

Raising the Fifty Star Flag in New York City

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Each time a new state enters the Union, a newly designed flag (with a different field of stars) is created and then first unfurled on the next Independence Day. The last two states admitted to the Union were sandwiched around the entry of the Class of '63 into the Naval Academy; Alaska in January of '59 and Hawaii in August. President Eisenhower decreed first in January that a 49-star flag be created for Independence Day, 1959, and then again in August he decreed that the 50-star flag be prepared for July 4th, 1960.

That date coincided with a portion of the consolation prize experienced by the many members of the classes of '61 and '63 assigned for the summer cruise to the *USS Northampton (CLC-1)*, President Eisenhower's command ship. The Northampton's mission for that summer was to steam over to Paris, France to pick up the President, and then take him to a summit meeting with Premier Nikita Khrushchev in Russia.

That was the plan. In fact, those of us assigned to the *Northampton* had to take finals early and miss all of June Week to make the ship's schedule.

But that plan was not to be. In May, U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers had been shot down on a spy mission over Russia, and so the invitation by Khrushchev was revoked, and the *Northampton* was all dressed up with no place to go.

And so Plan B was executed, and our ports-of-call, instead of Paris and St. Petersburg, turned out to be Montreal, New York City (over the Fourth of July), and ("a tough duty but somebody had to do it") Bermuda.

We arrived in New York City on about July 1st, so by the Fourth, most of us Youngsters were tapped out (in energy as well as finances). So,

when a call came in to the enlisted quarters where we were billeted for two Mids in Dress Whites "needed for a volunteer mission", not a lot of hands went up.

But I considered the situation to be potentially positive...I mean what wrong could come of going somewhere in SDW with White Gloves. So, I volunteered. Another of our classmates also did, but not someone that I was acquainted with (and to my chagrin, in the fog of a half century of memories, I have lost his name).

We met at the Quarterdeck and asked the Officer of the Deck what we would be doing. He pointed to a van on the pier and said that all he knew was that we were to go into town on that van. When we got to the van, the driver said that all he knew was that he was to pick up two Army Cadets at a hotel and the four of us were to be deposited somewhere downtown. Hmm.

After picking up the Cadets, we drove for a while and then stopped in front of a building in what the driver said was the "Financial District" (which meant nothing to me).

A naval officer met us and said that we were going to the roof of the 15- (or so) story building. That was a tad unnerving, until he told us what this was all about.

It seemed that we were about to raise the first 50-star flag over the city...and, if I heard correctly, the second one raised over the 48-contiguous states, after the first one was raised at 12:01 AM over Ft. McHenry in Maryland. Precisely at noon, a band down below (in the large 5-sided intersection) would begin the *Star Spangled Banner*, and two of us (one mid and one cadet) would raise the flag, and the other two would stand as honor guards.

Our first responsibility was to determine which each of us did what...so each couple did the tried and true "Rock, Paper, Scissors". I won and chose to be one of the two to raise the flag.

After that, I went over to the ledge around the roof and looked down to the street. Wow, there was band, some military types, and what looked like politicians and spectators. This was a bigger event than I had assumed. But it still didn't kick in to the reality of my being a part of an historic event in our nation's history...especially in looking back from July 4th, 2014, realizing that the 50-star flag has been unchanged much longer than any flag in that history.

Precisely at 12:00 noon, as we heard the first notes of the National Anthem from down below, the officer gave the command to slowly raise the flag and for the honor guard to hand salute. After we raised it and tied the lanyard down, we also saluted the newest edition of "Old Glory".

Not being familiar with New York City at all, I didn't really ever hear or know of exactly where this took place, other than in the "Financial District". But some 52 years after the fact, I was perusing NYC on Google Earth, looking down around the Stock Exchange area, when I suddenly saw something that had etched itself into my memory...the five-sided intersection that contained the band and everyone else when I looked over the ledge of the roof.

And, sure enough, it was not only in the "Financial District", it was the tall building right next to the shorter and iconic "New York Stock Exchange"...the corner building at the corner of Wall Street and Broad.

Thus endeth the saga of "The First Fifty-Star Flag". Then on to the azure-blue waters and sparkling sands of Bermuda, with the terror of motorbike touring of the island *on the wrong side of the roads*. But those are "Tales for Another Time."