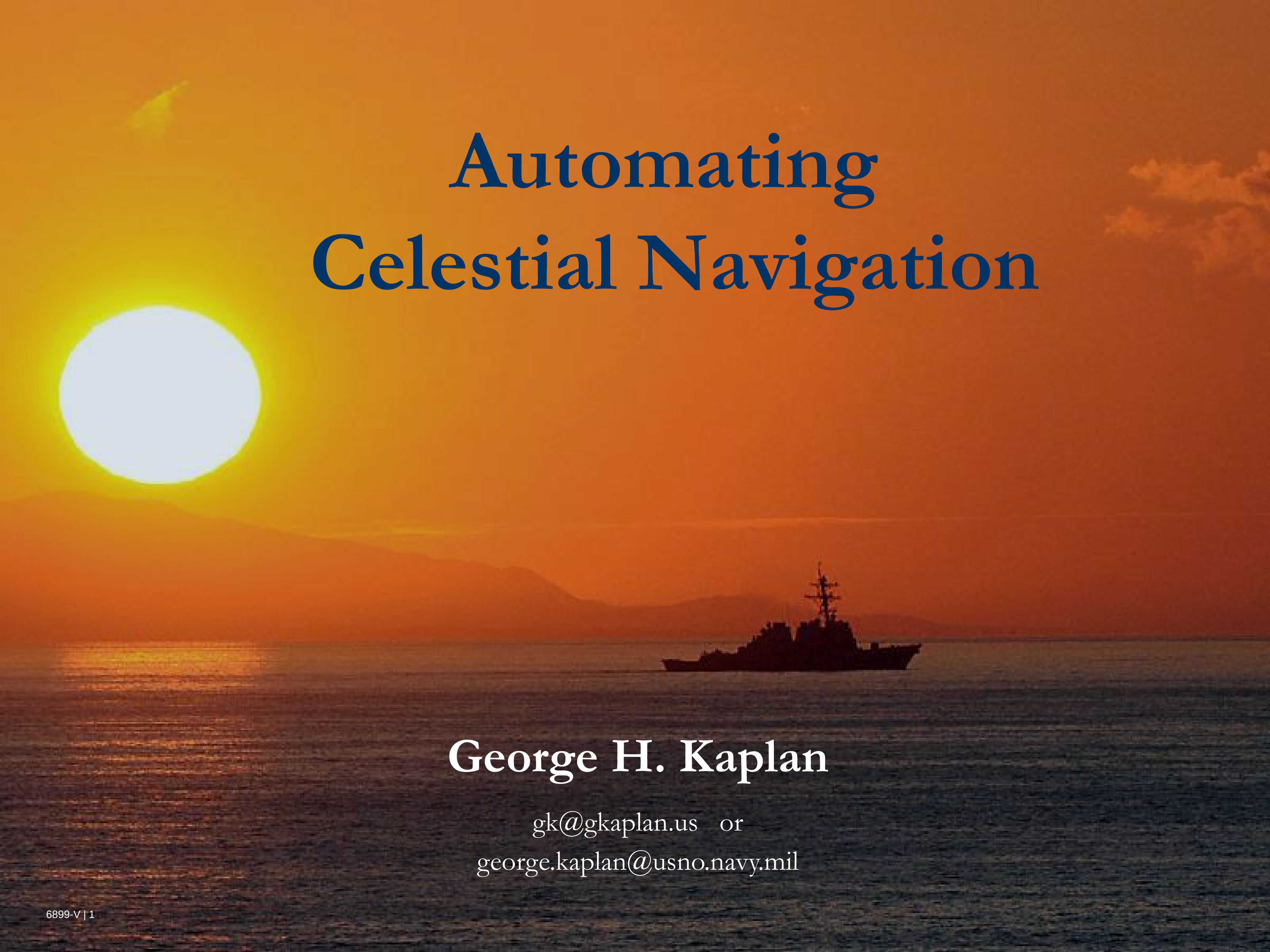


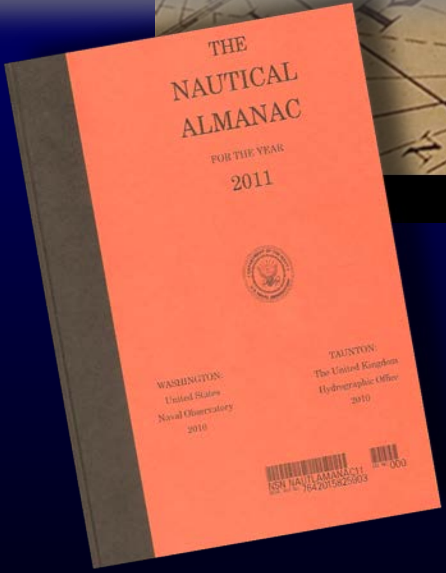
Automating Celestial Navigation

George H. Kaplan

gk@gkaplan.us or

george.kaplan@usno.navy.mil

Celestial Nav – What We Usually Think of



Outline of Talk

- Why celestial is still in the game
- Principles of celestial navigation
  - A look at one particular technical issue for automation
- A coloring-book history of automated celestial systems
- Where do we go from here?

