

U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1975, Shipmate Column OCTOBER 2023

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Dear ‘mates, As even the youngest of us move into our 70s, our column often includes a note marking the passing of a classmate. This summer we lost one of our stalwarts. **JJ Cuff** was a tremendously respected member of ’75. As one of the “old, seasoned” guys — community college, university, and then MAPS (not NAPS) before he came to Navy—we looked to him for guidance from the very first days in Bancroft Hall. As 12th Company’s representative, he kept his company



A great Marine and a great Skipper

U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1975, Shipmate Column OCTOBER 2023

and his class informed about everything that affected us. [*Scribe's note: I always looked forward to an incoming from JJ.*] JJ's Memorial Service, Inurnment, and Reception will be held at USNA on 13 October.

The next time you visit the Yard, take a moment to walk around the four planes displayed on the grassy area across from the boat house (Hubbard Hall). There's an A-4, an F-4, an F-14, and an EA6B Prowler. The Prowler dates to JJ's command tour of VMAQ-3. A great tribute!

Now, as I've promised for several months, here's a story from our intrepid world explorer, **Peter Damisch**.



Peter of the jungle

“I worked in the Antarctic for a few months earlier this year, then voyaged up the East coast of South America. As I write this, our ship is 1,000 nautical miles from the ocean inside the middle of a Continent. No, we are not aground but operating in the Amazon, which is larger than the next six largest rivers in the world — combined. The scale is stupendous, ranging from a river mouth 60 nautical miles wide to millions of species and hundreds of billions of trees. Here is the story of one recent day.

It's 0430 call time and we will operate for a 20 hour day. Our zodiacs (Combat Rubber Raiding Craft for you Seal Team members) are launched in pitch darkness with an overcast and no moon. The ship is mostly blacked out due to insect issues, so we do the work by experience and a few, small emergency lights. This process is quite difficult, as the ship is anchored and we must also deal with a 5-7 knot river current. This is a significant challenge as we jump from zod to zod while unhooking, docking, or maneuvering zodiacs near our vessel. The huge water flow is also filled with large floating “islands” of grass along with frequent encounters with barely visible floating tree trunks that can be over 50' long. Obviously, a serious risk of collisions!

Sunrise quickly bursts out through heavy clouds, which quickly followed by a huge deluge of tropical rain. It lasts for an hour and severely reduces visibility. As soon as the weather clears, we head inshore to explore a long series of branching tributary waterways which narrow to less than 100 feet. I'm focused on discovering wildlife while also evaluating the local rainforest ecology. We quickly have some fantastic encounters with more than 50 species of birds as well as sloths, monkeys, and pink river dolphins. In parallel, I'm also maintaining our navigational position in this

U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1975, Shipmate Column OCTOBER 2023

maize of unmarked channels running through a wide expanse of remote rainforest. Most of these locations are ½ nautical mile or more away from their charted position! Plus, we continue to encounter intermittent showers.

After a few hours, we reposition to make a landing at a small indigenous village with a population of just under 200 people. We are warmly welcomed to a series of wooden huts on stilts to avoid flooding. There is a church and small 'magnet school' which teaches 100 children from the village plus 35 other kids from nearby but even smaller settlements. These people survive on fishing as well banana and other fruit trees that are available nearby (but not in any organized farm). They also grow small plots of manioc along the edge of the rainforest. This staple food must be carefully processed by hand to remove potentially lethal cyanide. We had the privilege of visiting the 10'x10' location where this important work is done.

Our team goes back to the ship for a quick but late lunch, followed by my 1.5 hour overview presentation regarding the first explorers in this region. As a result, I had to skip dinner since I was back into a zodiac just before sunset for the start of our nighttime exercises. Now the environment is again totally dark and completely different from this morning. For safety there are now two expedition team members on board and my partner is from Peru. We go back out to explore over the next 5.5 hours. This time we find a broad spectrum of night herons, bats, frogs, and glow worms as well as almost having a few caimans and tree boa constrictors in our small boat!

All in all it was a tough but very worthwhile day. The ship headed out of the Amazon in May and I flew "across the pond" to start work on another lengthy voyage up the rarely visited west coast of Africa. We have planned operations in such great locations as Togo, Benin, Gambia and Senegal while I celebrate more than 7,850 days at sea."



Peter of the jungle

Thanks Peter. We look forward to the story of your next expedition. 75 Sir! Larry