

## **Neil Helm (8/11/23)**

I have many fond memories of my 18 years at COMSAT. I will begin with my first. As a member of the Army Security Agency, I was part of the first space tracking team that found Sputnik 1 on its first orbit in October 1957. After getting out of the Army in 1959, I entered the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, and went to work for the radio engineering company Jansky & Bailey. My goal was to work in the field of international relations in the emerging space industry, so I was following COMSAT closely during its organizational (1962-63) years. After Early Bird was launched 1965, I thought the timing was right, even though I was not finished at Georgetown. I went over to Tregaron on my lunchtime and walked in to a receptionist just inside the door. I stated I was interested in technical employment. The receptionist said all the technical people were in a staff meeting upstairs. Just then, about ten men came down the staircase on their way to lunch; Sid Metzger, Marty Votaw, Bill Pritchard, and the other directors all led by no other than Siegfried Reiger, the technical VP. As I was standing in the hallway sort of blocking their way, Reiger calls out "Want do you want". I said, "I am here to get a technical job." Reiger said, "What do you do?" I answered: "I tracked Sputnik in 1957 and I am now a radio engineer with Jansky & Bailey doing radio propagation studies." Reiger belted out "Hell yes, start tomorrow" and started with the others walking towards the door. But as I still wanted to finish my university work, I yelled "Can I work part time and finish my grad work". As Reiger was walking out the door he yelled: "Hell no! Everybody here works 18 hours a day. Come back when you can work 18 hours a day." The entire conversation (interview) lasted about ten seconds.

Two years later, in the spring of 1967, I was still in school, but now willing to work COMSAT hours, I went back to Reiger's office, where this time the interview lasted about 60 seconds. I was offered the job of joining his staff and becoming responsible for the preparations for the ICSC-T (Technical Committee--TC) meetings that were held about every two months. Reiger was the first chair of the TC. I held that job until Reiger's untimely death in 1970 at age 51. I then transferred to COMSAT Labs and Joe Pelton, who finished his PhD at Georgetown, now on the International side of the company, took over my ICSC-T job.

At COMSAT Labs, Burt Edelson replaced Bill Pritchard as director of the Labs about six months after my arrival. Burt moved me into an office next to his and asked me to assist him with the management of the technology development programs at the Labs, which we did during the exciting space R&D years of the 1970's. But those are other memories. I did finish my PhD after leaving COMSAT.