

SNAME Biography

Ronald K. Kiss

“Ron”

In June 1959 I graduated from Union High School in New Jersey, and was fortunate to be accepted to Webb Institute. Though after a relatively relaxed high school experience, I was unaware of how challenging those next four years would be. However, by the grace of God and the support of family and my future bride, I managed to graduate in 1963 and even managed to collect a few honors on graduation day (because the last two years concentrated on naval architecture and marine engineering, which suited me very well).

As a student I worked at the Brooklyn Navy Yard building the CV-64 *CONSTELLATION* and sailed on a C-2 United States Lines cargo ship to London and Le Havre. My engineering experience was gained at JJ Henry and Gibbs and Cox doing merchant and naval ship engineering. Upon graduation from Webb, I married June and embarked on a journey that has been exciting and rewarding. I joined the Maritime Administration as a “trainee” and built on the practical side of my Webb education by working in the MarAd field office at Sun Shipbuilding in Chester, PA, sailing over a six month period on a number of different types of ships operated by what was then called the Military Sea Transportation Service, (MSTS, now known as MSC.) After working in several MarAd offices, I went to the University of California at Berkeley where I earned my MS in naval architecture.

It was now time to begin my real career at MarAd, and I started in the preliminary design branch doing hull scientific work, drawing lines and enjoying the tasks associated with ship design and engineering. During the early years at MarAd I passed my Engineer –in-Training exam, and ultimately secured a Professional Engineer’s license in mechanical engineering. Major aspects of this part of my career included working on the CMX program, which was MarAd’s effort to create a number of standard ships for container service, OBO and tanker service among others. Bath Iron Works and NASSCO had won the R&D contracts to design this fleet, and I as head of the Preliminary Design Branch, lead the in-house effort to design a series of trial horses by which to evaluate the Bath and NASSCO products. Also during these years I worked with Scott Dillon (A Land Medalist and Cochrane Award winner) to investigate various hull design configurations to mitigate oil outflow from tankers in groundings, strandings and allisions. We were among the first to look at segregated ballast, double hulls and double bottoms (other than Mobil).

Blohm and Voss were touting a simplified ship that used flat plates throughout to reduce construction costs, and I was tasked to conduct a study on a series of designs using this concept using model tests at DTMB. This resulted in what I consider to be my best technical paper, which was published in Marine Technology in 1972.

While at MarAd I was fortunate to work on what was the nation's first EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) in order to save the new tanker shipbuilding program that was launched with the Merchant Marine Act of 1970. Exploring all the various approaches to ameliorate potential oil pollution was challenging and enlightening. Ultimately the program was allowed to proceed and many tankers were built with the aid of Title XI ship financing guarantees.

Having moved up the management hierarchy with stints as Chief, Division of Ship Design, and Chief Office of Ship Construction, I worked on the agency's efforts to launch a program to build LNG ships in American shipyards. About fourteen of these carriers (all 125,000 cubic meters) were built at General Dynamics (Quincy), Newport News, and Avondale. About this time I became a charter member of the newly created Senior Executive Service. In my spare time I was able to coauthor a paper for the SNAME spring meeting with two giants of our profession – John Nachtsheim and Jim Lisnyk. Our paper, "The U.S. Merchant Marine – Future in Forecast" was selected to receive the President's Award for the best paper at the meeting in Houston. I think the findings were prescient.

When John Nachtsheim retired, I was appointed Acting Associate Administrator for Shipbuilding and Ships Operations, a position I served in for about two years. President Reagan had just been elected, and MarAd's future role was not clear. Ultimately President Reagan's desire to pursue free trade spelled the end of the construction subsidy program and MarAd's active role in design and construction. But to fill the gap, the President, with the leadership of Navy Secretary John Lehman and Assistant Secretary George Sawyer were embarking on the greatest peacetime navy shipbuilding program – an effort to achieve a 600 ship navy.

I was fortunate to transfer to NAVSEA as Assistant Deputy Commander for Surface Ship Acquisition in 1982. This job introduced me to naval ship design and acquisition of every type of surface ship from boats and gators to carriers. While it didn't include the Aegis program, I was selected to serve as the vice chairman of the Source Selection Evaluation Board for the ARLEIGH BURKE, lead ship of the DDG-51 class. In a space of three years I moved from this position to a deputy program manager for Auxiliary and special mission ships; to the first Executive Director of a newly established platform Directorate which included Amphibious, Auxiliary, Mine and Sealift ships; to Director For Ship Programs, Office Of The Assistant Secretary Of The Navy (Shipbuilding & Logistics). This position evolved into the Deputy Assistant Secretary Of The Navy for Ship Programs, Office of the Assistant Secretary Of The Navy (Research, Development and Acquisition). As DASN for Ships I was responsible for integrating staff elements from ASN(S&L) & ASN (RE&S) during reorganization establishing ASN (RD&A). I served as principal advisor to the Principal Deputy and the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development & Acquisition for Shipbuilding programs, including ships, subs and craft as well as related combat systems not under cognizance of other DASN's. Specifically included were ship-launched missiles, guns and the Aegis combat system. Provided

executive leadership for policy and planning of Navy's shipbuilding and shipbuilding R&D programs.

Concurrent with all this I was active in both the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers at the section and national levels; the American Society of Naval Engineers at the national level; the Webb Alumni Association and a host of other maritime related activities. My service to professional societies culminated as President of SNAME in 1991/92, and President of ASNE 2011/13. Upon retirement from Federal Service, I worked for a year at Syntek supporting Navy programs before being selected as President elect at Webb Institute. After a 35 year career in ship design and construction, the opportunity to help mold some of the next generation of ship designers and engineers was a most welcome challenge. Among the achievements at Webb that were most satisfying were the creation and implementation of a long range strategic plan including turning around a serious decline in the number applicants that had been occurring before I arrived, recruiting a new Dean, Roger Compton, who ably lead improvements in the academic program, and initiating a Capital Campaign that ultimately exceeded the ambitious goals we had set. I have been author or co-author of nearly twenty publications, and served on a plethora of committees and boards over this fifty year span.

Along the way June and I raised three wonderful children and are now enjoying our seven grandchildren. My career in naval architecture and marine engineering has provided me with untold intellectual challenges and satisfaction, while enabling me to enjoy the non-professional pursuits I so dearly love including my family, sailing, painting, stamp collecting, and golf (I guess.)