

U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1975, Shipmate Column MARCH-APRIL 2021

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Dear 'mates, Once again we must bid a sad farewell to two members of the class of '75 family. Condolences to the families and loved ones of **Dr. Glenn Amundson** and also of Elaine Weyand (wife of **Bill Weyand**). Damn COVID and damn cancer!

COVID Survivors Club on Gator Beach



On a happier note, we received a fun note from **AJ Ronacher** in San Diego. There's a little informal Wednesday afternoon dinner party at Gator Beach on NAB Coronado. The Flower Children in the area proudly "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic" by joining this weekly party and enjoying the social act of ... freedom. They cap off the pride in our freedom at the end of the party with a salute to evening colors. Pursuing "Life, Liberty and Happiness" were Rox and AJ Ronacher, Lynn and **Jim Tenuto**, **Tom Gadzala**, **Tim Naple**, and Joyce and **John McTighe**. Credit goes to organizer Alana (wife of John McTighe's long time Frog friend and mentor, Joe Quincannon). The gathering has become known as the COVID Survivors Club. If you are ever in the San Diego area on a Wednesday afternoon, by all means join the "club." As members of the Class of '75, we have a reputation to uphold, and a fight worth fighting!

Paul "Beef" Barreto checked in with an aviator report from Florida.

"After retiring from United Airlines and the Naval Air Reserves, I began a search for a

used Vans RV8 airplane. The quest started because many of my retired Navy Pilot and Reserve squadron mates had already purchased planes and hangars. They established the Dreamland Squadron at Haller Airpark in Green Cove Springs, Florida. I was anxious to get back into the Squadron camaraderie and flying.

Totally by chance, a friend told me about a government auction that included a complete RV8A kit. The kit had been purchased by NASA to use in the development of



Paul's RV8 - The Old Goat

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Paul's RV8 - The Old Goat

an unmanned air vehicle before funding for the program was lost. Twelve years later, the kit was auctioned off and I won it. The assembly began in my barn in Welaka, FL and ended four and half years later in "Hangar 75" at Haller Park.

My mentor throughout the build was **Pat "Bonzo" Lee '72** a former squadron mate. His help, as well as from other fellow pilots at Haller, was invaluable. The paint scheme I chose was a compilation of my

memories of the Academy, the Class of '75 and historical Naval Aviation. After the initial flight testing is completed (40 hours) I plan on having our mascot "Bill" painted on the left cowling with the plane's name "Old Goat" placed underneath. Mickey and I currently reside in Vilano Beach, Florida. If you are in the area look me up and we'll take a spin around North Florida in the Old Goat."



Walt Flippin (left) in the Wilmington NC Folds of Honor golf fund raiser

Walt Flippin was a donor and a player in the Folds of Honor golf challenge held at the Country Club of Landfall (CCL). Walt played with pro partner John Whitaker while sporting Navy covid masks procured through the Cape Fear alumni chapter. The fund raiser reached \$40,000 when donations were closed at the end of December.

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West Point Raid (Episode Three—Return to Mother B). At the end of Episode Two in the Jan-Feb *Shipmate*, six classmates ... **Tom Dempsey, Bob Meissner, Jake Jennings, Tom Gadzala, Mike Reust,** and **Harry Lee** ... were in custody in the West Point Provost Marshall's Office a couple of nights before the Army game of 1974. Their mission had been a success however, because while they were causing havoc with GO NAVY sheet posters and painting BEAT ARMY on the parade field, **H. Ross Perot '53** was able to enter the Cadet Chapel and play Anchors Aweigh and the Marine Corps Hymn at midnight. Demps concludes the story:

“Apparently before I arrived at the Provost Marshall Office, Bob was questioned multiple times and kept insisting he was one of Perot's associates, which was technically truthful for that evening, until he was asked directly if he was a Midshipman. He told them yes. Once he confessed who he was, he and the others were locked up. During their confinement, they gamed the system and wound up getting a bunch of Woops locked up with them. Most of the Cadets were in their gym gear at the rally and not carrying their ID cards or didn't have upper class Cadets in uniform to vouch for them, so they were picked up by the MPs. As soon as these “undocumented” Cadets arrived at the PMO, they began loudly protesting their innocence. Bob and the others seized the opportunity to screw with them, telling them to own up to their Midshipmen status and that the gig was up. Bob and the others called them by various made-up names and saying “go ahead and admit you're a Mid, they know there's dozens of us up here.” It played right into the MPs' fears that there were a hundred or more Midshipmen roaming the grounds at West Point. At one point, they had about ten Woops in custody because they couldn't prove they weren't Midshipmen and of course the three known Midshipmen kept saying “Hey Fred, hey Joe, hah, hah, they got you too, huh?!”. ”

