

# Introducing Capt. Skip Theberge

Although this is my second effort at contributing to the History column, I would like to use this issue's column to introduce myself to the readership of Hydrointernational. As most of you know, I have accepted the somewhat audacious task of 'editing' the column so ably served by Admiral Steve Ritchie for many years. I came to being the new editor by way of Leeke van der Poel asking Captain Steve Barnum, the US Hydrographer, if he knew of anyone who might be interested in continuing the work of recording the history of our profession. Because of my interest in the history of the United States Coast Survey and the origin and evolution of many of our technologies, Steve suggested me.

My career as a coast surveyor followed a somewhat traditional path. I graduated from the Colorado School of Mines in 1969 as a Geological Engineer and entered ESSA Corps, a descendant organisation of the commissioned service of the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey. In 1970 this became NOAA Corps with the formation of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) within the US Department of Commerce. I retired from NOAA Corps in late 1995, with field stops along the way including four NOAA survey ships, a few field parties involved in such matters as astronomic latitude and longitude, levelling, and the transcontinental traverse, a mobile hydrographic field unit, and two years as a participant on academic research cruises from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography involved in early multi-beam and deep tow ROV work. Every now and then I was able to settle somewhere such as the National Geophysical Data Center in Boulder (CO, USA), where I was engaged in mapping geothermal energy resources of western states. I later headed NOAA's Exclusive Economic Zone mapping project out of NOAA headquarters in Maryland, an early civil example of use of multi-beam systems for large-scale sea-floor mapping. My interest in the history of both the old Coast Survey and the history of our profession stems from my stint at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography between 1982 and 1984, when it became embarrassingly apparent to me how woefully ignorant I was of the history of my own agency and the history of hydrography in general. During that assignment, and due to the inspiration of Dr Fred Spiess (1919–2006) who was my immediate superior at Scripps (known to some of you as the Father of Deep Tow and the designer of the acoustic research platform FLIP), I resolved to learn all I could of our collective history.

Following my retirement from NOAA Corps, I washed up on the shores of the NOAA Central Library. This Library is one of the great oceanic and atmospheric sciences libraries of the world, with over 1.5 million documents on site ranging through five centuries of time and geographically from well over 100 nations. Obviously, employment at this Library has provided fodder for my history avocation. I also have remained somewhat active in the sea-floor-mapping community as I sit on the US Board on Geographic Names Advisory Committee for Undersea Features and the corresponding international body termed GEBCO Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names. Enough of my personal history though – time for the business at hand.

What would I like to see this column emphasise? I believe there are a few major points that we as hydrographers should consider as regards our history. First, we should remember that we stand on the proverbial shoulders of those who went before us. These include both the giants of our profession as well as less famous men and women who did their duty well on the far-flung coasts of our oceans and seas. Second, we should be aware that all of the survey systems in use today evolved from earlier systems that were considered state-of-the-art when first introduced. The story of this evolution of instruments, systems and methodologies is of interest in itself. Third, our professional ancestors helped outline the world's shores, were instrumental in moving the commerce of nations and served in war as well as peace. And, on many occasions, they also made great contributions to the science of the oceans. All of this we should help record. As a final point, we should not forget that many of us have lived through and been part of great changes in the way that the hydrographers of today conduct their business. That is as important a part of our history as that of the hydrographers of centuries past.

I wish to ask all of you to consider the above themes, or maybe even just recall some rousing good sea stories associated with your work, to help record the history and evolution of hydrography and its related sciences. I will share with you some of my knowledge of the old Coast Survey and how it became the United States Coast Survey of today. I will also share with you my view of the history of sea-floor mapping and how sea surveyors helped unravel the story of our planet. But I will need your help in telling the story of all nations' charting and mapping of their waterways, how the old surveyors lived by a code of accuracy, precision and integrity, and how we all have contributed to the profession of hydrography as we know it today.