

U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1975, Shipmate Column NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2020

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Dear 'mates, I sit down to begin this column at home in Florida. Today, we should be in Dublin, drinking a Guinness and rehashing the day's Navy-Notre Dame football game. This column was originally reserved to cover a multitude of stories of the great 2020 American airlift invasion of Ireland. Instead, we get to watch the Central Arkansas Bears play the Governors of Austin Peay. At least we can see **someone** play college football!

Those teams do strike a chord with your Scribe. When we were mids, James "Fly" Williams was a high-scoring basketball player for the Governors. The Austin Peay students came up with one of the game's classic cheers. "**The Fly is open — LET'S GO PEAY!**" As for UCA, when our daughter was a college softball player, Central Arkansas was in the D-II Gulf South Conference with the University of West Florida. The nickname for their women's teams is the Sugar Bears. I thought that was a cool mascot.

Kevin "Kiwi" Wallace lost his apartment in Talent OR to the wildfires torturing the area. His town is one of several that have been nearly obliterated. He escaped with the clothes on his back, a small rucksack, and his "*FLOWERCHILDREN of the BRIGADE*" ball cap. As the fire closed in, Kiwi became the man-on-the-scene for the general manager of his residential complex, who was blocked from returning. He checked on residents that the manager was concerned about and made sure all were evacuated safely. Large embers were floating on the wind and trees on the property were bursting into flame when he finally decided it was time to go. "Sheepdogs never stop being sheepdogs." Good on Kiwi. He made it from Talent to Medford on fire trucks, police cruisers, and other assorted EMS vehicles. He spent his first night on the floor of a utility room in a closed hotel that let him in for the night anyway. Insurance is helping, but will never replace everything Kevin lost. Company mates from 10th Company started a Go Fund Me page for Kiwi and generous classmates exceeded the initial target in the first day. Thank you '75!



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Unable to meet in Ireland, a few of the 34th Company pirates decided to rendezvous in Asheville, NC instead. Guinness was replaced with wine, and the football game was replaced with tours of the grounds of the Biltmore Estate. The **Millikens**, **Repkas**, **Troys** and **Geyers** made merry. Who says a Global Pandemic can stop a party?

Do yourself a favor and get yourself a copy of **Dave Frost's** book — *KABOOMER ... Thriving and Striving Into your Nineties*. It's a tremendous resource for everyone, but especially for those of us who are enjoying the "later" years. It is full of good advice on building stamina and strength, sleeping and eating better, reducing stress ... and enjoying our lives in general. Frosty includes tons of web resources that you can tap to develop your own plan to improve your quality of life. I guarantee that you will get a kick out of Dave's writing style. It's energetic, entertaining, and interesting. The Koach borrows words from languages from Swedish to Sanskrit ... and if he doesn't find the exact word he wants, he just makes one up! Add in a whole bunch of Boomer-centric cultural references (like Wolfman Jack, Rowan and Martin's Laugh In, Lost in Space, plus many more) and you have a really fun read. Plus, Dave is a sponsor of our Reunion 45 Mod 1.

Deke Ahle forwarded a status report he received from the Officer Rep of the USNA Parachute team. Last year, a very ambitious goal was established to build the team parachute rig inventory by 15 rigs to a total of 20. (Alumni helped buy the first five in 2018.) To date, the team has received sufficient funds to purchase 18 additional rigs, bringing the total to 23 parachutes for the mids to share. (There are 40+ midshipmen on the team.) Every rig is one less that a midshipman has to rent at the DZ or buy on his/her own. The team identity will be unmistakable at competitions and demonstrations in future years. The 23 parachute containers bear the markings of the classes that sponsored them or were honored by the donor. Thanks to Deke, '75 is represented.

Once a classmate, always a classmate. **Bob Baldowski** went to NAPS with '75, took the oath with us on I-Day, but left the academy during plebe year. He passed away this summer. He was not legally married,

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but his significant other contacted **Chris Cikanovich** to assist with his arrangements. Bob wanted to be buried in his midshipman uniform. However, there was no money to pay the funeral home or get a uniform. His company mates got together and with the assistance of **Curt Coy** (former Under Secretary of the VA) got the process started. **Bob Sweeney** took the lead and worked the VA, the New Mexico VA, the funeral home and untold others to get Bob properly buried. The hardest part was finding a next of kin to claim the body, since Bob's wife was not legally his spouse of record. Without a next of kin, the body would remain unclaimed and end up disposed in accordance with local law. Bob Sweeney identified a next of kin and the process proceeded to get Bob Baldowski a proper veteran's burial.

Forty-six years ago, as we prepared for our last Army-Navy game as midshipmen, **Tom Dempsey** led a fun-loving group of conspirators that brought life and hilarity to USNA in 1974. The Brigade Activities Committee leaders teamed up with then none-other that **H. Ross Perot '53** to pull a great stunt on our Whoopoo compatriots. Here's the story in Tom's words ...

"25 November 1974 started out as a typical Monday at Navy for me. I got up, shaved, got dressed, and went to Quarters. I was dressed in White Works because I was going to leave formation, go to my first period class and then go to the Field House weight room to lift since I had no other morning classes. After lifting, I went back to my room, took a shower and got into the rack before noon meal formation. About 1100 the phone next to my rack began to ring. As President of the Brigade Activities Committee (BAC), I had one of the few allowed phones in my room.

