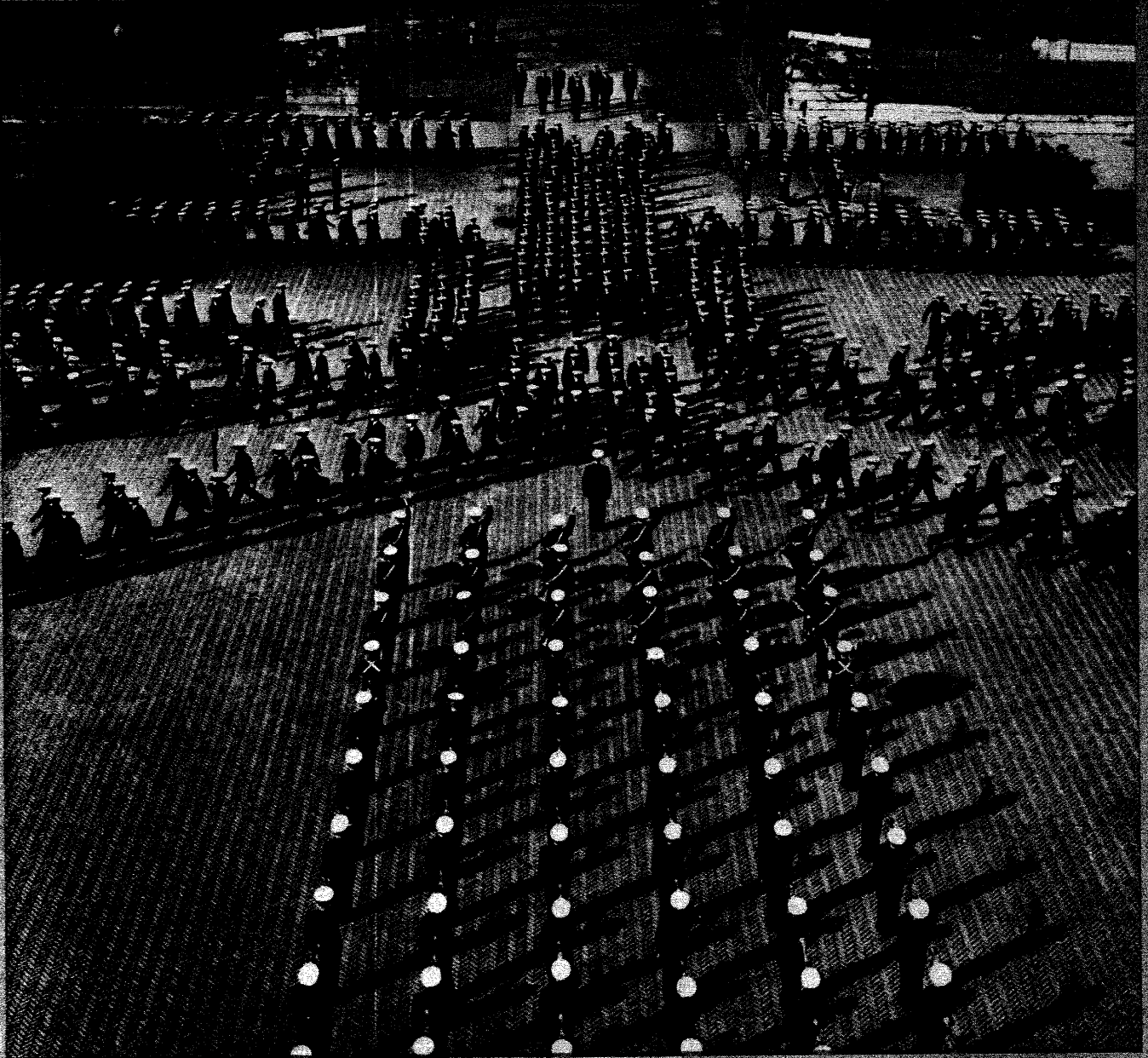


# Shipmate★

APRIL 1963

U. S. NAVAL ACADEMY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



*Annapolis—Rebuttal of a Young Sea Dog  
See Page Four*

## In answer to "Annapolis Teaching Young Sea Dogs Old Tricks" by David Boroff, in the January issue of Harper's

by James Myron DeFrancia  
Midshipman First Class, USNA

*The article which follows this introduction is a very genuine and clear statement of some of the things we are trying to accomplish at the Naval Academy, and I know you will be very interested in reading it. The author is James M. DeFrancia, Midshipman First Class, who wrote it after reading the January 1963 Harper's article, "Teaching Young Sea Dogs Old Tricks" by David Boroff.*

