said he had something else in mind for me after things got going. It was a lot to think about.

The new people would reside where they live rather than relocate. We could find an office to rent in Idaho Falls. Chris was sold.

We toured the new facility and met the lead design engineer, Tony Vacca, and the lead software/hardware system architect, Neil Lincoln.

After all this I was sold. It was worth a shot. We would be getting in on the ground floor.

End chapter 17b

End chapter 15b