



WALDO BECK *Personnel: 1955 - 1980*

<p>Introduction</p>	<p><u>MUSIC</u></p> <p>Welcome to the Dahlgren Centennial Celebration – A Century of Innovation. We hope that this and our many other products, events and offerings will showcase what Dahlgren has accomplished during its last 100 years.</p> <p>Throughout our history, we’ve interviewed some of the most prominent minds, leaders and innovators that have been here, and we’re opening up the vault to share them with you this year.</p> <p>Today we are honored to listen to the story of Waldo Beck, whose work spanned from the mid-1950s to 1980. During his tenure at Dahlgren, Mr. Beck worked in Personnel, and his podcast will focus on base operations and management at that time.</p> <p>Let’s listen to Mr. Beck!</p>
<p>Beck</p>	<p>I was born in Winchester, Virginia. And I didn’t come to Fredericksburg until I was about... I guess I was about six or seven years old. It was during the depression. Dad had gone bankrupt during the Depression of '29, and we moved back with my grandparents in Winchester, lived with them for about a year before we came to Fredericksburg, and Dad opened a bakery here on William Street. So I spent most of my childhood in Fredericksburg. I went to Lafayette [Elementary School], which is down on Caroline Street where the library is, went through the sixth grade, and then we went to James Monroe and that was the high school back in those days. We always walked to school, walked home. Even after I grew up and got married and lived on Sylvania Avenue, my children all went to school by walking. We only had one car, and I can remember when David was at the University of Virginia, we would occasionally let him have the car for a weekend party, and if we wanted to go somewhere we called Nell, Kenneth, John, and Betty, and they would take us wherever we wanted to go, so it was not a problem. Nowadays, Joanne and I’ve got three cars, and there are only two of us.</p> <p>I went to Hampden Sydney [College], and the draft was breathing down my throat after my second year, so I joined the Navy V-5 Program, which is Naval Aviation Cadet Program, and went to preflight training, went to University of Georgia for preflight, then to Olathe, Kansas, and finally graduated from Corpus Christi and got my wings at Corpus. I spent a year instruction, primary flight training at New Orleans, which was tough duty.</p>





I spent four years, I guess four years, during World War II and then spent—got out, came home, went to work for my father at the bakery. At the end of, I guess it was about 1950, I got a letter—the Marine Corps at that time did not discharge you, they just released you from active duty. So out of the blue, I got a letter from the Marine Corps calling me back to duty. I ended up back in Jacksonville and spent three more years with the Marine Corps.

So, after I got out of the Marine Corps the second time, Fred Harman, who was the Employment Officer at Dahlgren, came to see me and asked me if I'd like a job at Dahlgren. And that's how I ended up down there. He was the Employment Officer, and I had been Personnel Officer as a collateral duty in the squadron at Cherry Point, and I figured he thought that qualified me to be—to work in Personnel, so I got the job as Head of the Wage and Classification Division in the Personnel Department.

In 1954, '55, I went to work at Dahlgren in the Wage and Classification Office. And they wanted me to go to Washington for about six months training in wage work primarily. And so I went—main Navy at that time was located on Constitution Avenue. I rode the train from Fredericksburg to Washington. You get off the train in Washington, you go outside, there would be about ten or fifteen taxis lined up, and somebody would say “main Navy,” another would say “State Department,” another would say “Interior.” So you crawled in the main Navy taxi, and as soon as he got six people, he'd take off. It cost us 35 cents apiece. In the afternoon when we'd come out about five o'clock, there would be all these taxis lined up that said “Union Station.” And so we would catch a taxi to Union Station, occasionally stop by the bar if we got there early enough before our train left.

