

From RPI Cheer-leader to Cold  
War hero

# He Heard a Different Drummer: the Cold War memoirs of a scientist, explorer, naval officer, spy, and oil-finder. By Leonard A. LeSchack



In 1955 I am a lifeguard (me, at far right, in B & W) during my summers, and in my senior year at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. I will soon graduate and begin my life of scientific research, geographical exploration, and dangerous military, and espionage adventures! I (wearing an RPI Cheer-Leader sweater) had already begun my amorous adventures. My very first began with Giselle of Montreal, a most worldly, bilingual teenager who had been my date for the RPI 1953 mid-winter dance (color photo) !



While a student at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute studying geology and geophysics I had been enrolled in the AF ROTC program. I am cadet at left. I graduated in Geology in February 1957



Here I am in November 1957 Already at work, exploring at Byrd Station, Antarctica, during the International Geophysical Year (IGY)



Soon I am at work as assistant seismologist exploring Antarctica in 1957. We used three Tucker Sno-Cat tractors. The team and I are in front of Mount Johns



I spent 14 continuous months in Antarctica! Mount LeSchack described below was named after me.

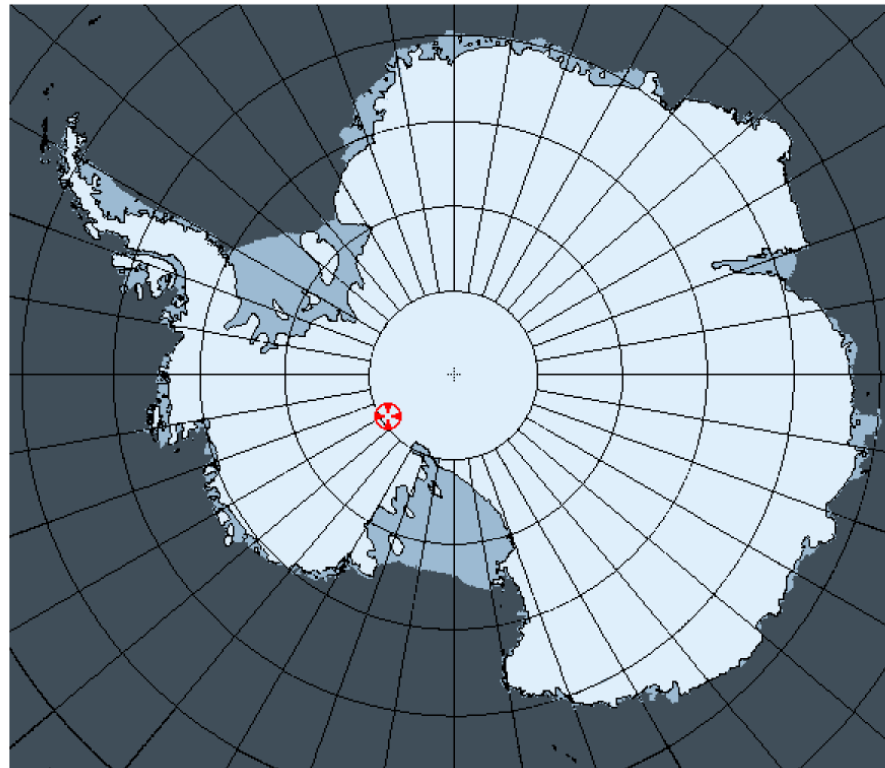
## LeSchack, Mount

Location Type: mountain

Position: [85°25'00"S](#), [124°00'00"W](#)

A distinctive flat-topped mountain, 2,265 m, standing on the N side of [Perkins Canyon](#) in the [Wisconsin Range](#), [Horlick Mountains](#). Mapped by USGS from surveys and USN air photos, 1959-60. Named by US-ACAN for Leonard A. LeSchack, traverse seismologist, Byrd Station winter party, 1958.

© USGS



My 1957-58 over snow traverse team. I am second from the left. Note the RPI Geological Society sent me its banner to adorn my Sno-Cat Tractor,





Upon returning to the US in 1959 aboard the USS Arneb, I enlisted in the US Navy, was quickly sent to Navy Officer Candidate School (OCS), and became an officer in November, 1959



LeSchack's first assignment upon commissioning is to Air Force Arctic Drift Station T-3 in 1959. Here he assists the Navy in surveying in, and orienting an acoustical array for tracking the nuclear submarine SSN Sargo, which made several test runs beneath this station. From this exercise, he now recognized the strategic importance of being able to track SSN's and SSBN's, both ours and the Soviet's, beneath the ice pack! Soon thereafter, he conceived the idea of "Project Coldfeet!" T-3's mess hall is building at left, the radio shack at right. He served on T-3 from November 1959 – March 1960.



LeSchack's next assignment directly from the Office of Naval Research (ONR) in Washington, was to assist in the establishment of the Navy's new Arctic Ice drift station, ARLIS II, and to set up an array for measuring ocean waves beneath the ice, as well as to map the circumference of this station, and determine by celestial navigation its exact position.



During this time period, two US Arctic drifting stations on the pack ice, Alpha and Bravo, both broke up and had to be hastily abandoned since they no longer could be supported by fixed-wing aircraft. Several Soviet stations also similarly constructed on pack ice also had to be abandoned for the same reason during this period. Knowing that forced abandonment of US ice stations was both hasty and chaotic, I knew abandonment of Soviet ice stations would likely be the same. Accordingly, I proposed to ONR that I should parachute on to the next Soviet abandonment, and search for evidence of expected clandestine operations, and then be picked up by the Fulton Skyhook! ONR agreed to my James Bond-like scheme!! That was the birth of Project Coldfeet. Shortly thereafter I began Skyhook training, followed by training as a Navy Parachutist! That's me being picked up by Navy P2V, the beginning of my training!