*I was personally delighted at this completely spontaneous and unsolicited response to Mr. Boroff's interesting and provocative article. Its lively rebuttal provides another point of view to most of the items discussed in the Harper's article. We recognize of course that the Naval Academy is not above criticism, and we are busily and actively engaged now in improvements on a broad front, including the academic curriculum in its entirety.*

*It is perhaps even more significant that Midshipman DeFrancia's views might be said to represent those of the average midshipman at the Naval Academy. His relative standing during the past year was 402 in a class of 908. Furthermore, I might mention with his permission that this article was written during some spare time he happened to have as a result of being restricted to the limits of the Naval Academy following an unsuccessful encounter with our regulations (and the wall one night).*

*If we can believe that most of our midshipmen agree with James DeFrancia, and I am sure they do, then you and I can be reasonably sure that this great institution is doing its job. I can only pledge that with your help, it will continue to produce some of the world's finest naval officers, as it has done so successfully in the past.*

C. C. Kirkpatrick

IN HIS ARTICLE, Mr. Boroff presented his views on various aspects of life at the U. S. Naval Academy. His conclusions and criticisms were based on a few interviews with a small number of midshipmen and officers. I should like to present my opinions on the basis of having had contact with hundreds of fellow midshipmen and a large number of officers. Mr. Boroff considers himself qualified to present a picture of USNA after spending a few days here in research. I feel equally qualified after living the life of a midshipman for three and one-half years.

The first point of Mr. Boroff's criticism was the vocational curriculum taught by the Naval Science Department. He questioned whether it "is in sound alignment with vocational realities" on the grounds that only 375 of 765 graduates of the Class of 1961 actually entered the Navy Line. He fails, however, to analyze the curriculum before criticizing it.

During Second Class (junior) year two semesters of navigation are taught. This course is directly applicable to not only the 375 Line candidates, but also to the 200 naval aviation candidates and the 80 Air Force candidates. (The principles

of air and sea navigation are the same.) The navigation course is, then, valuable to at least 655 of the 765 graduates, not taking into account those men who entered Marine aviation. Military Law and Leadership, which includes psychology and the analysis of personnel problems which have actually arisen in the fleet, together occupy two semesters of a midshipman's education. These courses are obviously of use to all graduates whether they enter the Army, Navy or Air Force.

Naval Operations deals with tactics, logistics, and amphibious operations—all of which are useful to Line officers, naval aviators and Marine officers. And the course is at least partially beneficial to Army candidates (amphibious warfare) and Supply officers (logistics), which gives us a total of 683 of the 765 graduates who derive applicable knowledge from the Operations training.

The Weapons curriculum centers around computers, the principles of modern electronic weapons systems, and ballistic missiles. This course is valuable to all graduates, since even Supply officers will deal with at least computers in their military careers.

The obvious conclusion is that where Mr. Boroff questions the worth of the vocational curriculum on the basis of its being valuable to less than half of the graduates, it has here been shown to be of value to at least 85% of them. And to criticize a vocational curriculum for its own sake would be analogous to eliminating anatomy and biology from a pre-med course.