Limitations/Concerns About GPS

- Relatively weak signal, easily jammable
- GPS spoofing (civilian vulnerability)
- Sometimes not available or reliable in steep valleys or "urban canyons" (signal blockage and multi-path problems)
- Possible solar maximum problems
- No reliable indoor capability
- Concerns about a single point of failure in a rapidly evolving warfighting environment, which may include EMP, anti-satellite actions, and cyber warfare

Schwartz Warns Against Dependence on GPS

Air Force Times
Posted Saturday, Jan 23, 2010

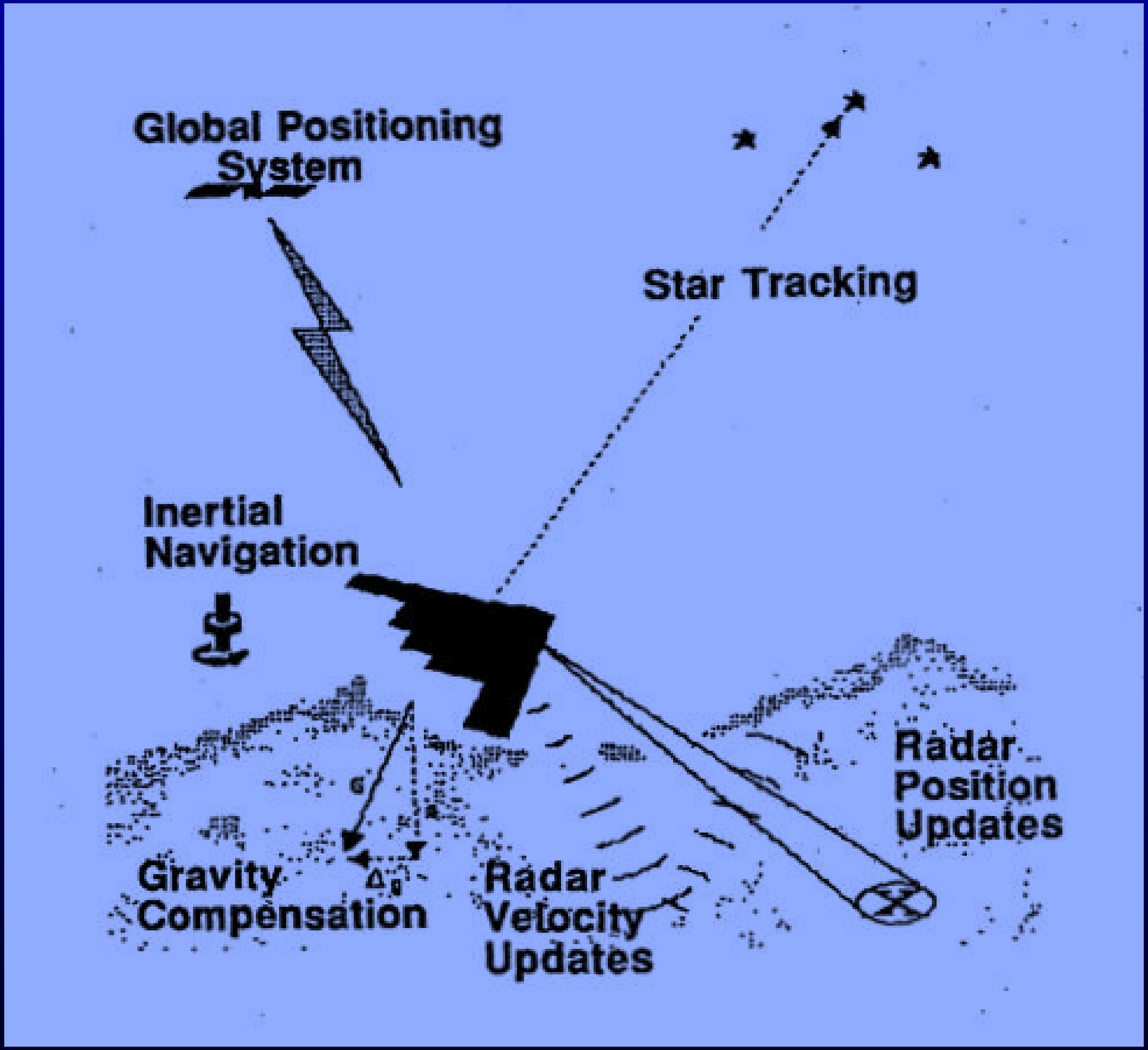
The Air Force's top uniformed leader thinks the military is too dependent on global positioning and must develop an alternative to the navigation system to reduce its vulnerability to enemies. Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz delivered his warning about the government's satellite constellation Jan. 20 at a national security conference in Washington but also assured his fellow defense leaders that Air Force scientists are working to develop other navigational technologies…