In 1961 I conjured up the James Bond scheme, “Project Coldfeet”, a classic OSS type intelligence mission to investigate a recently abandoned Soviet ice station in the Arctic Ocean. I am on the left. Major James F. Smith USAF, a trained intelligence officer and Russian linguist is on the right. In the center Captain Dan Walter, MD, USA, our medical officer. The operation was sponsored by ONR, CIA, DIA and ONI



Major Jim Smith has already jumped from the B-17, landed safely and lit a smoke flare for my guidance, and now it is my turn, and a few seconds later, after a quick prayer, I too, am gone!



Photo of NP-8 taken by Len, May 1962, after he and Jim landed by parachute.

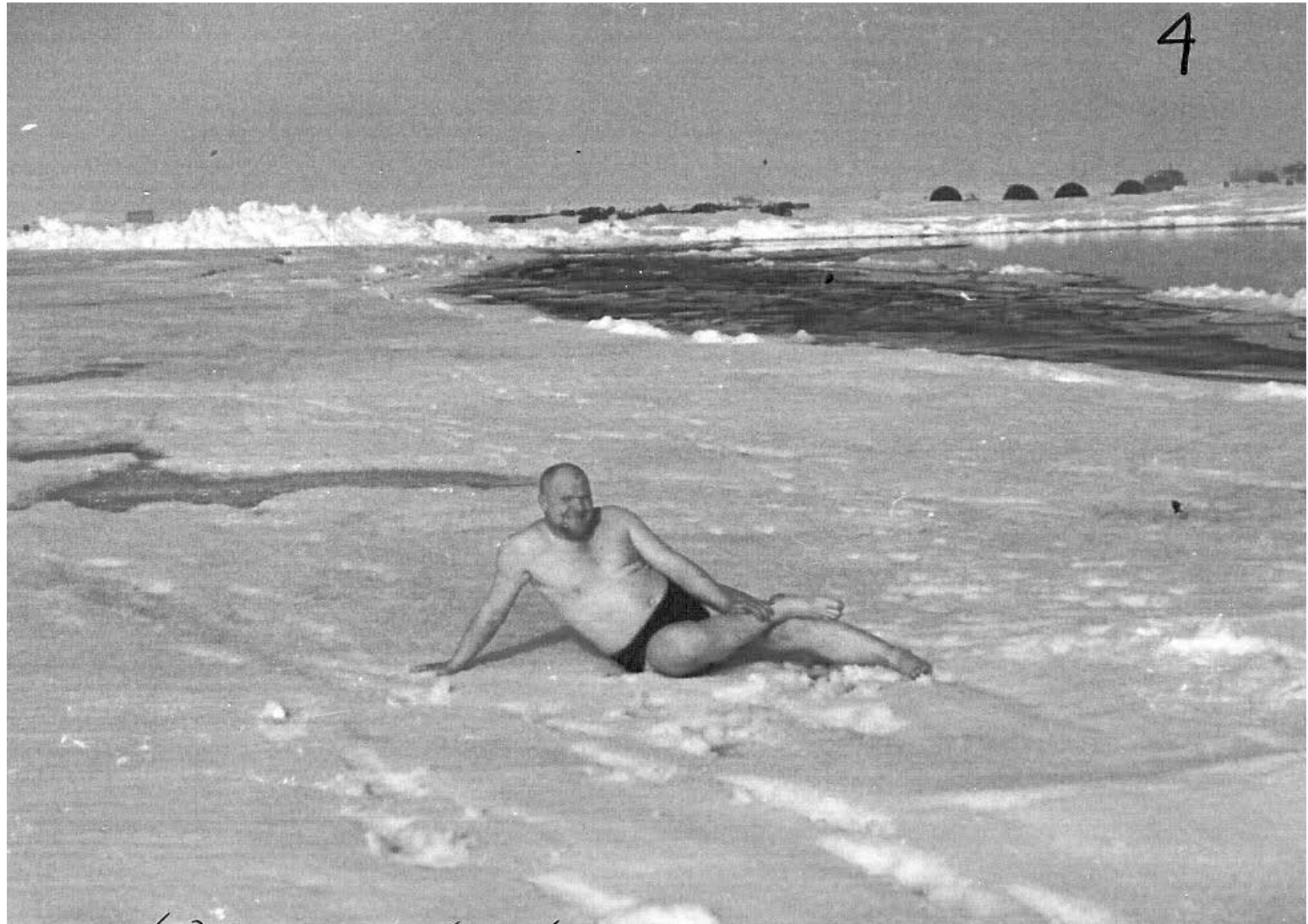


Poster taken from NP-8 mess hall wall with Station Leader Romanov's request that Arctic and Antarctic Institute be notified by any visitors. It was abandoned six weeks before Jim and I jumped in.