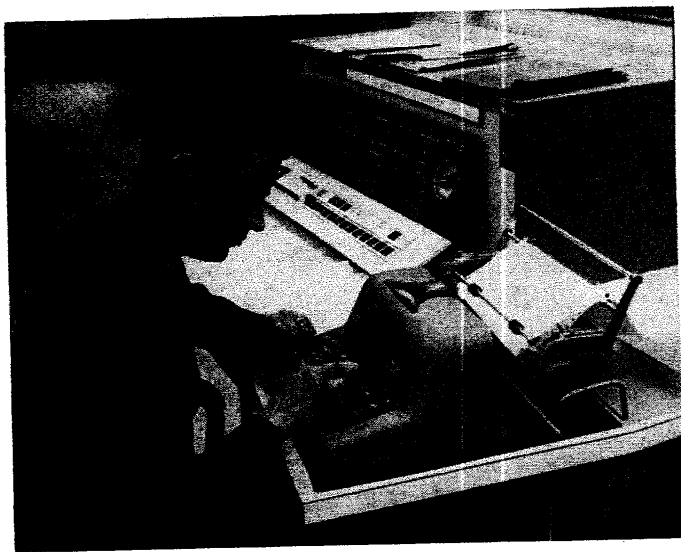
Mr. Boroff further criticizes the course of study at the Academy when he states that the "curricular time (25%) allocated to the humanities and social sciences doesn't quite make sense." His argument is that graduates may find themselves assigned to foreign-aid missions, liaison NATO billets, or planning groups which deal with complex political and social factors, and hence these men need more education in the humanities. I should like to point out, however, that a minute number of officers below the rank of Lieutenant Commander will ever occupy such billets, which allows for more than sufficient time to obtain proficiency in the social sciences through postgraduate and correspondence work. Furthermore, in comparison with the vast number of officers who need primarily the engineering training provided by the Academy, only a small number of officers will ever occupy the billets Mr. Boroff alluded to which require a more extensive humanities background. The primary duty of all naval officers is the operation of ships and weapons systems, which requires a fundamental understanding of engineering and electronics. The humanities and social sciences are not by any means neglected, rather the midshipmen are provided with a sound foundation in these fields—a foundation which allows for further development. And a strong foundation is provided in Engineering, too—but a more extensive one. The majority of junior officers have an immediate need of engineering know-how for their shipboard duties and a less immediate need of the humanities simply because they lack the

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**FURTHER CRITICISM** was aimed at the Academy system by the dispraisal of senior officers (Captains) heading the various academic departments. It should be noted that these officers are well qualified in the field of the department they head. (For example, the head of the English, History and Government is a Rhodes Scholar.) We must remember that the purpose of the Academy is to provide officers who will fill the needs of the Service, and who is better qualified to determine what background a junior officer will need in today's Navy than a senior officer fresh from the Fleet who has observed the shortcomings of his juniors? And as for the fact that only 15% of the officer faculty possess advanced degrees, Mr. Boroff himself pointed out that a program is now underway which will have 100% of the officer-instructors having at least an M.A. or M.S. within the next few years.

A most illogical basis of criticism was Mr. Boroff's reference to the midshipman's slang terms. He states, and I quote: "As long as midshipmen dismiss the humanities as 'Bull' and foreign languages by the unspeakable term 'Dago' the Academy is not fulfilling its mission." I might point out that we midshipmen also refer to engineering as "Steam" and electronics as "Skinny." To criticize the mission of the entire program because midshipmen refer to their courses in slang terms is ridiculous. We no more dismiss the humanities by using the term "Bull" than the American people dismiss their respect for General Eisenhower by calling him "Ike." Slang names for courses are common to *all* college campuses, and, quite frankly, it's easier to tell your roommate you're off to "Bull" class than to say English, History and Government class. We've been doing it for a hundred years.

Mr. Boroff points out that midshipmen cannot pursue special academic interests because of their heavy schedule (compulsory intramural sports, lights out at eleven). But he fails to remember that the Academy emphasizes the "whole man" concept—athletics and social graces, not just academic. It takes more than a knowledge of the arts to run a ship and lead men in battle. He then calls attention to the fact Harvard students have a higher average on the College Boards (they lead by a sixty-one point average). I concede that Harvard is a better school *for its purpose*. But the Academy's purpose and mission,



WORKING WITH data processing equipment in Weapons Department is both interesting and challenging.

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And his examples of first class research papers (and their senior essays) were very poorly selected. He might better have selected as a cross-sectional view such topics as "An Analysis of the Truman-MacArthur Controversy Over American Strategy in Korea," or "The Influence of the Yalta Conference on the World Today," or "The Dismantling of Indo-China." All these are controversial historical topics, and the research paper is intended to be an essay on an important occurrence in history wherein the midshipmen logically present an argument to justify their conclusions. It might also be noted that in recent years several research papers were intellectual enough to merit publication.

