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## HOW IT ALL STARTED

In the early 1930s I was impressed with how many toys bore the inscription “Made in China.” One day I asked my father, “Where is China?” To my puzzlement, he pointed straight down. “You mean down there?” He then tried to explain how absolutely huge the world was. It had many oceans, many countries, and China was a big country on the far side of the big, round world. This made a deep impression on me that gave me many things to ponder for quite a while. He fed my interest by showing me pictures in *National Geographic* from time to time, and relating tales now and then about exploration, ships, wars, battles, and so forth. I developed a real desire to see the world and have my own adventures.

My father read a great deal and wanted to get me interested in reading books. One of the first books he gave me was *Treasure Island*. It was difficult to put it down. I wanted to be like Jim.

I had a normal boyhood, but travel and adventure were always in the back of my mind. One day I noticed a sticker in the back window of a car ahead of us. It read "U.S. Naval Academy." I asked my sister who was driving, "What's the U.S. Naval Academy?" She explained it was a college in Annapolis, Maryland, where you went to become a navy officer. "That's what I want to do!" I exclaimed. She then explained that I could not just go because I wanted to, but that I would have to gain an appointment from one of our U.S. senators or our congressman. I was determined to try. First, however, I would have to complete grammar school and then high school.

In 1939, after completing my freshman year in high school, I set out to request an appointment from our U.S. representative, the Honorable J. Percy Priest. He maintained an office in Nashville during the congressional summer break.

He said he was very pleased that I had come to him. He explained that quite a few young men wanted appointments to the Naval Academy and to the U.S. Military Academy whom he would have to consider ahead of me, but that I should be patient and he would do all he could to oblige me. In the meantime, he wanted me to send my report cards to him to help prove my interest and my scholastic ability. I assured him that I would pass along my grade reports and do the best I could in all my classes.

I liked this man from the very beginning and through the years I became more and more impressed with his honesty, sincerity, and capability. Quite a fine gentleman!

I had already applied to Vanderbilt University when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred. I could not enlist or register for the draft until my birthday late that next summer. My parents pleaded with me to continue with my plans to attend Vanderbilt that fall. Classes at Vanderbilt had barely started when all engineering students were told to convene in the assembly hall for a presentation. A group of naval officers explained that the navy wanted engineering students to join a navy training program that would accelerate our studies. We would then be commissioned upon graduation. Since I wanted to serve my country and to join the navy, the program was just what I wanted. It assured me of a commission even if I did not go to the Naval Academy. Most all of us who were physically fit enrolled and were told to continue as we were and await further orders. It could be months, probably the end of our freshman year, before we heard anything.

Sure enough, just when we were about to complete freshman year, we received our orders. Vanderbilt became an army school, so we were sent to colleges all over the United States. I, along with most of my friends, was ordered to Georgia Tech.

After a year at Georgia Tech I received a telegram from Representative

Priest giving me a principal appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy. I was truly excited. A few days later I received all of the required paperwork from the Navy Department. After studying the papers I went to my company officer to see how it would all be handled. The date I was to report to the Naval Academy was such that I could complete my current term at Georgia Tech and go directly to Annapolis. On the train I met Paul Early, who also was going to the Naval Academy from Georgia Tech. He was a member of the Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) unit rather than the V-12 Program, in which I was enrolled. We stuck together and ended up in the same company at the Naval Academy. Through the years we kept crossing paths. We both became submariners. We roomed together while attending the Prospective Commanding Officers Course at Adm. Hyman Rickover's office. We both took command of our submarines on the same day at Pearl Harbor. We both commanded Polaris submarines at the same time, working out of Holy Loch, Scotland. He was a very fine friend.

We spent the first few days at the Naval Academy undergoing the entrance physical and filling out forms. Since I was already in the military, I was permitted to live in the "Visiting Team" dormitory in Bancroft Hall. I had to take my meals aboard a Civil War ship, the *Cumberland*. Within a couple of days I was discharged from the Naval Reserve and immediately sworn into the regular navy as a midshipman along with about a thousand classmates. In no time at all we received our initial issue of uniforms and bedding. By that evening we all had settled in our assigned rooms with our assigned roommates.

Only a portion of the upper-class midshipmen was at the Naval Academy for summer classes. The rest were at sea on cruise or at home on leave.

My class spent the summer training in sailing, rowing cutters, athletics, obstacle courses, swimming, infantry drill, and on the rifle range. There were constant personnel inspections. We could not help but get shaped up to be proper midshipmen in very short order.

As you can imagine, plebe year was pretty rough. I did my best, but by either ignorance or carelessness I was put on report quite a few times. It seemed that practically all my hours of extra duty were served rowing cutters. A cutter was about eighteen feet long and propelled by ten or twelve oars. We rowed from the landing up to the bridge across the Severn River and back again. You knew you had a workout. I was required to repeat most of my academics. No matter how much education you had received before entering the Naval Academy, you had to start at the beginning. Of course, there were things I had never taken, such as navigation, seamanship, gunnery, military justice, and rifle marksmanship. Everything was accelerated except plebe year. It stayed a year. However, at the end of World War II,

schedules were rearranged to go back to a four-year program. My class was informed that it would be split: Half would graduate in three years; the other half would complete the program in four years. I was pleased to be a member of the three-year group.