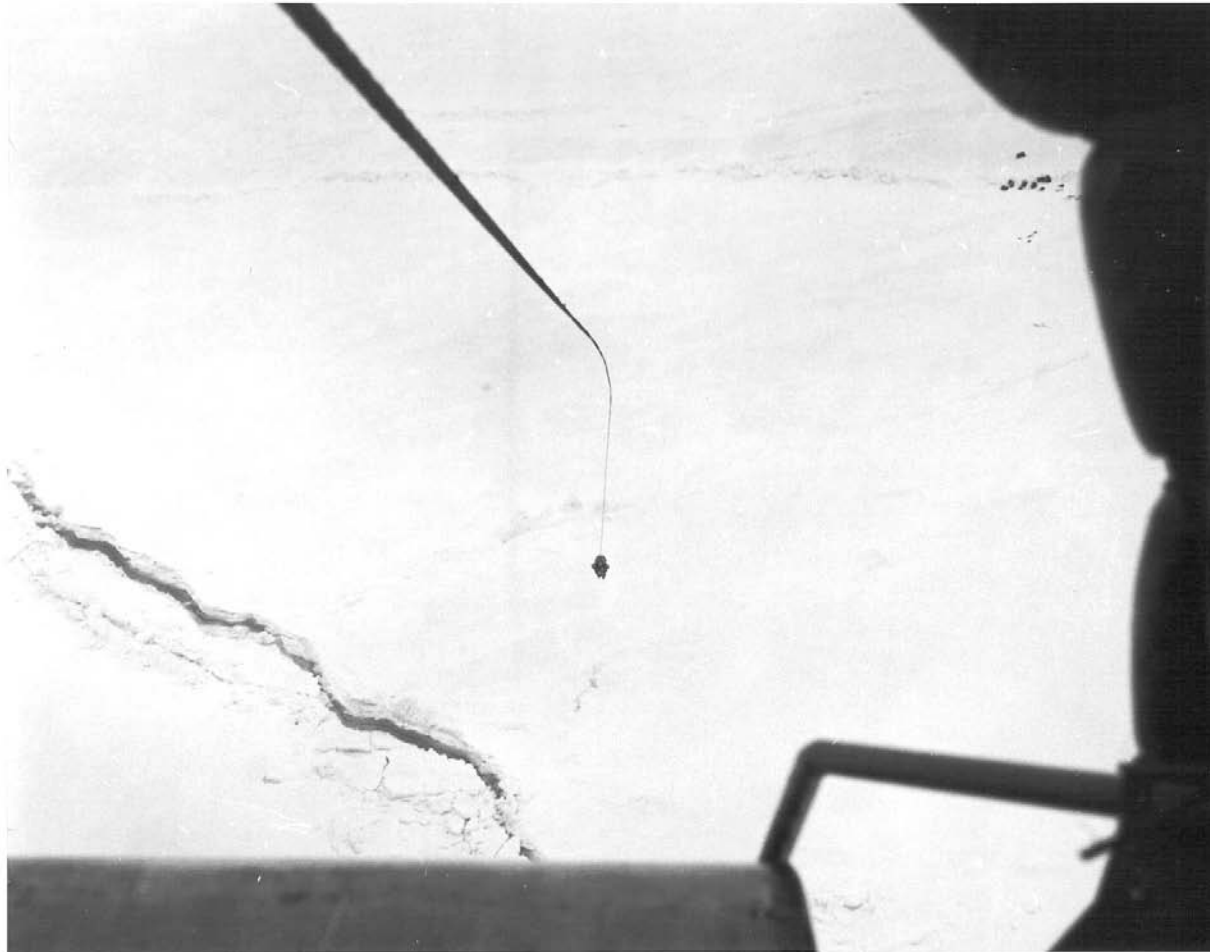
Photographs taken by Soviets; negatives found in the negative carrier in the enlarger in darkroom. They had a sense of humor. Their photos were also a good source of intelligence.



These photos were taken by the Soviets and were found in their NP-8 darkroom. They were of significant intelligence value.



Once my proposed espionage mission to an abandoned Soviet Ice Station in the Arctic Ocean was approved by ONR's Admiral, this operation quickly became a tri-service, multi-agency mission including CIA, and DIA. CIA provided a WWII B-17, configured with the Fulton Skyhook. I and my Air Force partner, Major James F, Smith, parachuted from the B-17 on to the target, partially seen in upper right-hand corner of this photo, taken from the tail-gunner's station, which has been converted to the entrance for retrieving both cargo and personnel. Seen at the end of the line is Jim. Our bag of intelligence and myself have already been successfully retrieved! This secret mission that I had proposed, was declared by all, "A resounding success!"

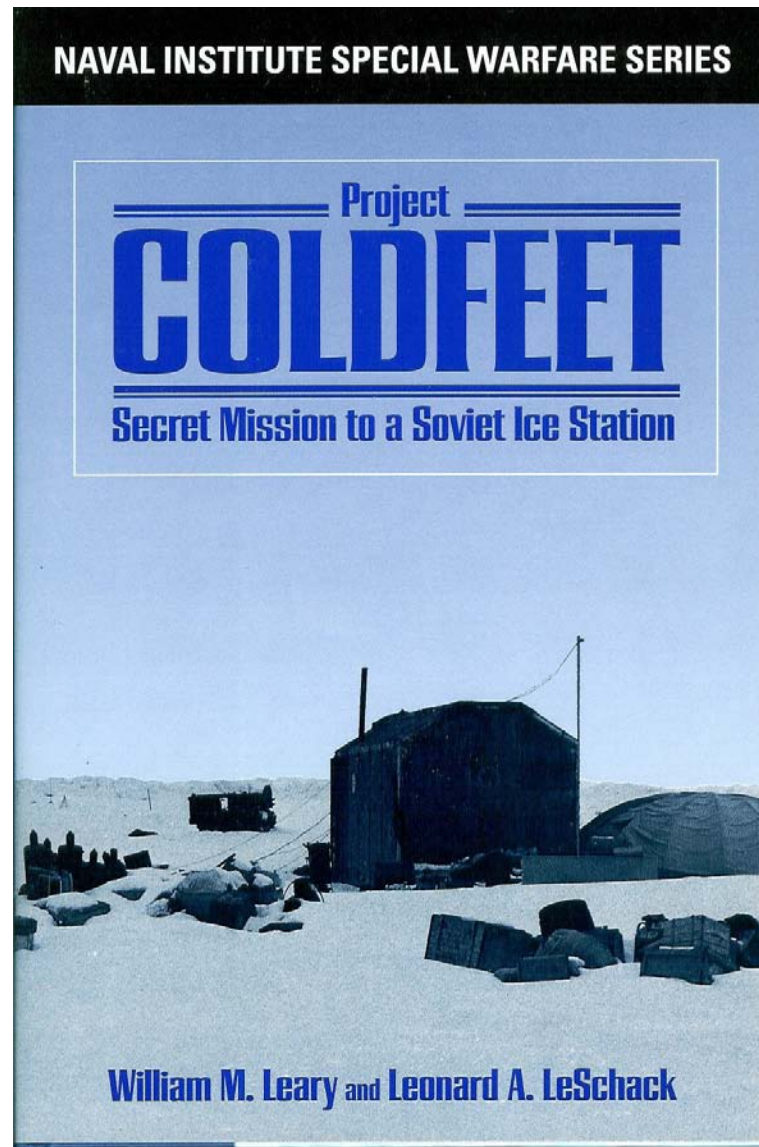




On 1 November 1962, just three days after President Kennedy resolved the “Cuban Missile Crisis,” that same president authorized the Legion of Merit, a presidential decoration, for Air Force Major James F. Smith and Navy Lt(jg) LeSchack. The Secretary of the Navy is pinning it on me at left, and the Secretary of the Air Force is pinning it on Jim, at right.



