

The First Navy-Air Force Football Game Falcon Prank

Peter Savage

The first NAVY – AIR FORCE game pitted the Navy Goat against the Air Force Falcons! While Bill the Goat was brave, strong, handsome and proud, he didn't impressively soar around the field at halftime. Several of us on the WRNV staff (can't remember who was involved) conspired to confuse the falcons.

We knew the handlers communicated with the falcons using ultrasonic whistles. Hmmm! We might be able to jam those communications!

We borrowed an ultrasonic signal generator, amplifier and horn speakers from the Navy Experimental Station across the Severn, and set the speakers up looking like part of the public address system. The signal generator and amplifier were placed discretely out of sight. When halftime started, the falcons were introduced to welcoming cheers from the Air Force contingent. Because this first NAVY – AIR FORCE game took place in Baltimore, the stands were filled with active duty and retired Air Force officers and enlisted men, wives, families and friends. They enthusiastically welcomed the falcons! The falcons started their impressive swoops across the stadium with the Air Force contingent cheering them on! Then we turned on the system and, not knowing the frequency of the handler's whistles, slowly swept the ultrasonic signal band.

SUCCESS!

The falcons headed to the top of the light towers around the stadium where they remained until we turned off the system at the end of halftime.

At the next conference of the Superintendents of the Military Academies, the Supe of the Air Force Academy reportedly made an impassioned plea to his colleagues to not confuse the falcons in the future. It apparently had taken significant effort and time to retrain the birds!

More Information from Dick Nelson '64

Pete, from "The Contrail Chronicles," here is my recollection: I was befriended and "spooned" (put on a first-name basis) by one of the Second Class in my company, who was a member of the Drum and Bugle Corps. Learning of my extensive music background, he recruited me to join the Drum and Bugle Corps, which ate together like the varsity teams. That became my attempt to escape from the Gulag of my company's tables. This Segundo was very smart, but his "grease" (military aptitude ranking) was terrible. He spoke fluent Russian, and was an electronics nut. One day, just prior to the Air Force game in Baltimore, he asked me if I wanted to participate in a major operation against the Zoomies (Air Force Academy cadets). How could I say no?

We dressed up the Drum and Bugle Corps in fake uniforms, and papered over the bass drum with the logo "Goucher College AFROTC Drum & Bugle Corps." (Goucher was a women's college.) After playing a hideous rendition of "Up we go, into the wild blue yonder....." in front of the Zoomie stands, we peeled off the fake jackets and showed the USNA flag, playing Anchors Aweigh. Very cool, and relatively harmless.

The real caper was yet to come. During half time, the Zoomies brought out their trained falcons for an air show. My Second Class mentor had found out that they use high-frequency dog whistles to signal the birds and retrieve them. He and his buddies had used the electronics lab to create a high-frequency oscillator and powerful amplifier system that would duplicate, or "jam" the Zoomies' dog whistle signals. They brought this gear in trucks behind the stands, and hooked up to a powerful generator in one of the trucks. Using a converted bullhorn, complete with an added gun sight, my mentor and his pals took aim at the birds and waited.

One of the Zoomie trainers threw a string with bait out on the field and called one of the birds down from his orbit. As the bird swooped down, our "sniper" team squeezed off a burst of inaudible sound. It was apparently very audible to the bird, who looked like he had been hit by a Sea Sparrow missile. He did several aileron rolls, and skidded to a landing near the 50-yard line, leaving a line of feathers. He then flew off in the direction of New York, never to be seen again. The other bird got it next, and he landed on the scoreboard and refused to return to his trainers. The Zoomies never found out what

happened.

Bill the Goat, the Naval Academy mascot, thus got his revenge for various Zoomie goat-napping attempts, including one in which Bill was captured and flown all the way to the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs on an Air force cargo plane. These attempts became so frequent that Bill finally had to be kept at the Naval Academy dairy, guarded by a squad of Marines. It was rumored that Bill had a "body double" that made public appearances for him while he remained hidden from view in a secret, undisclosed location.