But anyway, that's when I came back to Dahlgren and worked in Personnel all my 25 years at Dahlgren. I spent quite a while as the Personnel Officer for Dahlgren and so it was a very time-consuming and a lot more hours than I wanted to put in, so I turned down the job and went back to Wage and Classification, and about that time, we merged with the White Oak Laboratory, and they sent me to White Oak two or three days a week, and I spent half my time at White Oak, and was back on the commuting trail again, which we were in the process of reclassifying all the positions at White Oak Laboratory. Apparently, they'd gotten completely out of control, and I think that was the reason that the Navy Department merged our two labs. At that time, we were one lab with two sites.

David Brown, my brother-in-law, lived on the base right behind the chapel, and David Brown went to the University of Virginia and got a degree in Mathematics or Physics. While he was at UVA, he started working at Dahlgren in the summer





when he was off, and he actually rode the train from Fredericksburg to Dahlgren, commuted. That was during the war. And after he graduated from UVA, he was an ensign in the Navy and worked as a Deck Officer on a liberty ship, going back and forth, taking supplies back and forth to England, and then after he got out of the Navy, he came back to Dahlgren and went to work for Dahlgren. He took a leave of absence and went back to UVA and got an engineering degree. And he was, I think, his first love was mathematics and physics, but he became the director or the division head of the Geoballistics Division, and I don't know how long a time, maybe five or ten years, it took him to move up to the Division Head of the Geoballistics Division.

I remember Doreen Daniels—by the way Doreen died just last month—was the first woman to ever go aboard a Navy submarine. And she was the one who was involved in developing the tapes that went aboard the subs that... I guess—I'm sure you know more about it than I do, but the tapes were able to direct the missile to a pre-determined target, which was fascinating.

One of the things we talked about earlier was Dick Rossbacher's division, which was the Cartridge Actuated Devices Division, which is CAD. Dick was an outstanding manager, and he had an interesting technique of what he called the "red dog" plan, and whoever in his organization—he had a pretty big organization—whoever was in his group had a good idea that Dick felt was worth pursuing, he would give them what he called the "red dog" badge. And that, he could be a TS-7 engineer that had just come into the organization, and that young man would be in charge of the entire division for as long as he needed to pursue his particular project, which was fascinating. And it worked! He developed quite a few things, I believe.

And the other organization I always thought was fascinating was the HERO organization, Hazards of Electromagnetic Radiation [to Ordnance], and I don't know whether they still operate that or not, but they had a simulated carrier deck right over by the hangar. They subjected all sorts of ordnance to all sorts of electromagnetic radiation to see what effect it would have.

Ralph Niemann was the head of the K Department, and he was an interesting person. He was a clean desk manager. Never saw a piece of paper on his desk. It was all in the drawers, but he always knew where everything was. And then there was Hal Overman, who had the messiest desk I've ever seen in my life. Hal Overman, you couldn't even see him for the stuff piled on his desk. Hal Overman... Arthur Jones was Ralph Niemann's assistant department head in K Lab.

Jim Talley—we had two foremen back in those days. We had Ben Tubman and Woody Saft. Woody was probably one of the few people—when Vietnam came





along, he was probably one of the few people who was knowledgeable about the 16" gun, and they needed the 16" guns off of—the battleships off Vietnam, and they couldn't—there wasn't anybody who had the capability or technology of producing the right amount of powder and whatever else component went into the projectile to accurately—so they called Woody back. He had been retired for years, but they called him back, and he helped straighten them out on that. Ben Tubman had the Plate Battery, and interesting, being in classification, I will always remember one of the interesting stories about Ben Tubman is he told one of his employees to clean up something, and the guy said, "I'm not going to do it. It's not in my job description." And Ben said, "Let me see your job description." And the guy pulled a copy of it out of his pocket and handed it to Ben Tubman. Tubman took his pencil out and wrote in the bottom of it, "Also required to clean up so and so," handed it back to him, says, "Go for it." [Laughs] But I think they were the last two foremen that we had at Dahlgren.

The foreman was an unclassified manager, "ungraded" they called him. There were two systems. There was the classified positions and the ungraded positions. Woody Saft was in charge of the Firing Battery, where all the—and Ben Tubman was the Plate Battery.