This secret mission was classified for many years. Upon declassification, CIA historian, William Leary and I co-authored the definitive story of this spy mission, published in 1996.



Project Coldfeet was to be just the first of my three espionage adventures to the USSR! In 1965 I became the Polar Regions Project Officer for the Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World's Fair. I was sent by them to Moscow and Leningrad to collaborate with the Soviets on polar matters. This mission was excellent cover for further espionage against the USSR



In 1967, I start my own company focused on engineering problems in jungle regions of Central and South America. Here, I land on Curiche Beach, Choco Department, Colombia, January 1967, to work with Army Corps of Engineers, Office of Inter-Oceanic Canal Studies (OICS) in the jungle. I arrived on LST USS CHURCHILL COUNTY seen in background. Then I explored in the jungle, and studied engineering practices in such areas.





Len, as principle author of paper on Alaskan permafrost is invited by the Soviet Academy of Sciences to attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Permafrost Conference in Gulag Archipelago country in Siberia. CIA pays his way (and gives him a homework assignment!) Just another opportunity to play “cat and mouse” with the KGB, just as he had in Moscow and Leningrad in 1965.



Focusing in the 1970s on exploration for geothermal energy, DOE eventually funds Len's geothermal project in both Long Valley and at the Coso Hot Springs area at the Naval Weapons Test Center, where more serious drilling can be done. Here, drilling at Coso, for a SHALLO-TEMP Survey, 1977