Modern Nav Solutions

> Note: Omega, Transit, and U.S. LORAN are gone

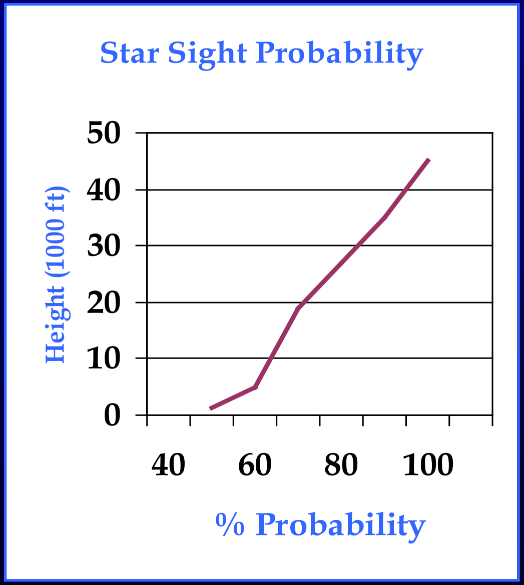
- Strengthen GPS
  - alternative frequencies/signals
  - "spot beam" for M code (military signal)
  - directional antennas on user side
  - better signal processing algorithms
- Combine GPS with inertial navigation systems (INS) to provide a nav "flywheel" that can bridge GPS outages
- Use blended-nav solutions using a variety of sensors
  - GPS
  - INS
  - celestial
  - automated visual systems
  - magnetic sensing
  - bathymetry
  - altimetry
  - use of radio signals of opportunity
- iGPS: Reprogrammed Iridium satellites (ONR/Boeing project)
- Pseudolites

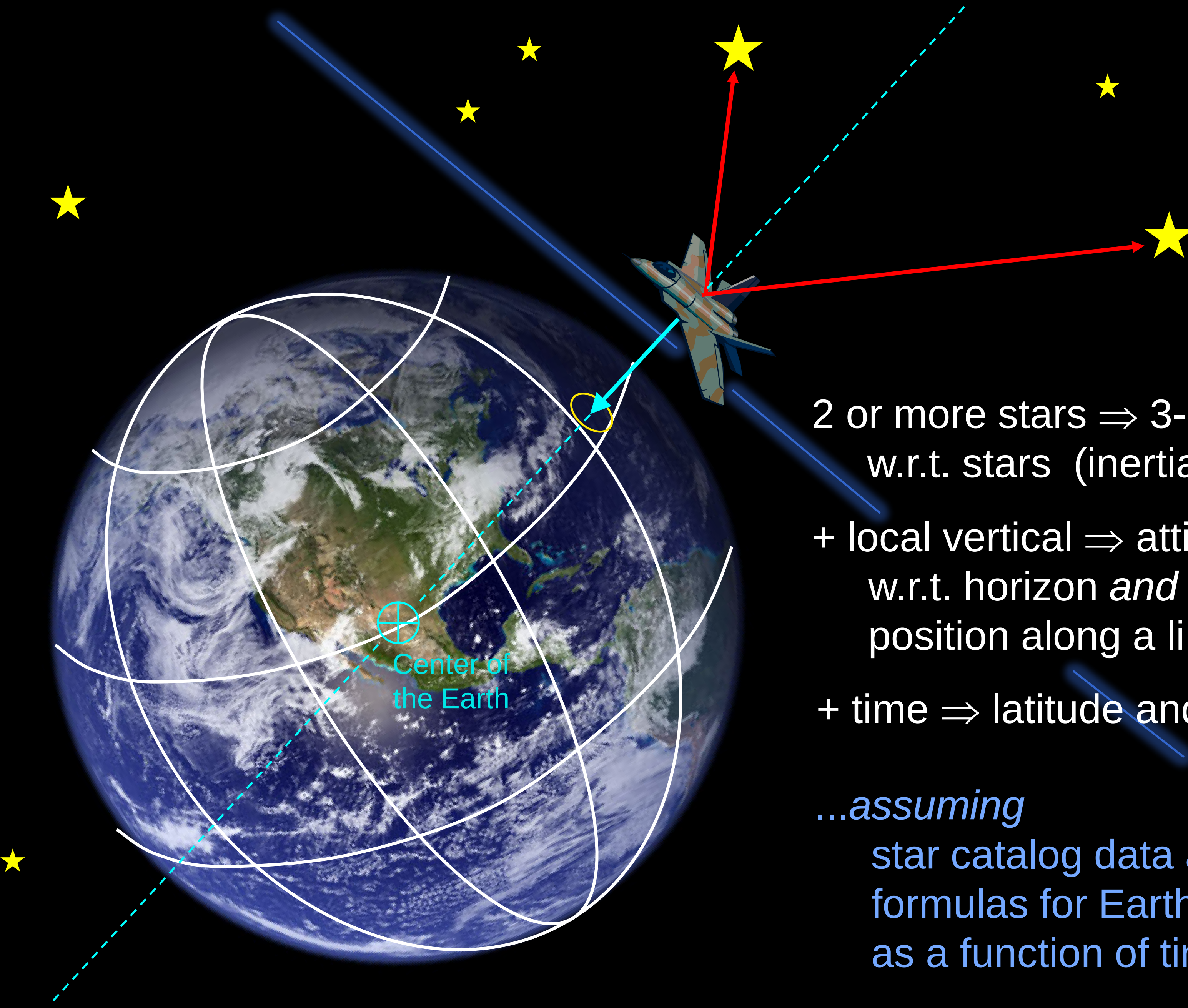
Modern Nav Solutions



Why Celestial?

