Born and raised in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Monroe Trout was one of 14 children. His father was a carpenter, who frequently was out of work. Like his older brothers and sisters, Trout went to work as a youngster to help support the family. At age 6, he was working at odd jobs for the mother of a prominent surgeon. The physician was impressed and later hired him for various other jobs. Trout graduated salutatorian of his school class of 310 students and won a scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania. Later, with help from a Navy program, Trout went on to Penn Medical School. Later, after almost 25 years as a senior executive for two large pharmaceutical companies, he joined American Healthcare Systems in 1986. The company was deeply in debt at the time, but was to be turned around to become a major health care conglomerate valued at more than $4 billion. Trout retired as chairman at the end of 1994.