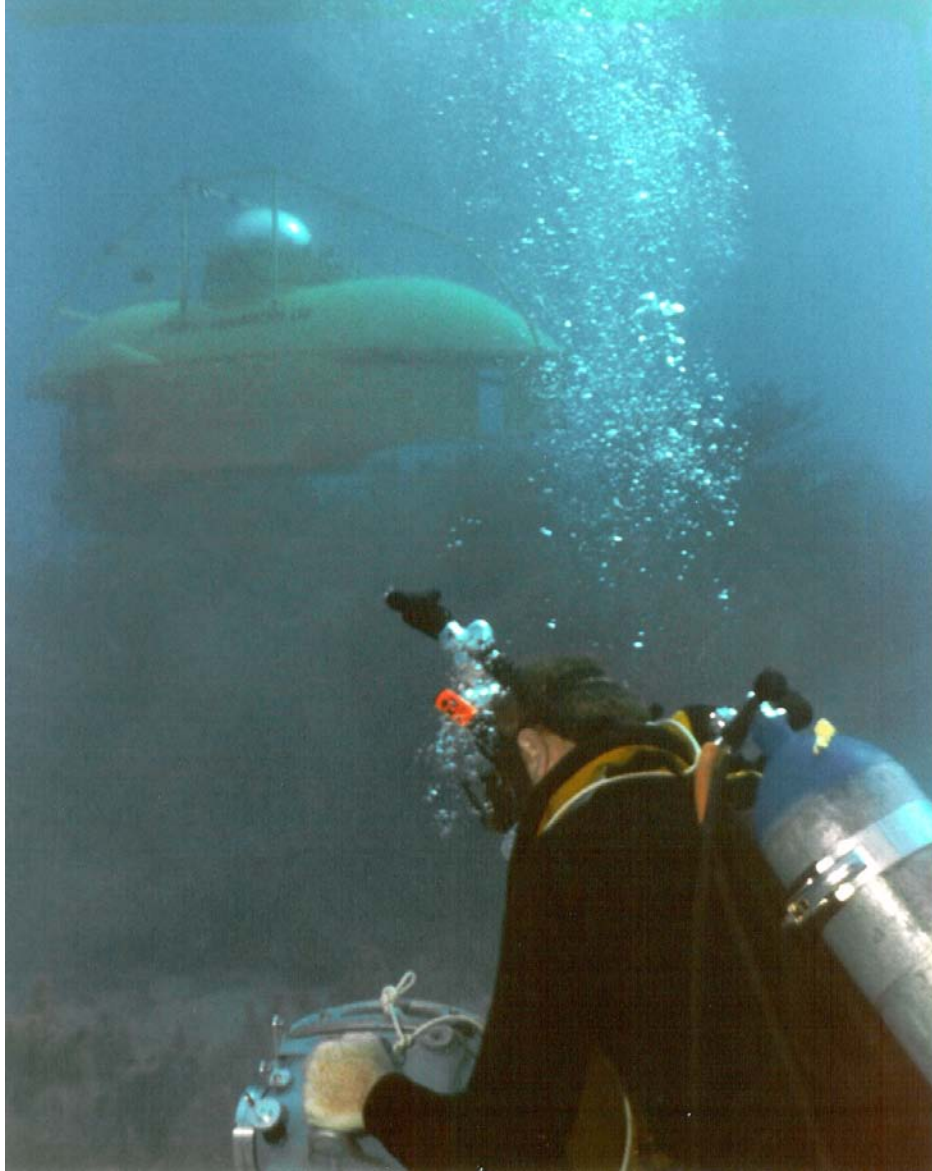


**Peace on Earth**

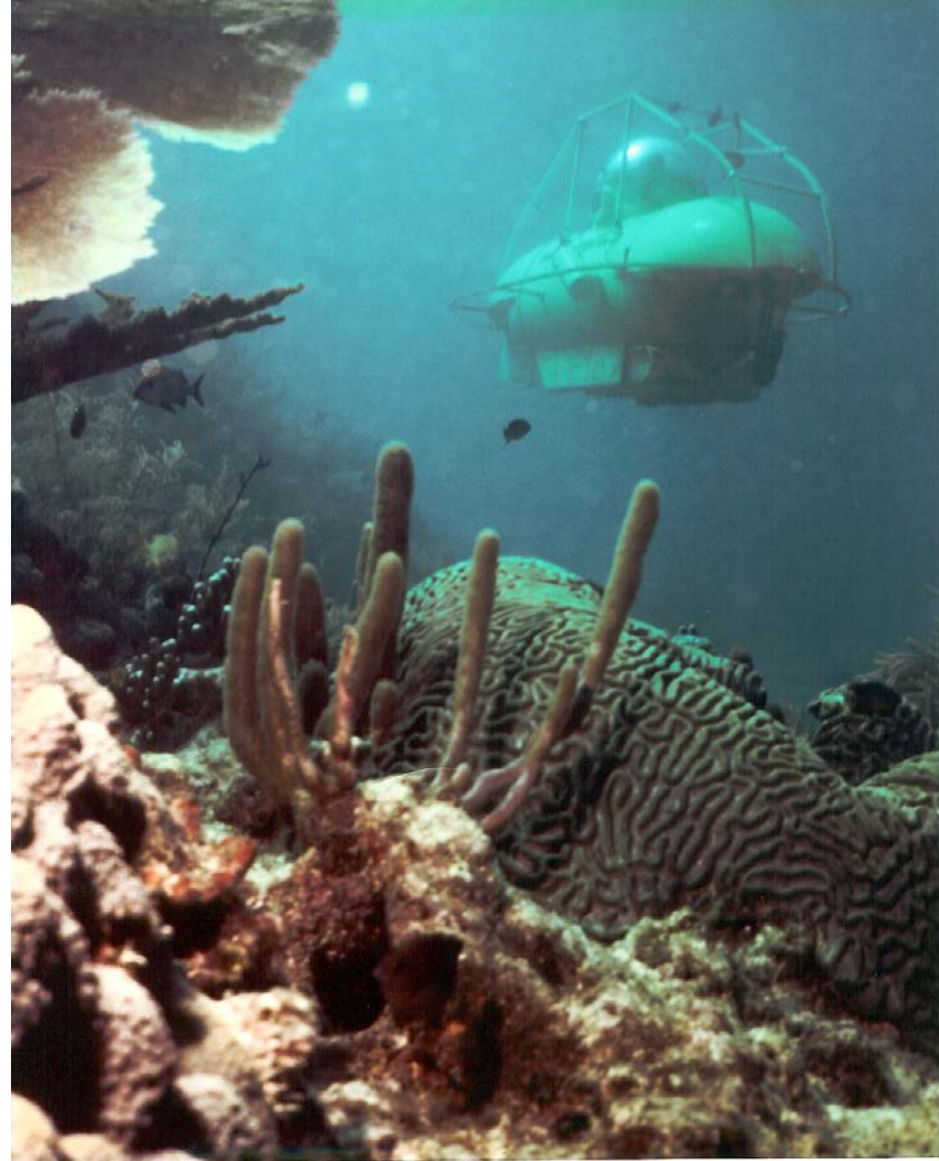
LeSchack Associates, Ltd.

SHALLO-TEMP <sup>TM</sup>

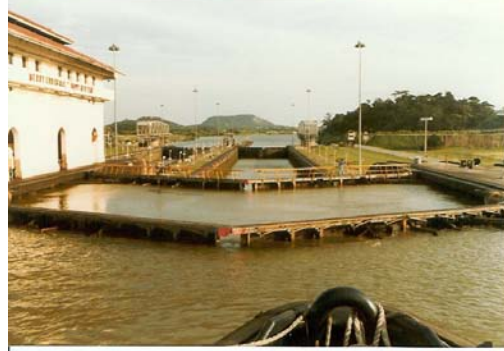
LeSchack, a scuba diver who took graduate studies in oceanography, procured a a one-man K-250 submarine for undersea exploration. Here he is seen enjoying himself filming K-250 in action at French Reef, off Key Largo, Florida, December 1978.



Len's K-250 submarine explores French Reef off Key Largo, Florida, December 1978.



Len in the Panama Canal, December 1980. He had been called back to Active Duty and was assigned to U.S Naval Station Panama Canal, 1980-81. Len already had made a complete transit through the Canal aboard USS ARNEB AKA-56, April 1959.



Called back to Navy active duty in 1980, he was first sent to Fort Allen, Puerto Rico, where he became the Coordinator (read "Colonel Klink) of the Cuban-Haitian Refugee Center, then he was assigned to the US Naval Station, Panama Canal where, within a week of arriving, the Captain Selection Board was out, and he was promptly promoted to that rank according to Navy regulations, by the CO of the Navy Station!