- Passive
- World-wide
- Referred to a well-defined inertial coordinate system
- No external infrastructure to maintain
- Provides absolute attitude
- Yes, there are clouds and haze… but we can
  - Observe in the near IR
  - Use it at altitudes above most of the clouds
  - Use it as needed only to stabilize an INS nav solution





2 or more stars ⇒ 3-axis attitude
w.r.t. stars (inertial system)

+ local vertical ⇒ attitude
w.r.t. horizon *and*
position along a line in space

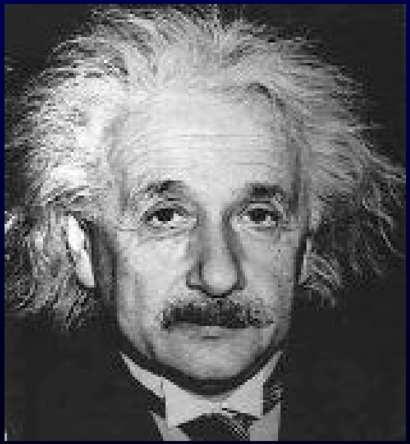
+ time ⇒ latitude and longitude

...*assuming*
star catalog data and
formulas for Earth orientation
as a function of time

A Technical Challenge: Determination of the Vertical

- An essential part of celestial navigation based on stars
- Precision tiltmeters (inclinometers) are a solution for fixed positions on land
- However, moving observers — the most important case — present a more fundamental problem:

  Vehicle accelerations cannot be distinguished from gravity using an internal ("lab") measurement



Determination of the Vertical

Solutions:

1. Use external natural surrogates for the vertical
   - Horizon
   - Atmospheric refraction of star positions
   - Local average sea surface
2. Use vertical direction computed by INS
   - Better: Use stellar observations to correct the INS orientation
3. Don't use stars! Observe nearby celestial objects —— artificial Earth satellites —— and use triangulation to determine location

Scheme 1

The Vertical as Defined by the Horizon

In the traditional scheme for open-ocean celestial navigation, the sextant field of view combines two sightlines, one to the star and the other to the horizon.

Scheme 2

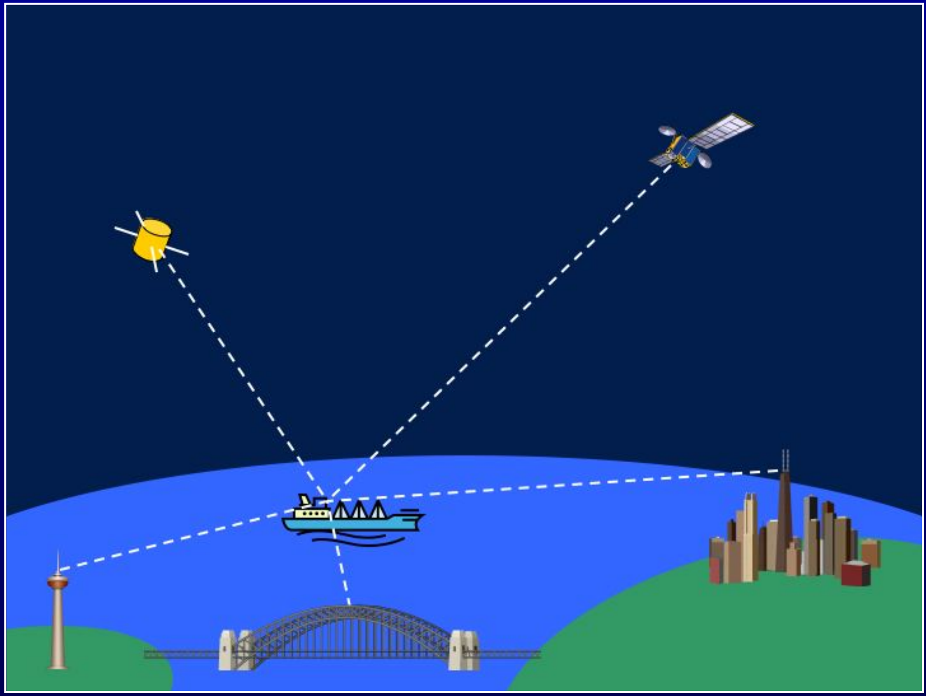
Using Star Observations to Correct the INS Orientation

- Inertial Navigations Systems (INS) are a form of computerized dead reckoning, using data from acceleration and orientation sensors (accelerometers and gyros)
- INS *computationally* track position, velocity, orientation, and spin (navigation state) in a single Kalman filter solution
- All INS navigation solutions are subject to various errors, including drift
- Stellar observations can be used to correct the computed orientation –– thus improving the *entire* solution

Scheme 3

Eliminating the Vertical

- The problem with celestial navigation is that the stars are (essentially) infinitely distant — the angles between them don't change as we move around
- If we could instead observe relatively nearby objects, we could apply **3-D triangulation** and we would not need to determine the local vertical



- The "nearby objects" could be artificial Earth satellites observed against a star background

Automated Celestial Nav — Beginnings

Started with the Snark jet-powered cruise missile in the 1950s

Automated Celestial Nav — on ICBMs

Continued with ICBM guidance systems:
Polaris, Trident, Minuteman, MX

(also Soviet missiles)

