

Bowie Seniors Computer Club Minutes for Jan. 15, 2009

Carl Bulger presided.

Treasurer Ken Godstrey reported that he had paid the \$80.55 annual fee to Gate.com for our website's ISP service. (Our website's URL, www.BowieSeniors.org will not have to be renewed until about 2015.) The balance in our treasury is now \$172.89.

Considering the annual cost of the ISP service and the fact that the website is not being kept current, we asked whether we really need the website. Eric Hein suggested that we make use of a free 2GB capacity website service offered by Comcast, the Internet Service Provider for the two public computers in the Senior Center hallway. Eric has maintained a Verizon website on his home account for several years. He believes that a simple layout would be relatively easy to maintain and use and would not depend on a highly trained webmaster to enter information and material.

For example, he suggested that I could directly insert copies of my minutes. He could maintain his list of Freeware. Program Chairman Dan Lee could post announcements of upcoming meetings and summaries of past meetings. And somebody can keep the Bowie Seniors Computer Class Schedule updated.

Vic Kiviat proposed that we form a committee to consider these suggestions. He volunteered to chair it. Other volunteers were Eric Hein, Dick Henthorn, Barry

Hammond, Bob Rapczynski, and Ted Tuck.

Yahoo has admitted that they track users' web use. Yahoo reveals this practice about two-thirds of the way down in its Privacy Statement. Someone mentioned that to prevent it you must opt out on each of your computers.

Presentation:

William L. Blakeman, III, discussed the technology available for our military personnel serving in Iraq to communicate with family and friends in the States. In addition, he told us about his experiences conducting computer forensics on captured computer related equipment and media to gather intelligence. Mr. Blakeman is a government contractor providing support to the Department of Defense as a forensic examiner and media analyst. During 2007 - 2008 he was on active duty serving in Iraq.

Adapting to the special conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan where the enemy, terrorists, and insurgents don't attack our troops with electromagnetic signal homing missiles, the Defense Department has allowed its military and contractor personnel to communicate with friends and family at home. They communicate via several technologies. A common one is Voice Over the Internet Protocol (VOIP). Skype.com is a free service for them. It turns their laptops into telephones. Magic-Jack can contact landlines in the US free, whereas Skype charges for US landline connections.

Cell phone towers exist in some parts of Iraq and Wi-Fi access is available in some places.

Satellite communications via the Global systems for Mobile Communications (GSM) Network is also available. It has the advantage that roaming charges are not a problem but they still require a nearby cell-phone tower. Personnel can buy a GSM phone and calling cards at the PX.

Depending on broadband width, personnel can talk, share files, use chat rooms, and text message. Twitter.com is used for microblogging and social networking. Twitter text messages are limited to 180 words. Soldiers also use iPhones, iPods, Linux, SMS (Short Message Form), Instant Messaging (IM), and Webpages.

On combat patrols, soldiers sometimes use inexpensive, commercially available, handheld walky-talky type radios that can communicate up to a six mile radius.

One of Blakeman's duties was to monitor communications and examine computers and other hardware to make sure that personnel were practicing good communications and operational security. Another duty was to support the Defense Intelligence Agency in exploiting enemy communications and examining captured computers for information of value to interrogators.

His tasks have been made easier by large memory capacities of modern technologies and large hard drives. This has led programmers to worry less about space limitations and more about losing information. They will copy the same information to several places on the computer.

When you choose to delete a file, only the first character of the file is deleted until something is written over it. Unless you use a special program to wipe that area clean, someone like Blakeman can retrieve the information.

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There are many algorithms to wipe disks clean by writing over the information with 0's or 1's or a random combination. The standard DOD procedure makes three passes. The standard NSA procedure makes seven passes. CCleaner, a free program, has a file deletion option. There are many other file shredder programs. www.12Ghosts.com has a file shredder.

Next Meeting:

Rob Pegoraro, the technology reporter/columnist for the Washington Post will be our speaker at the meeting on February 5.