Robert W. Adams

Associate Professor
Earth Sciences
(1967-1994)



U. S. Navy
Cold War

I am a so-called Cold War Vet. Started out at University of Rochester Navy ROTC program in fall 1952. Had three summers of "boot camp" for two months: 1953 Battleship Missouri, 1955 Destroyer. In 1954 I had one month at Corpus Christi Texas Navy Air Station and one month Little Creek Virginia Amphibious Base (with Marine Drill Sergeants!). On graduation I was assigned to a Navy Oceanographic Survey ship based at a Navy facility in Philadelphia. Navy really messed up sending a Geology/Oceanography major to such a ship.

First mission (1956) was to work on the ballistic missile test range that extended about 5000 miles from Cape Canaveral to Ascension Island in the South Atlantic. The government needed to locate the exact impact point of the missile in the target area as well as any impact of an aborted flight between Florida and the target. Radar could give important data, but GPS did not exist and a backup was needed. That backup consisted of a number of Sonar detection stations along the range. The sonar could pick up the sound of impact and multiple stations could the triangulate its position. The location device was placed at particular depths known as "sound channels" that pick up sounds over hundreds of miles away. We conducted research to determine the depth of the channels (up to thousands of feet down) and the Sonar device was placed to pick up the signal and transmit the data through submarine cable to shore facilities.

The next mission (1957-1959) was a submarine detection network in the North Atlantic. The same Sonar devices were placed throughout the area (Gibraltar, Great Britain, Bermuda, Nova Scotia, East Coast USA, and elsewhere). The purpose was to detect Russian submarines and surface ships leaving their bases and track them. The movie "The Hunt for Red October" contained references to the system.

I was the ship's Communications Officer (radiomen and encryption) for the first two years and Navigator the last year of my tour. I interacted with the scientists who came aboard to identify the Sonar channels and install search equipment. The three-year experience enabled me to share a lot of practical

applications in my Brockport Oceanography class. I also crossed the equator and became a "Shellback"!