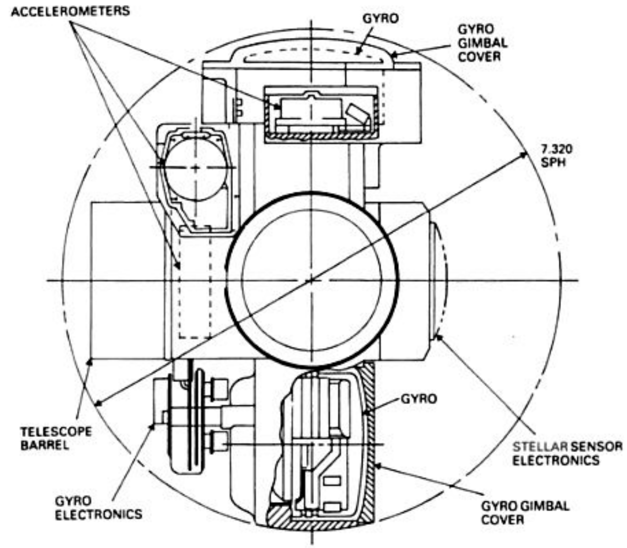


Figure 5.2
American "Paradigm" Design for Ballistic Missile Stellar-inertial Guidance System
Source: Redrawn from figure in Stephen F. Rounds and George Marmar "Stellar-Inertial Capabilities for Advanced ICBM," paper 83–2297 read to American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics 1983 Guidance and Control Conference.

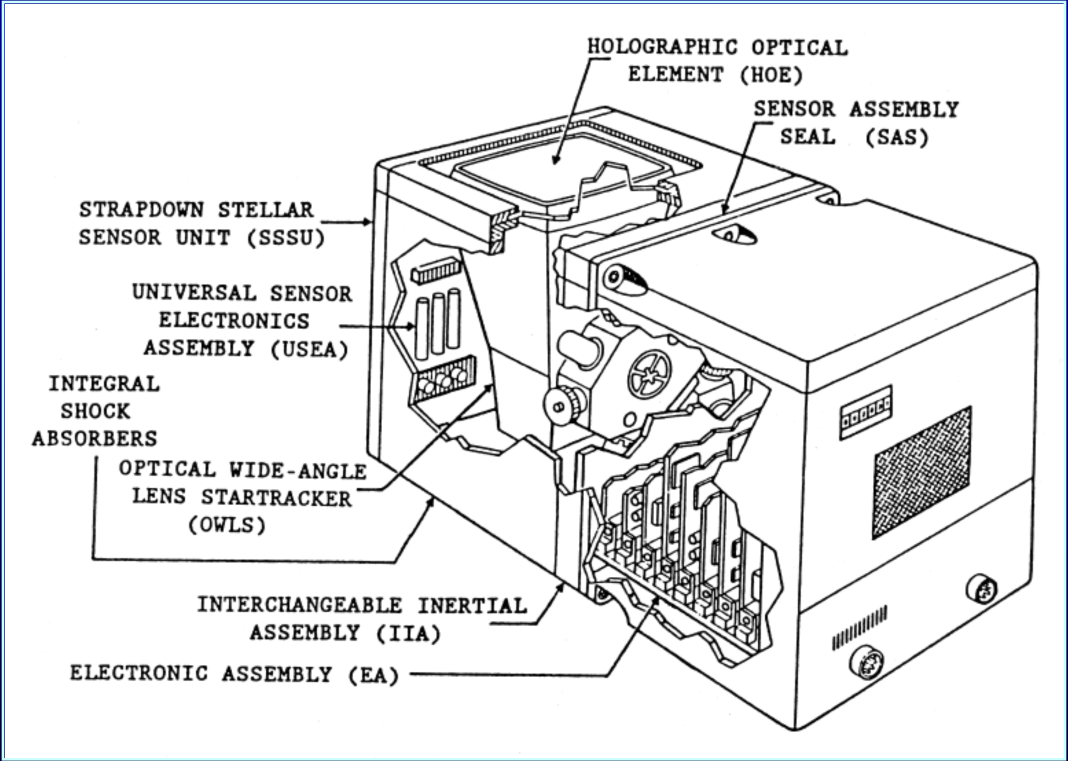
Drove a major mission area at USNO: improved absolute star positions for use in these systems

Automated Celestial Nav — on Aircraft

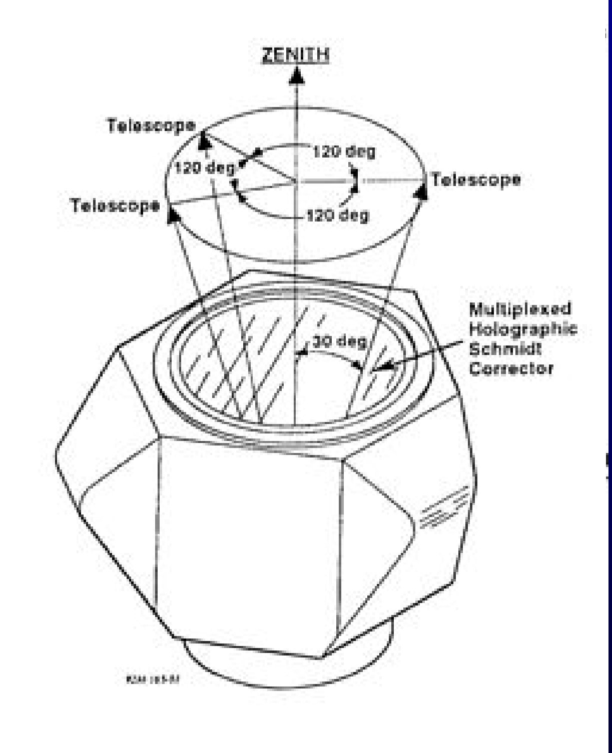
Aircraft systems: SR-71, RC-135, B2

Automated Celestial Nav -- Experimental Aircraft Systems (Never Deployed)

