AOC Chapter History: Golden Gate Chapter

By Robert Simmen

Just over 60 years ago, on October 21, 1966, a group of electromagnetic warfare (EW) professionals gathered in the San Francisco Bay Area for the first meeting of what they called the Golden Gate Club. Today, the chapter is **one of AOC's most storied**, with a history that tracks the growth of the Bay Area's EW community.

A Club Takes Shape

Lee Heesacker served as the club's first president, with Jim Taylor as secretary. Bill Boulton, Jim Brennan and Bob Stone made up the first board. Together they drafted a preliminary constitution and set a course for a local organization devoted to EW.

By the 1967-68 year, the club had an official constitution and bylaws, a program chairman and its first membership drive. It also received a national membership plaque for its efforts. It counted 153 members. A year later, the number was 186. By 1970, it was 420.

Building a Reputation

Momentum came from the programming. In 1970, the chapter hosted its first high-level Department of Defense speaker, Rusty Porter of the Office of the Director of Defense Research and Engineering. In 1972, local industry support had spread across the Bay Area because of the chapter's rapid growth and nationally known speakers. The next year brought its first technical speaker from NATO, a Royal Navy representative.

The chapter was thinking bigger, too. In 1973-74, members pitched AOC Headquarters on holding a convention in the Bay Area, and the 1982 convention was awarded to San Francisco. The chapter held its first technical symposium the following year, when membership reached 520.

Education and Giving Back

The chapter's investment in the next generation began in 1979-80 with its first scholarship award. That year also brought its first meeting with the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, a relationship that endured. The scholarship program grew steadily: two awards in 1982-83, three the following year, five in 1986-87, and 10 by 1988-89.

Education reached beyond students. A first tutorial series on EW receivers launched in 1984-85. A direction-finding tutorial later netted $5,600 and 55 new members, proof that sharing knowledge could also strengthen the chapter.

The Golden Years

The chapter's 1982 hosting of the National Symposium and Convention in San Francisco was a defining moment. Chapter member Dave Adamy chaired the convention, and Dr. William J. Perry, who would later become Secretary of Defense, chaired the technical symposium. The chapter also hosted a visit by the NATO EW Committee to Silicon Valley. That year, membership topped 1,000, making Golden Gate the second-largest club

worldwide.

Growth continued. The chapter launched its monthly CROWTRACKS newsletter and held its first two-day technical symposium with displays in 1983-84, and membership passed 1,500. By 1988-89, it peaked at 1,865 members. Along the way, the chapter earned Regional Club of the Year honors in 1981, 1983 and 1984. It hosted classified symposia and a tour of Moffett Naval Air Station and published “EW Crow” cartoon books. It even sponsored the 1991 Trans Pacific EW Symposium in Taipei, which netted more than $12,000.

Golden Gate members also rose to national leadership. RADM Julian Lake, USN (Ret.), became AOC president in 1989, and Dave Adamy followed in 2002. Bea Dowd, the chapter’s longtime historian, became the first woman elected a Regular Director of the AOC.

Preserving the Past, Looking Ahead

Like the broader defense industry, the Bay Area EW community changed as companies consolidated and shifted. Chapter membership shrank to 392 by 2001, but the chapter held on to its mission. In 1998, it acquired an EW display from Northrop. That exhibit later moved to the USS Hornet in Alameda in 2009, then to the Navy Museum at Moffett Field in 2010, so the history of EW remains on public view in the Bay Area. The chapter also marked the millennium with its “Y2K EW Calendar,” distributed at the national convention.

Today, under President Ragan Wilkinson, the Golden Gate Chapter continues the work its founders began in 1966: bringing EW professionals together to learn, teach and serve.