

# It's Later Than You Think – Do You Know Where Your Software Is?

**I am a proud Air Force “Brat.”** In fact, I have never been without a military ID card – first as a dependent, then as a member of the USAF (23 years), and now as USAF retired.

I was born while my Dad was stationed near Edinburgh, Scotland at RAF Kirknewton, which had a U.S. Security Service (USAFSS) squadron attached there. We then moved to Shaw AFB (Sumter SC), Orlando Air Force Base (which eventually became the Orlando Naval Training Center), Chanute AFB (Rantoul, IL), Istanbul Turkey (The US Logistics Group – TUSLOG), Sheppard AFB (Wichita Falls, TX) and finally, McCoy AFB (formerly Pinecastle AFB, Orlando, FL). All of these moves by the time I was 15. (I had another 8 bases under my belt by the time I retired, but that's another column).

Back in 2004, I realized I wasn't getting younger, and I decided to visit all of the houses I had lived in as a child. I wanted to relive some memories. My parents had kept careful records – so it would appear that all I had to do was plug the addresses into Google Earth, and spend a few \$s for a couple of airplane tickets.

Of course, nothing is as easy as it seems. In 2004, I took a vacation to Edinburgh, Scotland – I had not been back since I left at the age of 4 in 1959. (NOTE: in case my former boss is reading – I REALLY went to the conference, and only vacationed during weekends. Honestly!) RAF Kirknewton was still there, and I was able to find the house I grew up in, located in the sleepy village of Balerno. Next stop was Sumter, SC. Shaw AFB was still there, of course, but the street name had changed. It took a while, but eventually I was able to find our old house (really, a townhouse) – which seemed SO big as a child, but was unbelievably small. The entire block was under renovation – I was lucky to visit when I did. One more house checked off.

Orlando – that's an easy one. Dad retired there – and even though Orlando AFB became Orlando Naval Training Center (and then closed in 1999) the house we rented was still there. Likewise for the house when he was assigned to McCoy AFB (formerly Pinecastle AFB – also closed) in 1969 – we lived off base, and the house was still there.

Chanute AFB in Rantoul, IL? Not so easy. It had closed in 1993 – and while most of the houses were still there, all streets were renamed. Luckily, there is the Chanute Air Museum where the base headquarters used to be, and with the help of several volunteers who worked there – old maps were brought out, and the two houses we lived in during our 4 years there were located. Both still there, both were visited, and both marked off my list.

Sheppard AFB? Still there, and when I drove through back in 2007, I was lucky enough to arrive the week before they were scheduled to tear down my old house. Pictures taken, memories relived, and another one marked off. (NOTE: We left Sheppard in 1969, and I vaguely remember a cute red-haired girl who lived down the block. I met her again in 2010, 41 years later – and we got married. Some things are just meant to be.)

Only one house to go – the one in Istanbul, Turkey. There

was no actual base in Istanbul, and we had rented a house near the detachment. I had the address – how hard could this be? My first trip back to Istanbul was in 2005 (39 years after we had left), and even with addresses and maps and a pretty good memory, it appeared that my house was long gone. The address no longer existed – several taxi drivers were unable to locate it. I walked all over the area I thought it should be in – and I never saw anything familiar. Of course – when we lived there in the 1960s, Istanbul was a big city – about 1 million people. In 2005 – bigger! 12 million! I gave up.

Until 2009. I got the chance to visit Istanbul again to attend a conference (and yes, I actually attended the conference. EVERY DAY!) This time, I had done my homework. In addition to the old address, I had old several maps that I could use, and thanks to several web sites that I had discovered, I had a few landmarks to use as points of reference. It took me less than 2 hours to re-discover our old house (instantly recognizable, but now a small girl's school!)

And my mission was complete. Every house I grew up in as a child I had re-visited as an adult. You are probably asking “What in the world does this have to do with a topic for BackTalk? Not much – it was just fun for me to relive a few memories. Wait – maybe it IS relevant! I was lucky. A lot of military brats (with similar backgrounds to mine) can't revisit where they grew up – based closed, houses torn down, missing addresses, etc. It's all about documentation, directions, addresses and maps. And timing. It's not enough to just know where you are going. Like software, I knew my goal. I “had a vision.” However, along the way, I missed turnoffs, got sidetracked, and occasionally got lost. I was lucky in Turkey – almost everybody spoke a bit of English. I just kept asking and asking, and eventually found my way.

I have to ask – “It's halfway through your budget – do you know where your software project is at?” I am teaching a senior-level project management course this semester and there are just SO many things you have to keep track of to be a good project manager. Budgets, risks, configuration management issues, personnel, training. Milestones, earned value, etc.

Why do we have project management tools? Just to make our job simple? Not really – project management is seldom (never?) simple. Project Management tools are there to help you manage the data. It's not enough to just know where you are going. You have to know that you are heading in the right direction, and you need something to make sure you are getting closer (and closer and closer and ...) to your goal. And whatever data you have – you need more data, better data, more accurate data. Data that helps you find your way to your goal.

And if that lesson isn't about Data Mining in Metrics, then I'm still lost.

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