COMMANDING OFFICER  
U.S. NAVAL STATION PANAMA CANAL  
FPO MIAMI 34061

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1427  
Ser 1749  
DEC 22 1980

To: Commander Leonard Albert LESCHACK, USNR, 085-28-9143

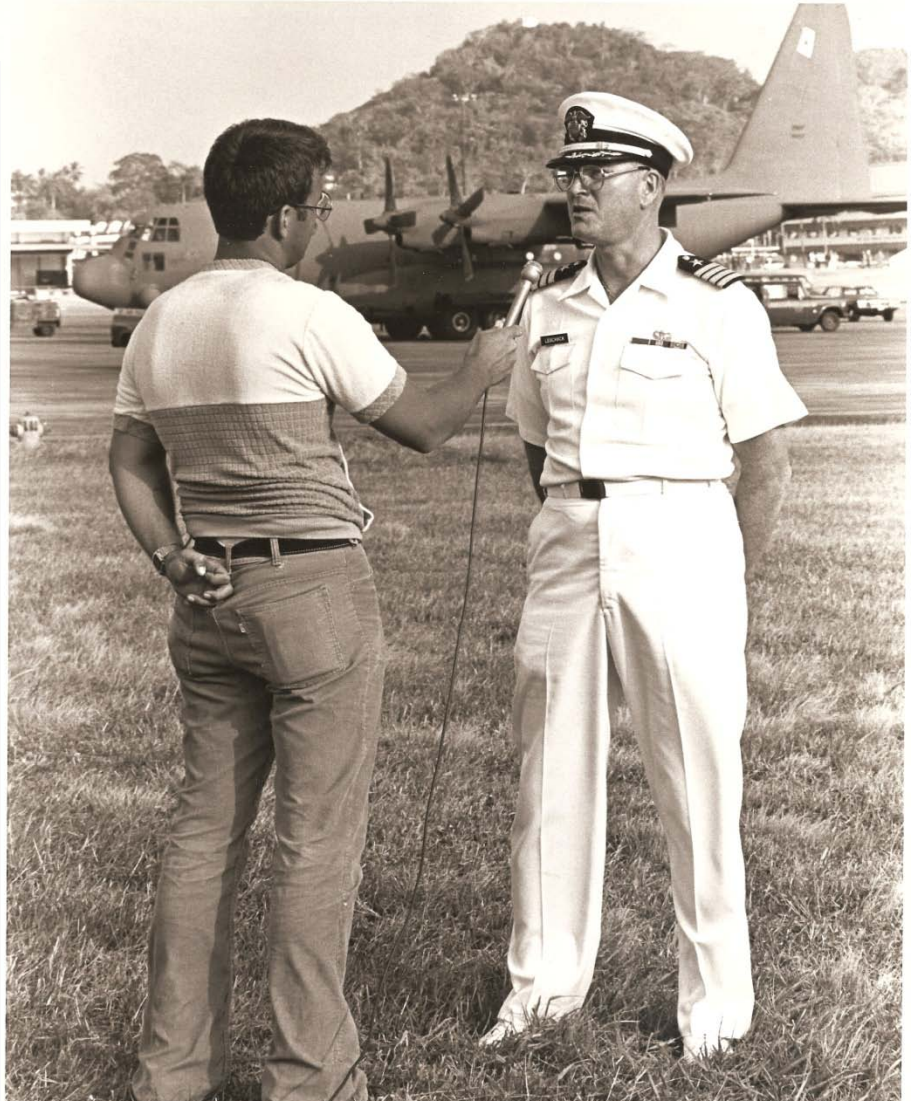
Subj: Authority to Assume the Title and Wear the Uniform of a Captain

Ref: (a) ALNAV 042/80  
(b) Title 10, USC

1. In accordance with the authority vested in the Commanding Officer, U.S. Naval Station, Panama Canal by reference (a), you are hereby authorized to assume the title and wear the uniform of a Captain U.S. Naval Reserve, effective upon receipt.

2. You will not be entitled to the pay and other allowances of a Captain nor to increased disciplinary powers under Article 15, UCMJ, until actually promoted in accordance with reference (b).

  
G. T. HULL



Captain LeSchack was to spend five months in Panama working on an assignment from the Deputy Director of DIA, Admiral Jerry Tuttle, focused on the potential for Political Terrorism In the Panama Canal. He spent time in Swift Boats and PBRs on Panama's waterways.



Now, although no longer on active duty, he remained in the Naval Reserve, and was tasked with establishing an Intelligence Unit to support the new joint command, US Forces Caribbean, in Key West, Florida. LeSchack became that unit's first CO in 1983. Several times a month he commuted between Long Key, where he had his home and research office and COMUSFORCARIB, where he had his Intel Unit. I am on the right.





Captain LeSchack and his consort, Barbara, were quickly accepted into the Command Community. Here they are at an afternoon outdoor party.