Northrop OWLS

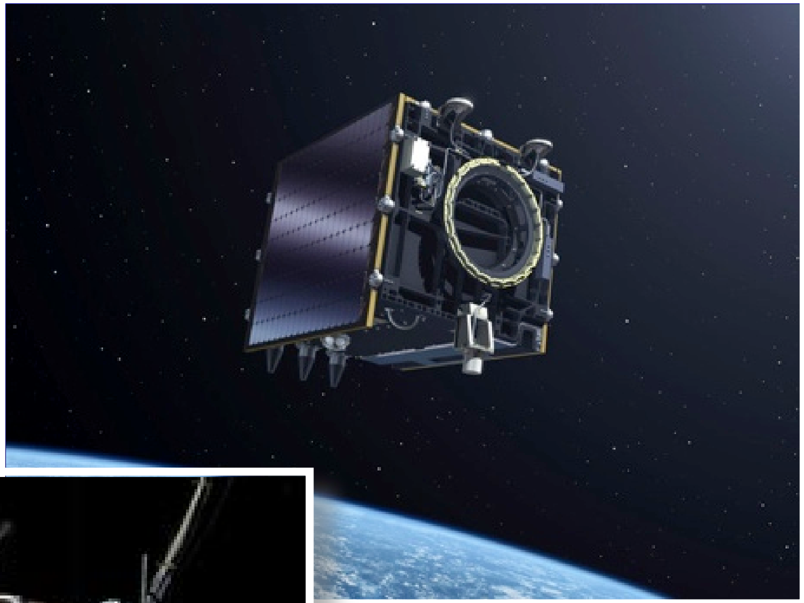


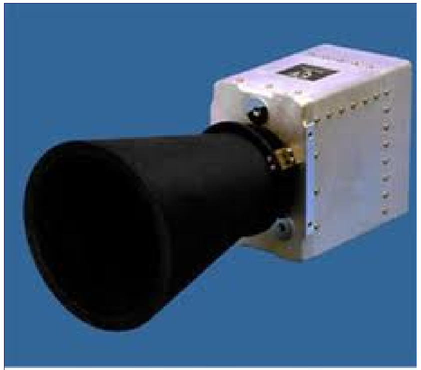
Northrop Mini-OWLS



Automated Celestial -- Current Space Applications

Commercial star trackers





A star tracker module, similar to those on the GP-B spacecraft.

Used for attitude sensors for satellites

Automated Celestial Technology

- Old
  - Gimbaled
  - Photomultipliers, vidicons, or similar detectors
  - Single-star observations
  - Programmed sequence of observations
- New
  - Strapdown (no moving parts)
  - CCD or CMOS detectors
  - Multiple stars observed in each field
  - No active pointing, automatic star recognition