I carpooled to Dahlgren for all those years, lived at 809 Sylvania Avenue. Sam Branscome, who worked for Wes Meyers down in the... I've forgotten the name of that lab, but anyway, Sam picked me up. He had four of us that rode with him. He picked me up every morning at quarter to seven. I paid him—I think I paid him eight dollars a week to ride back and forth to Dahlgren. When I ended up working at White Oak three or four days a week, I still had to pay him to keep my ride available, even though I was commuting to White Oak.

I'm sure you all have heard about the 16" shell that landed down at Coles Point. The lady's name was [J. P.] Gunter. Mrs. Gunter from Richmond had a cottage at Coals Point, and a 16" shell landed right by her back door. She went to the phone immediately and called Dahlgren and said, "Cease fire. I know where the last one went, but I don't know where the next one's going to go." So they went down to try to—they never did figure out what exactly went wrong, what caused that, but they went down to try and dig it out. It was a dud, thank the Lord. They were undermining her house, so they gave up trying to retrieve the shell, and to appease her, they went down—she was very nice about the thing—they took a 16" shell and mounted it on a platform right outside her back door where this shell had gone in with a plaque on it describing the date and the type of shell and everything and who fired it [laughs]. Anyway, it was an interesting...

I was at Dahlgren 25 years, and I loved it. I had a good time.





	<p>We had some super Technical Directors. When I went to work at Dahlgren, Russ Lyddane was Technical Director. And he went to General Electric, I believe, in New England. Then we had Barney Smith. We had what we called a Super Grade Analysis Committee where we evaluated super grades and determined who would get these grades, and I think that was established under Russ Lyddane and continued as long as I was at Dahlgren.</p> <p>Well, Dahlgren had the first computer, I guess, in the United States. And it was the Aiken Dahlgren Relay Computer. And then soon after that we got the NORC [Naval Ordnance Research Calculator], which the NORC would have filled up this entire section of the house, it was that big. It was developed—well, Ralph Niemann came here from Harvard with the Aiken Dahlgren Relay Computer. He came with the computer. And that’s how he ended up at Dahlgren and subsequently became the Director of the Computation and Analysis Laboratory.</p> <p>There was one programmer who noticed a particular hum on the NORC, and he was able to program the NORC to the point that it would play the National Anthem. You could stand in the room and listen to the NORC play the National Anthem. It was fascinating.</p> <p>The Space Surveillance System came to Dahlgren after I’d been there about ten years, I guess. It was a separate activity, not a part of Dahlgren; it was under a separate command. They had a fence across the southern part of the United States, a radar fence. They were able to detect, from this radar fence, any object circumventing the world. I think they had two [IBM] 7090 computers in the Space Surveillance System, and this information came back into a preexisting program in the 7090, and if it matched up with what was already there, they knew nothing new was flying around the world, but if any new object—and that time they were concerned about Russians putting up objects, and if anything new was detected by the radar fence, they were able to pick it up from their predetermined program. The Technical Director for the Space Surveillance System was a fellow by the name of Hal Hasenus.</p> <p>I was having a good time. I enjoyed Dahlgren.</p> <p>If I had anything to say about Dahlgren, it’s working for the government, you never get rich, you can live comfortably, and it’s a good life.</p>
Conclusion	Thank you for listening to this week’s Dahlgren Centennial Podcast, and hopefully you have learned another interesting aspect of what our people accomplish for the Navy and for our nation.





	<p>We will continue sharing how Dahlgren is a one-of-a-kind location where innovation is heralded as the hallmark of each individual.</p> <p><u>PAUSE</u></p> <p>Tune in next week to hear from Dr. Jon Yagla whose significant work at Dahlgren started in 1965. His podcast will especially focus on his contributions to the shock tube.</p> <p>Thank you for celebrating this century of innovation with us at Dahlgren.</p> <p><u>MUSIC</u></p>
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