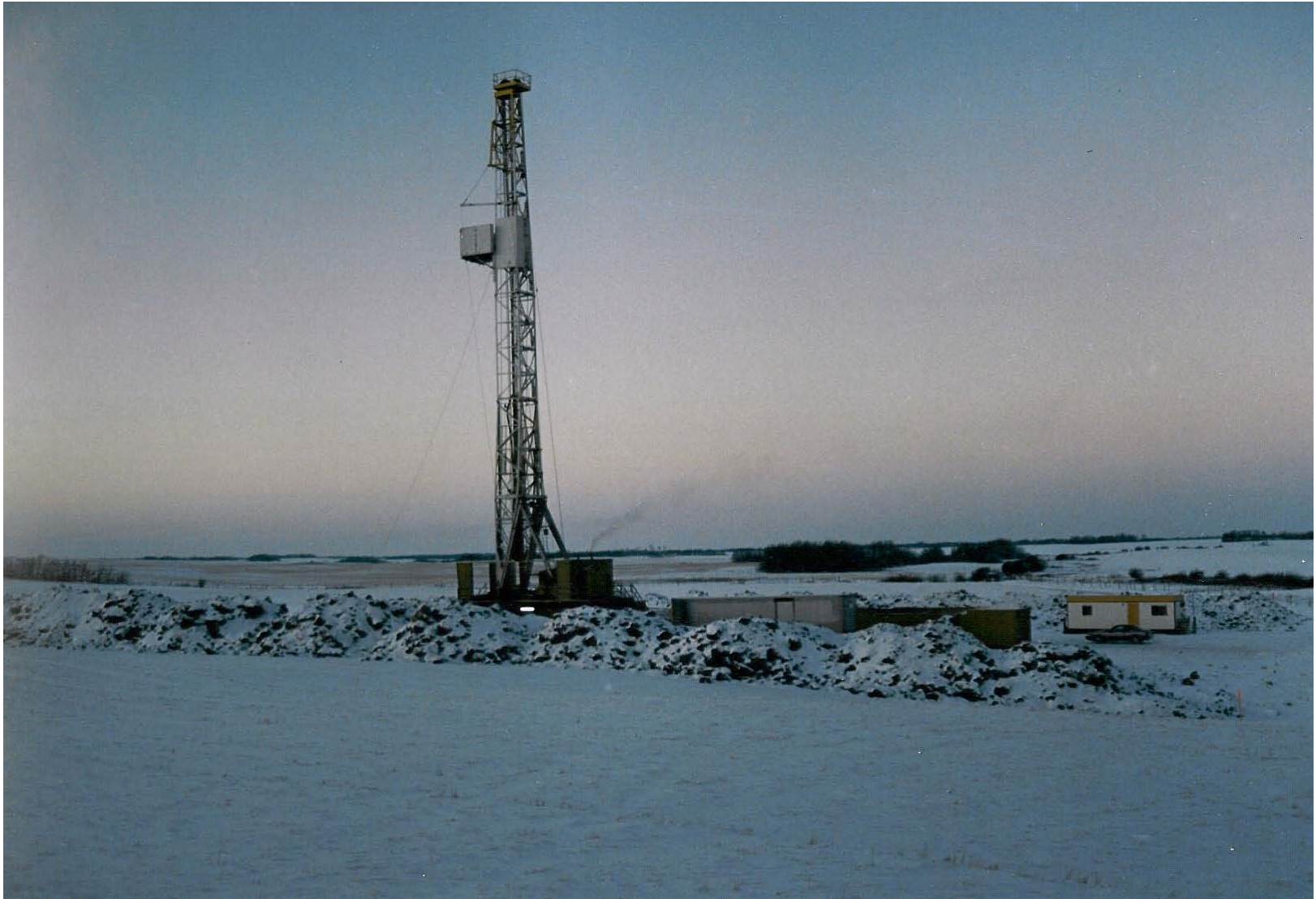
In September 1985 at a change of command ceremony, Captain LeSchack turned over his command to another captain, and the admiral awarded him his second personal decoration, the Joint Services Commendation Medal, seen pinned to his blouse, while his adoring Barbara looks on. Upon his retirement, President Reagan sent him a personal letter from the White House.



Len retires from Navy, moves to Canada with Barbara in 1986 to begin exploring for oil using new technologies; here, he is conducting high resolution ground magnetic gradient intensity (HG') surveys which he invented for successfully finding oil!



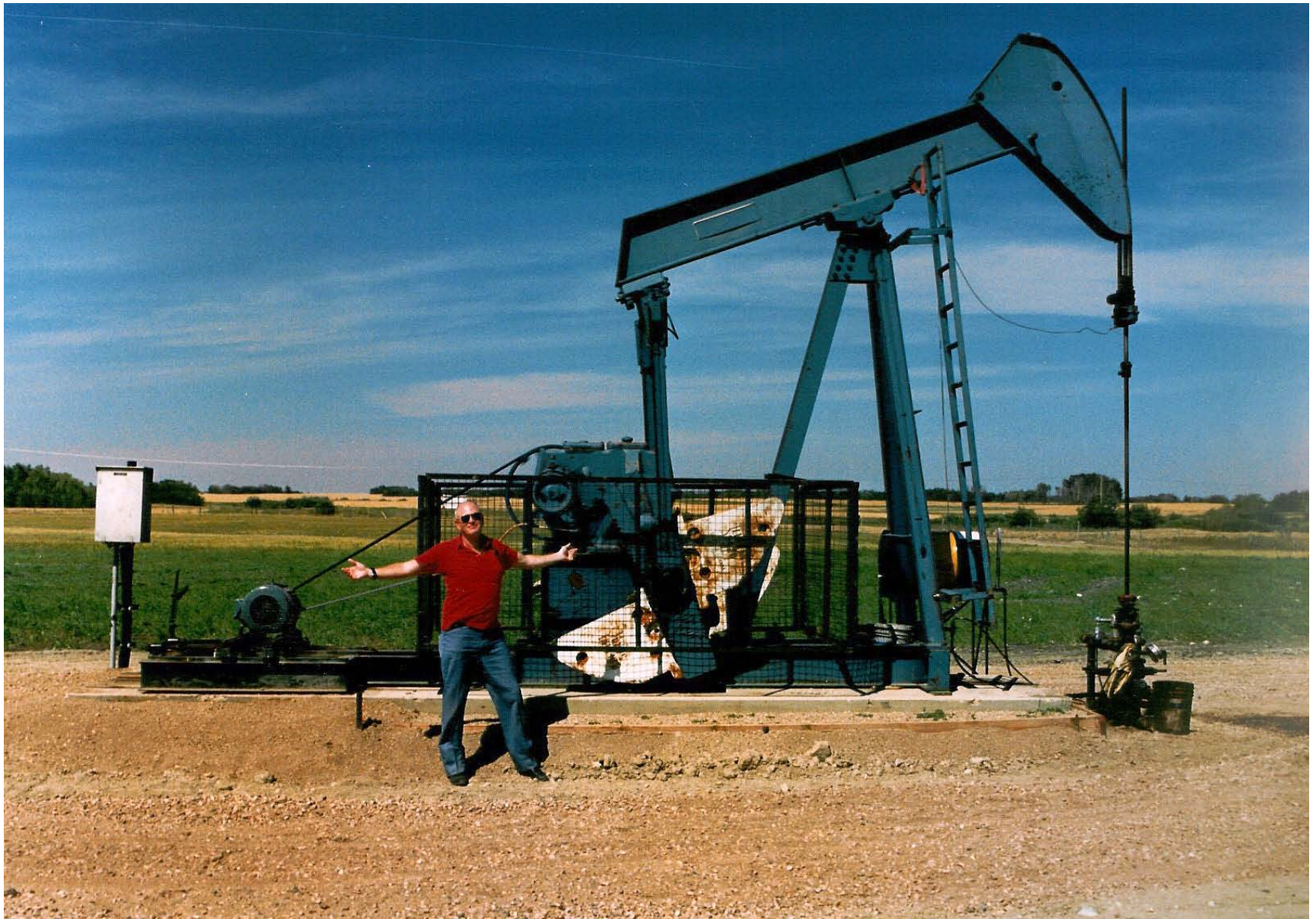
Len promotes his first well in Saskatchewan. It was successful. It came in New Years Day 1989.