During the Provost Marshall's Office lock-up, the Deputy Corps Commander showed up and insisted that the arrested Midshipmen had to go back to the Cadet Barracks during the early morning hours to apologize. He told Bob and the others that he was also their Honor Committee chairman and threatened to have us all kicked out for honor offenses. He tried to pull rank on us because he was a five striper. I think to a man we each told him to what he could do — no apologies offered.

The initial “arrested group” were initially charged with “impersonating a Cadet” since two of them had on Jake's dad's uniforms. It turns out that there was no such regulation or law, so everyone was prepared to be released. Shortly after those who had spent some time behind bars were taken out of lock-up, Paul Bucha, the retired Army Captain, showed up (although I'm not sure how he knew we were there) and told the MPs to let us all go since we were Perot's “associates” and had nothing to do with the events of the evening. At that time, Bob pointed to the ring on his finger and proudly said, “No we're not. We're Midshipmen.” At hearing this, Bucha wheeled a hasty about face and looked dead in the eye of the Police Sergeant, said, “Book 'em!” and left us there.

Seconds later, Perot came through the door to be processed as well. He went behind closed doors with the MPs. Later, I found out that when he was given an opportunity to make a phone call, he asked to speak to President Ford since he was a personal friend. Shortly after that we all got released once and for all. Perot promised that we would all leave West Point and never again come back. We were escorted back to the Hotel Thayer by the MPs, told to gather our stuff, get in the car, leave West Point, and never come back.

The MPs allowed only one of us to enter the hotel to retrieve our gear for fear that we would escape and cause more trouble. One of us went upstairs (although for the life of me I'm not sure who it was). The rest of us remained in the car and as we prepared to load the trunk and leave, Bob and Mike slipped out and started rolling up the Hotel Thayer door mat. I'm pretty sure they never got it in the trunk since it was so big. I do

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know that Jake and Tom Gadzala were able to grab trash cans out of the Presidential Suite and have proudly carried those with them since 1974.

We were escorted all the way to the turnpike by several MP cars with their lights flashing. The upshot was that the Woops and MPs never did know how exactly many of us were there, so while we were speeding back toward Annapolis, the entire Corps of Cadets was up most of the night searching for non-existent Midshipmen raiders.

As we sped down the highway to make it back to the Yard before noon meal — perhaps a little too fast — Bob got ticketed for speeding somewhere around the Delaware Memorial Bridge. The police took us to a local justice's house (some old lady in a house coat). The fine was going to be almost \$250. If we didn't pay, we'd be locked up again — two arrests in one night. We used some of the cash that Perot had given us. Once we paid, they let us go.

We found out that the Provost Marshall Sergeant had called the Navy front office sometime that night telling anyone who would listen to him that he had three first-class Midshipmen locked up at West Point. When the Mate started laughing at him, he demanded to speak to the senior duty officer. Of course when he told our classmate, the MOOW, he started laughing too which caused the Provost Marshall Sergeant to explode in a fit of rage. He sent a charge sheet down to the Navy OOD the next morning charging Bob personally with more than fifteen UCMJ violations and wanted him kicked out. Not sure where that charge sheet ended up, but no Form 2 was ever issued, nor was Bob brought up on charges.

Long story short, we made it back safely and at the Anchor before “Brigade, Seats” we announced to the Brigade that we had successfully conducted a raid on West Point and that Anchors Aweigh and the Marines Hymn were played at midnight at the West Point chapel.”

You might think that this is the end of the story — not so fast my friends! Tom has discovered some additional background information that he will share with us in the May issue. Is your Scribe stretching this great story to help fill multiple columns? Well ... yes he is. Without a shred of shame. '75
Sir! Larry