Recent & Current Activity

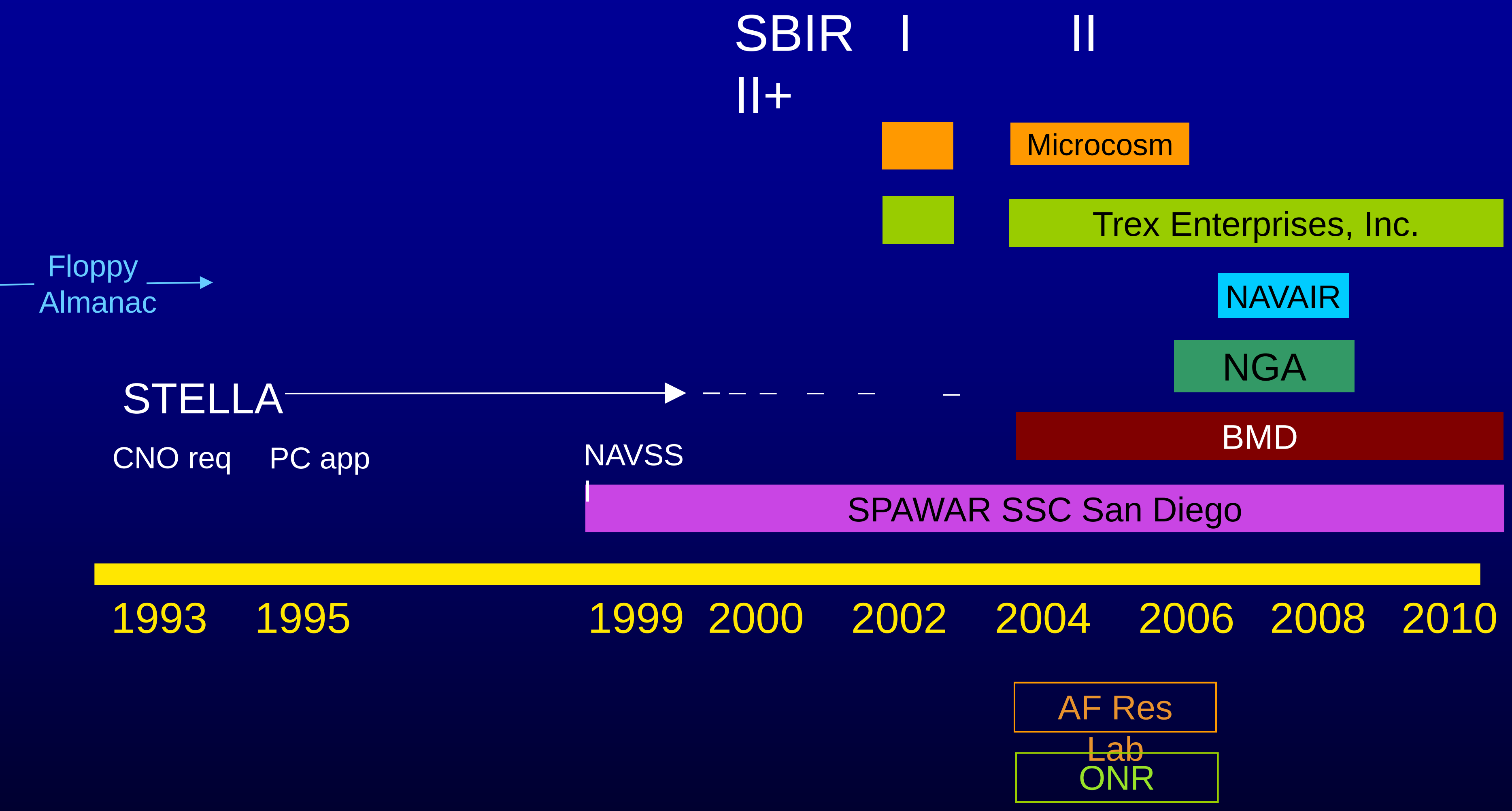
- SSC Pacific (San Diego) – USNO partnership with California contractors Microcosm, Inc., and Trex Enterprises Corporation
  - Focus on <100 m accuracy, day + night operation at sea level
  - Funded by ONR, SPAWAR, AF Research Lab, NGA, NAVAIR, BMD
  - Resulted in several prototype instruments for fixed locations on land, including one for NGA surveying
- Ball Aerospace internally-funded R&D
- Draper Lab SKYMARK experiments
  - Tests of feasibility of using LEO satellites as optical targets
- Recently Formed: Inter-Service Star Tracker Working Group to define a coherent strategy for future R&D
  - POC: Dr. Bryan Dorland, USNO
  - Testbed instruments at USNO

Conclusions

- Celestial navigation is still an important component of the modern navigation picture
- Automated celestial observing systems have been reliably used for a half-century in critical national defense systems
- Modern sensor systems provide a new opportunity for developing compact celestial observing systems
- Observing Earth satellites against a star background — for a triangulated navigation fix without the need for a vertical determination — is an area of active R&D

End

USNO Work in Automated Celestial Nav



The Vertical as Defined by the Horizon

Atmospheric Refraction as an Issue:

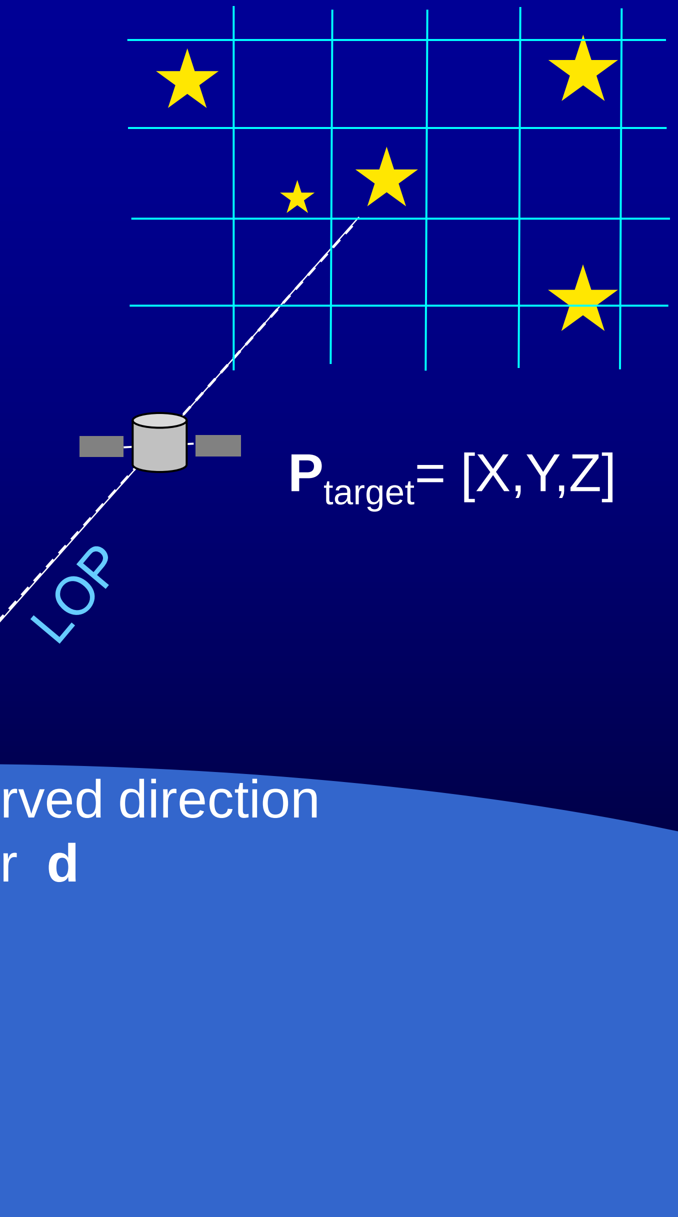
- The line of sight to the horizon goes through a lot of air $\Rightarrow$ the horizon itself is refracted (typically by ~1/2 arcminute)
- We cannot assume that the refraction will be constant in all directions; the horizon is a somewhat warped circle
- Refraction of the sea horizon depends on the air-sea temperature difference; even a few degrees variation results in many arcseconds difference in the horizon's depression wrt the vertical
- The horizon is likely to be the first thing to become indistinct when weather conditions deteriorate

