

Obituary

Mortimer Rogoff

Scientist and engineer



Mort Rogoff, aged 87, died at Nantucket, USA, August 2008.

Mort Rogoff came into the hydrographers' world through his developments of the electronic chart in which he played a major part. He contributed to many of the ideas and standards which today provide the basis for much of the work of Hydrographic Offices engaged in the work of producing ENC's and stimulating their use in navigation. The obituary below was provided by his close friend and colleague, Giuseppe Carnevali.

Mort loved to be a several decades ahead of the world.

During the war he developed a radio communication system that was totally undetectable by the enemy because its power was below the background noise and the frequency variable in a random way.

This was the birth of the spread spectrum, the technology on which modern GPS and cellphones are based. Unfortunately he was not allowed to get public credit or to patent the technology because it was top military secret.

Half a century ago he developed a computer network system and a text exchange protocol that could be viewed as the harbingers of the Internet and of email.

More than a quarter century ago he developed a revolutionary electronic chart system.

Although GPS did not exist, and small

computers were rudimentary, he managed to survey Loran coordinates in New York and Tampa to create differential Loran with sub-metre accuracy, and then he found a computer in Japan with half a megabyte of memory and 4MHz clock (which means 1,000 times slower than today's home computers) and through clever software he was able to perform all the functions of today's advanced electronic chart systems, including a digital vector database of the highest detail, and radar overlay.

The ISO standard for electronic charts, which he tenaciously squeaked through the system, caught everybody off guard: nobody could argue against the need for a standard, but nobody was ready to endorse one, yet nobody had the guts to oppose it. So the standard is there, an excellent standard, which for sure will become commonplace - a few decades later, as always, when the world manages to catch up with Mort's creations.

Mort took off for the ultimate climb from his lab/home in Nantucket, after watching the last beautiful sunset on the harbor with his witty and beloved wife of 65 years, children and grandchildren.

He forgot to take with him his computers, his radios, the equipment with which he had managed to start a new career as an accomplished photographer, but he will continue to churn out innovations for many decades, as we continue to discover more things that he had discovered for us earlier on.