View of Len's second well being drilled in Saskatchewan, photo taken from site of pumpjack on his first well, May 1991.



Len at first well, the Parkman Field. He is happy. His wells produce royalty income for him!



A Gamma radiation spectrometer is mounted on ATV to conduct surveys for mapping oil fields. Barbara, standing beside ATV, is both the driver, as well as the recorder of radiometric data also used for identifying oil fields below



Len and Barbara, his field assistant, travel together on ATV with geophysical tools to map potential oil fields in Manitoba





Captain LeSchack and Barbara Tudsbury, after living together most joyously for eleven years, were finally able to get married legally! Although intending only using a Justice of the Peace, the Calgary military community which immediately accepted LeSchack and Barbara into their midst, urged them to enjoy a full military wedding! And they did! Led by a skirling piper from the Calgary Highlanders, the now happy couple passes beneath an arch of swords! While LeSchack certainly seems most pleased, Barbara is positively glittering! The event took place at a regular Army Officers' Club at Sarcee Barracks



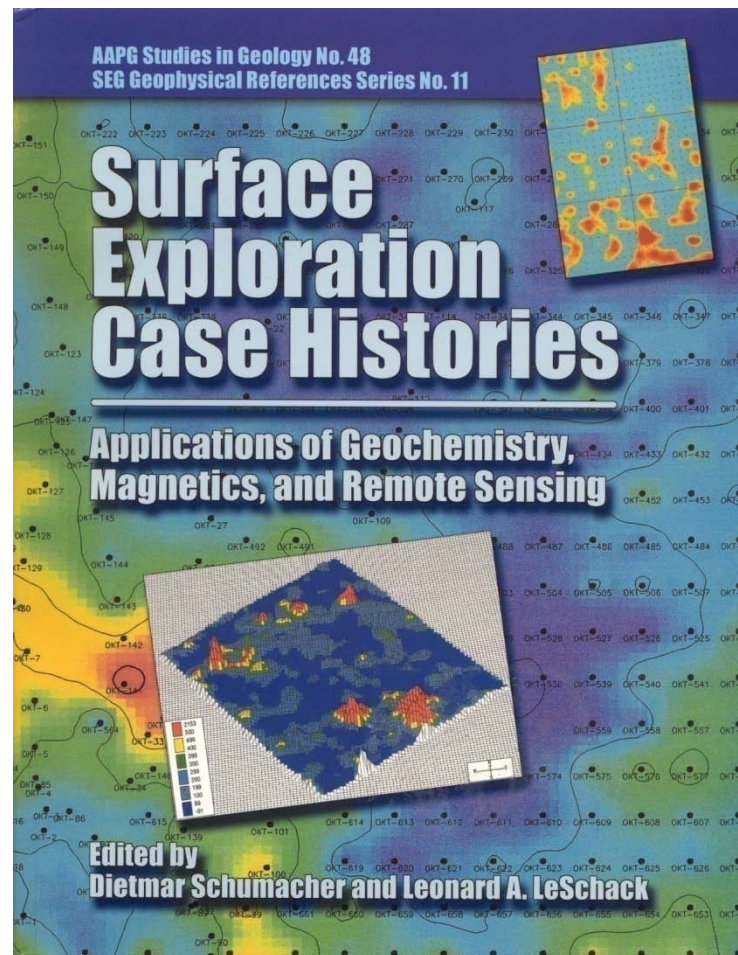
Len and fellow geologist, Chantel, on drill-site where one of Len's wells is being drilled.



Petrophysicist, Natasha, checks wellhead gas pressures at the wellhead of one of the wells LeSchack had promoted.



LeSchack and his experience and success in using unorthodox “Surface Exploration” techniques is recognized by the American Association of Petroleum Geologists and the Society of Exploration Geophysicists, and these organizations ask him to be the co-editor of this book, published in 2002!



In 2008, 46 years after LeSchack's crowning espionage achievement, "Project Coldfeet," CIA, which facilitated his "James Bond" espionage against the Soviets, unveiled an original oil painting depicting the Skyhook pickup of then LT (jg) LeSchack from the now ransacked Soviet Arctic Drift Station NP-8! That painting is now hanging in CIA's Intelligence Art Museum at CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia.



At the time of the unveiling of the Coldfeet painting, the Chief of CIA's Special Operations Group (SOG,) awards Captain LeSchack the SOG Coin displayed here, signifying that, after all these years of otherwise prodigious achievements, he was finally being welcomed into that very exclusive "Band of Brothers!"



Special Operations Group  
Challenge Coin



Leonard LeSchack receives his Special Operations Group Challenge Coin in a ceremony at the Central Intelligence Agency in 2008

And so, eight years after the Cold War officially ended in the year 2000, LeSchack has come complete cycle. Upon standing here, he has recognized CIA had enabled his unorthodox and highly dangerous Project Coldfeet, which not only began his career in espionage, but was a project model upon which he compared all his other adventures to follow, not only in espionage in Moscow and Leningrad in 1965, and in Siberia in 1973—paid for by CIA-- (both of which missions were highly frightening), but for all of his scientific, geographical and further military adventures, of which there would be many!

