Elmer Ackerberg VQ-1 Special Projects Civilian as remembered by Mike Palmer, VQ-1, 1966-1969

Elmer and I got to VQ-1 about the same time, in May of 1966. I was assigned to the Special Configurations Shop about a month later.

I wish I could recall all the personnel in the shop but sadly it was a long time ago and with the detachment schedules, I’m sure I never saw everybody. Shortly after I was selected to work in Special Configurations we got a new OIC, Lt “Doc” Hudson. Chuck “The Crab” Christman introduced me around the shop and that was when I met Elmer. Whenever those three got their heads together it meant work for the rest of us.

As I recall Elmer wasn’t a particularly talkative individual. He was usually busy chewing on his pipe and working with his slide rule and pencil designing something. At that time transistors and other solid-state devices were relatively new but that was Elmer’s specialty! Some of us nicknamed him “The Sandman” because of his use of silicone devices. I remember he drove a big old Chrysler New Yorker, green I think. It was kind of big for Japanese roads but just right for Elmer.

One thing we all found out in short order was that if Elmer handed you a drawing and said, “build this” if you did it exactly like he designed it, it worked! I had heard of people like Elmer but he was the first one I ever met and had the pleasure of working with! Elmer and I worked on several projects together with some great success and some not so much but we were learning and I guess that was all part of the process in Special Configurations.

Most of the projects we worked on were highly classified so to discuss them in any detail would more than likely get me into trouble. There was very little that went on in Special Configurations that Elmer didn’t have a hand in!

I retired from the Navy in 1978 and moved back to North Dakota. We decided to settle in the big city, Fargo, and who should run into but Elmer! We go together once a month or so for coffee and BS. We talked about old times and some of the people we had worked with. Come to find out Elmer knew a bunch of VQ people!

Towards the end of his life I would visit him every week or so and take him to Doctor’s appointments. He was very independent and didn’t want a lot of help. He passed away in 2005 from complications due to diabetes. He is buried in the Military Cemetery in Mandan, North Dakota.

This is his obituary:

Fargo Forum: October 27, 2005

Elmer D. Akerberg Fargo

Elmer David Akerberg, 81, Bethany Homes, Fargo, died Tuesday Oct. 25, 2005, in Merit Care Hospital, Fargo. No service will be held.

Mr. Akerberg was born April 25, 1924, in Plaza, N.D., where he grew up and attended school. He also attended the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks; University of Minnesota, Minneapolis and North Carolina State University, Raleigh. He served in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II. He co-operated Akerberg Bros. Radio Sales and Service, Stanley N.D. He operated Akerberg and Beckler Electric Co. Inc., Bowman, N.D., for several years.

On Dec. 8, 1949, he married Caroline Hora in Rapid City, S.D. In 1952, he began working for Radio Corp. of America as an electronics engineer and worked on many defense and commercial projects for about 15 years. On Feb. 10, 1955, he married Kimi Maeda in Japan. She died in 1984. He was contracted with various intelligence agencies of the U.S. government as a senior design engineer from 1966 to 1992. He lived in Japan.

He is survived by two sisters, Astrid Gates, Grand Forks, Carol Ann Monson, Sioux Falls, S.D.

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(Boulger, Fargo)