Observation Geometry

An observation consists of:

- Observed direction of target wrt stellar reference system
- 3-D geocentric coordinates of target at instant of observation

Defines a line of position (LOP) in 3-space on which the observer must lie: $\mathbf{X}_{obs} = \mathbf{P}_{target} + r\,\mathbf{d}$



Satellites as Optical Targets — Which Ones?

Low Earth Orbits

Advantages:

- Bright
- Numerous
- Close, therefore higher positional accuracy

Disadvantages:

- Very high angular rates
- Generally poor orbital accuracy
  - Except for some geodetic sats
- In shadow much of the time

Medium and Geosync Earth Orbits

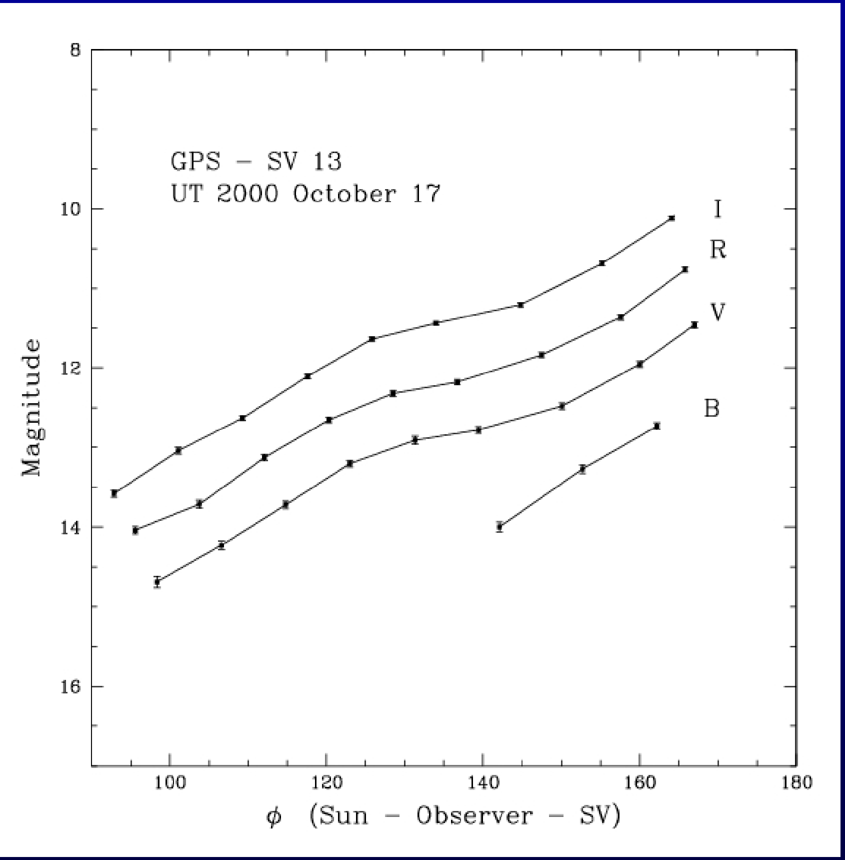
Advantages:

- Many have precise orbits
- In sunlight most of the time
- Lower angular rates
- GNSS sats have good nav geometry

Disadvantages:

- Distant, therefore lower positional accuracy
- Faint

GPS Satellites as Optical Targets



from Vrba (2005) PPT

Well established photometric properties: USNO/FS – Aerospace Corp. study by Fliegel, Warner, & Vrba (2001) and Vrba follow-ons to 2005

1.3-meter Telescope at USNO Flagstaff

2x3 CCD array in focal plane, chips individually programmable

Photos by Marc Murison

Lessons Learned (I)

- Pay attention to nature
  - Sophisticated instrumentation can't overcome fundamental limitations imposed by the underlying natural phenomena
- Determining the vertical is a hard problem
- The "average sky" is not typical — star counts per unit area of sky are highly variable
- For strapdown (target of opportunity) systems, 70% of the stars observed will be in the faintest magnitude unit that can be detected

Continued…

Lessons Learned (II)

- The near IR has a lot of advantages
  - Darker sky, more stars
- "High altitudes" are not space!
  - 60,000 ft: still below 10% of the atmosphere
  - 80,000 ft: still below 5% of the atmosphere
- One size does not fit all
  - Vastly different instrumentation issues for shipboard/sea-level applications than for aircraft systems
  - Even within each category, the trade space is large
    - Aperture, focal length, field-of-view, band, type of sensor, pixel size, …

End