One could write an entire book about life at the Naval Academy, but there is only one story I want to tell. During my summer cruise, after completing my first year, we pulled into Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where we were to spend several days.

On the second day it was announced, much to our surprise, that the group of midshipmen aboard the *Raleigh* (my ship) would be guests at a tea dance at the Officers' Club so we could see what an Officers' Club looked like, sort of an indoctrination. The midshipmen on the other cruise ships were to go on succeeding days. The uniform was dress whites, our formal uniform, with high collar, gold buttons, shoulder boards, and white shoes and socks — really dressy.

At the appointed hour we loaded on buses and off we went. The club was very attractive. It was a rambling one-story building located on a point of land overlooking the bay and had a white sand beach. It was also quite attractive inside. We were led to the ballroom. It was very impressive. Windows and French doors lined the walls of the room overlooking the bay. The doors opened out onto a good-sized terrace about six or eight feet above the sandy beach. A low stone wall bordered the terrace to prevent someone from accidentally falling off the terrace. The wall had purposely been built low so that those sitting on the terrace would have an unobstructed view of the bay. Several long, white tables — on which waiters were already setting out large punchbowls and cups — bordered the dance floor. It was a very hot day and there was no air-conditioning, so most of us were anxious to get a cup of ice-cold fruit punch as soon as the bowls were filled. We expected fruit punch because that was all we midshipmen were ever offered at any party.

As the waiters went about their work, girls started arriving. They had come from Havana. Each was accompanied by a proper, matronly chaperone. The Cubans were very strict with their young ladies. There were a good number of punchbowls, and the waiters were filling all of them to the brim. We wanted to get with the girls but did not know how to go about doing it. In the meantime, we headed for the serving tables to get some ice-cold punch. It was very good punch. It was the best we had come across in our brief midshipman experience. You could not help but get a couple of refills. Several of us wandered out on the terrace to get a better view of the scenery before the dance got organized. It was very relaxing on the terrace. We all agreed that the setting was perfect: beautiful scenery, warm fellowship, and

very good punch. Soon we were laughing as various midshipmen told of their more humorous escapades during the cruise. We really were a very jovial group. A few of us were standing by the wall bordering the terrace, howling in laughter at a story just completed by one of the fellows. The fellow next to him was so carried away that he slapped him on the back and over the wall he went. We rushed to the edge, looked down, and there he was — flat on this back on the beach below, still laughing. He apparently was not hurt. We could not figure out how to get to him quickly, so we carried on as though nothing had happened. Slowly it dawned on me that we were not acting quite normally. I know I felt a little woozy. I figured I would walk around a bit and see more of the club. Maybe I would feel better.

I left the terrace and entered a large party room next to the ballroom. I could hear laughter and girlish squeals coming from the ballroom. From there I started down a large hallway and spotted a midshipman ahead of me going the same way. He turned into another room ahead. As I reached the room, I was impressed with its deep, red carpet and stately furnishings. Inside were the admiral, the captains of the four cruisers, and several other captains and commanders. They were standing in a large circle enjoying their cocktails. I stood there watching the other midshipman walk into the center of the circle. What in the world was he doing? He finally stopped in the middle and started turning about slowly. His open-mouthed expression showed he did not know what he was doing there either. He abruptly threw up all over the beautiful red carpet. I made a hasty departure.

What in the world was happening to everybody? I saw a door to the men's room at the end of the hall and headed for it, thinking that it was a good place to go to figure all of this out. I could hear a good bit of noise inside the men's room as I approached the door. In I went. I was astonished to see a midshipman in each of the four shower stalls. The showers were running full blast, drenching the midshipmen, who were still in uniform. A couple of others were waiting in line for their turn. I stood there a moment and then decided to get out of there, get out of the club.

Once outside, I found my bus and climbed aboard. I sat there thinking that all of us had gotten ourselves in a lot of trouble. There was no other answer. That punch had to have been spiked, heavily spiked. There was no way a midshipman, or even a group of midshipmen, could have done it. I wondered how the girls had fared. They must have had some punch, too. Soon others joined me on the bus. Everyone else was as mystified as I. No one had detected anything strange tasting about the punch. Everyone agreed it was simply great punch. How were we to know? No one ever served midshipmen alcohol. We had simply done it to ourselves unwittingly. In pretty short order everyone was loaded back on the buses and that was the end to a very

short party. Back to the ship we went, laughing about all the unusual things that had happened. What a party!