At first I thought it was the alarm clock, but soon realized it was the phone. I answered the phone with, "Midshipman Dempsey..." The voice on the other end of the line said, "Hello, this is Ross Perot. I got your name and number from the Brigade Activities Officer. I'm planning to go up to West Point for their pep rally. He said you might be interested in coming along with me for some pre-game activities at West Point tomorrow night." He then went on to explain his plan and how he co-opted an Army Chaplain to let him in the Chapel to play Anchors Aweigh and the Marines Hymn at midnight and asked me if I thought I could get some classmates together and meet him up there to create some diversions and have some fun at Army's expense. I told him that I was definitely interested but would have to work out some details. He gave me his phone number and told him to call him back to let him know how planning was going. I hung up the phone and wondered if I was being set up or whether this was a legitimate call. I then began contacting classmates who I thought might be interested in flying up to West Point for their pep rally. I blew off my afternoon classes. "BAC Business" was always a convenient excuse for missing class during my Second Class and First Class years (not to mention parades, formations, and other mandatory events) ... and this was definitely BAC business.

I called the BAC Officer and he confirmed everything was legit and that he would support us. I then began to contact classmates who I thought might be interested. Throughout the day, Perot and I exchanged several phone calls so my fears of being set up started to subside but there was still that nagging feeling. By the end of seventh period, I had the "team" identified. The team included me, **Bob Meissner, Jake Jennings, Tom Gadzala, Mike Reust, and Harry Lee**. We all met in my room after class that day and began to plan our activities. I explained to them what Perot had in mind. We exchanged ideas of what we might be able to do and how to pull it off.

The next morning, all of us assembled in my room to continue to make arrangements and fill out special request chits. Throughout the morning, we exchanged phone calls with Mr. Perot as we arranged the logistics of getting us there. Jake Jennings was busy calling New York to talk to his brother to set up support on that end for this escapade. Bob Meissner was busy calling airlines to see what flights were possible and set up the rental car. Sometime early that afternoon, Bob took a call while Perot was on his way

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from Dallas to New York. He had been working to get us plane tickets and some front money for our troubles. He told Bob to expect a call from a medically-retired Army Captain who worked for him, and that he would finalize all the arrangements. Mr. Perot asked us to keep the conversation to a minimum and not to let on to what we were planning.

Sometime during mid-afternoon prior to us driving to the airport, Bob received a call from the retired Army Captain who would later end up being our escort that evening. The Captain insisted on picking us all up at the airport. During the conversation he asked Bob what EDS account we were working on in New York City. Perot had told him we were a bunch of up and coming new management guys and since we were in New York, he thought it would be good for "civilians" to see West Point and learn something about the military. Bob continued to chat with him on the phone trying to convince him that we would drive our own car since we knew that was where we would have the uniforms and the printed signs and our other gear. He agreed but insisted that he had to take care of all of us throughout the evening and that he'd drive us around in his family's van. Before he hung up with us he again asked what EDS account we were working on in New York City. After a long pregnant pause that seemed like about ten minutes, Bob finally said, the Blue Cross account. His Mom worked for Blue Cross' headquarters in Manhattan. Bob had no idea what EDS really did. It turns out the Blue Cross account was the biggest contract EDS had in mid 70s.

As the afternoon progressed, we continued to refine our plans, while getting special request chits for special liberty approved, signed and routed properly. Despite talking with Perot and the Captain several times throughout the day, we all still thought we might be being played by some clever Cadets, but continued to work through the details anyway.

We then drove to the airport, picked up our tickets at the Eastern Airlines counter along with some cash. As the doors on the plane closed, I think we all thought it was too late now to turn back; we had crossed the line of departure. We flew into LaGuardia where we rented a vehicle and drove to West Point. We were to check into the Hotel Thayer and prepare to execute our plan. A couple of us drove to Jake's Mom's house in Cornwall-on-Hudson NY, just two miles north of West Point. Jake's dad—a USMA graduate from 1950—generously donated (in absentia) his mothballed Cadet uniforms and Jake managed to find his father's Army officer set of "greens" that still had the West Point patch below the Ranger tab that we might find useful at some point during the evening.

As we had planned earlier, Jake's brother had already purchased four gallons of white paint that we were going to use to paint "Beat Army" on the Cadet parade field. Jake had lived at West Point as a kid and knew the lay-out well. He suggested a two-pronged attack. Upon leaving the pep rally, one group would put the banners in the Cadet North Barracks area and the others would paint the parade field. We were then to rendezvous at the Cadet Chapel for the musical finale that Perot had planned.

When we arrived at West Point, we checked into the Hotel Thayer where Perot had arranged rooms for us. The clerk at the desk told us that Mr. Perot had gone out but would be back soon and he suggested that we go out to dinner before meeting up with him. With that, he handed us several sets of keys. Army had given Perot the Presidential Suite that evening and we had rooms on the same hallway just down from his room. Still somewhat leery about the situation we found ourselves in, we went to Perot's room and knocked on the door. Getting no answer I mumbled what we were all thinking, "Oh (expletive deleted), this is not a good sign." Bob then took out either his stiff Navy Midshipman ID card or some credit card and slipped open the lock. In the closet I found a hanging bag embroidered with the initials HRP. There was also a briefcase on the sofa. In

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a final move to confirm that we hadn't been set up, one of us opened it. There we found business cards, some cash and a check book imprinted with Perot's info and a multi-page list of political contributions (Senators and Representatives names on the left side and cash amounts on the right side). We were finally convinced, this was the real deal and we were not being played. No West Pointer was smart enough to set up this elaborate a ruse. We closed the brief case, locked the room and left.

To be continued in the Jan—Feb issue!

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, Wonderful holidays, and here's hoping 2021 does a better job than 2020 did! '75 Sir! Larry