The next day we learned that the Bacardi Rum plant had furnished its finest, smoothest rum as a promotional effort. The club staff had simply made that splendid punch, not knowing that midshipmen were not permitted to have alcohol. The parties for the rest of the midshipmen were canceled. They did not give a specific reason, but I bet it was because they could not find any more girls whose mothers would let them come.



Enough with the humorous stories. The end of the war came as a complete surprise. I had a guilty feeling, as though I had planned all along to avoid the fighting. I reconciled myself with the knowledge that I had always intended to make the navy my career, and who knew what the future would hold.

Of course, we were all surprised and mystified when news of the existence of the atomic bomb broke. That such a powerful weapon existed was mind-boggling. You simply could not comprehend that such a powerful weapon was possible.

For the most part, my three years at the Naval Academy passed rather quickly. In our final parade I carried my grandfather's Civil War sword. Finally, graduation: June 6, 1947. Many war heroes attended the ceremony. I was off for a couple of weeks before having to return for duty, along with about a dozen of my classmates, to serve as instructors for the incoming plebe class. In September, I was slated to join a destroyer being overhauled in Bremerton, Washington. We were not permitted to transfer to submarines or aviation until we had spent at least a year at sea and qualified to serve as officer of the deck on a surface ship. I considered myself quite fortunate to have attended the Naval Academy. It was a distinct privilege that I greatly appreciated.

At the beginning of the fall term, our task of training the incoming plebe class at the Naval Academy was complete and I started my drive to the West Coast via Nashville for a brief stay with my parents. I had bought a brand-new dark blue Ford convertible with all the trimmings for the all-inclusive price of \$1,600. I only made about \$180 a month, so my family loaned me the money, to be paid back over a period of time.

Driving along in the beautiful countryside in my very own car gave me a new sense of freedom. I had left Annapolis in the afternoon and spent the rest of that day and most of the next driving to Nashville.

It was great to be back home again. By this time there was no more food or gasoline rationing. Life seemed to be back to normal. I got to see quite a

few friends and learn of their experiences during the war. One had been a German prisoner for several years. A few never made it back.

After a few days it was time for me to hit the road to report to my first ship, a destroyer, the USS *Stickell* (DD-888), which was undergoing overhaul in the Bremerton Naval Shipyard, across from Seattle, Washington. It was a long way to go, and I wanted to push on and go as far as reasonable each day. I estimated I would arrive in Seattle several days ahead of my reporting date. I wanted to allow for some extra time in case I had any problems. The last thing I wanted was to start my career reporting late. I left home with a bag of sandwiches so I could have lunch whenever I wanted to by simply pulling off the road. I did not want to waste time searching for a place to eat. I planned to spend the nights in cities where I could expect to find a hotel room. Motels were quite rare at that time; those you did find usually did not look like the sort of place you would want to spend the night. The marvelous interstate road system did not exist then either. All the highways went through the center of each town. The more towns you went through, the more time you lost snarled in city traffic. The roads had only two lanes, one in each direction. On hills and curves you might wind up going at a snail's pace, waiting for a chance to pass a slowpoke. You had to watch for people jumping in front of you from hidden roads and driveways. Expressways were almost nonexistent.

My scheme of getting a sack of sandwiches at breakfast to eat later for lunch was a good idea. I enjoyed being able to stop and eat whenever I desired. It was surprising how few cars I encountered in the open country. One day I stopped for lunch, and only one car passed during that roughly twenty-minute period. It sure was lonesome. I do not know why people worry so much about the world becoming overcrowded.

I eventually reached Seattle after traveling about twenty-seven hundred miles coast to coast by myself and checked into a hotel where I planned to spend a couple of days. I called the shipyard and learned that my destroyer was indeed there and would not be going anywhere for a couple of months. I then spent a couple of very relaxed days eating, sleeping, and going to movies. After all of that driving, I needed the rest.

My reporting date finally arrived. I caught the ferry and eventually arrived in Bremerton. It was a short drive to the shipyard. After getting some directions, I found my ship moored to the seawall. A messenger led me from the quarterdeck to the executive officer. He welcomed me, introduced me to a few officers, and had me shown to my stateroom, which was up forward, under the main deck. One of the stewards helped me unload my car. I had time to unpack and get moved into my stateroom before lunch. There were three staterooms up forward. One could accommodate two officers

and the other two staterooms three officers each. The wartime complement of officers was nineteen, but we had only nine, so everyone had his own private stateroom.

I went up to the wardroom a little early and met a few more of the officers. A door flew open and flattened me against the bulkhead. I heard the exec say, "Captain, I want you to meet the Ensign who just reported aboard, but you have him trapped behind the door."

The door eased away from me, and there was the captain.

"Hi, George," he said.

"My name is Dan, Sir."

"No, your name is George," he said as he shook my hand.

I did not argue. Still, I wondered why he could not get my name straight. After lunch, one of the officers explained that it was a long-standing tradition to call the junior officer aboard ship "George." There was no doubt I was "George" — and I remained so for quite some time.