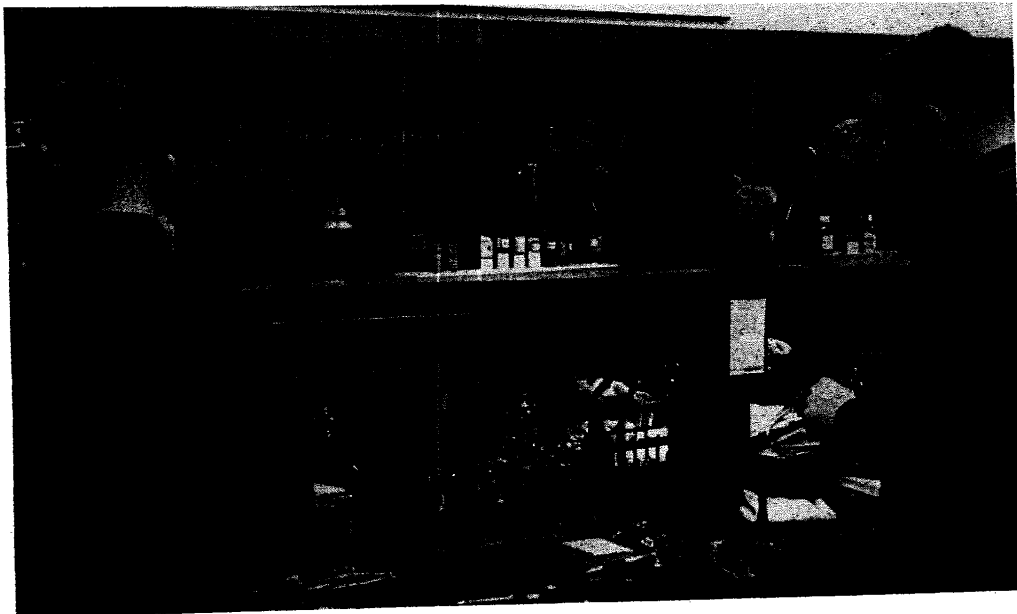
**MR. BOROFF** then proceeds to criticize the midshipmen themselves as being of a "Brother Rat" mentality. In reference to the Academy he states that "the prevailing tone is rambunctiously adolescent." I would ask what he terms the cavortings of my civilian peers. It is well known that college students all over the country indulge in such antics as telephone booth stuffing and bed pushing contests (ref. *Life* magazine). Football rallies here parallel those of any other large college, as do the dances, both formal and informal—we even do the Twist!

In attempting to justify his criticisms he attacks the Brigade's magazine, *The Log*, as full of schoolboy humor and sentimental fables of old admirals. *The Log* is quite comparable to any other college magazine in that it emphasizes subjects of interest to its readers, the midshipmen; such as sports, and yes, sentimental fables. Essentially it is a humor magazine and collegiate publications on the same footing also have humor articles and quips about their administrators. But the error is one of omission, for Mr. Boroff fails to mention our professional magazine, *The Trident*, which contains articles on serious professional and political topics. Nor does he mention the fact that midshipmen also subscribe to the *Naval Institute Proceedings*, the professional magazine of the Navy.

He calls our culture "monolithic" and "adolescent." I could say the same about any college if I cited only their football rallies and humor magazine as proof of their depth of thinking. Our culture might better be exemplified by the Naval Academy Foreign Affairs Conference, which deals with modern social and political problems and brings in speakers such as G. Mennen Williams of the State Department. Is there a lack of culture here when students the nation over flock to an Academy-led conference on the problems of the modern world?

Midshipmen dating habits, which were also subject to Mr. Boroff's criticism, can be explained quite simply. Midshipmen are like young men anywhere else—they enjoy escorting, like pretty girls, and date young ladies of all types and from all walks of life. Some girls like midshipmen, more often one Mid in particular, and some don't (ref. Mr. Boroff's choice of interviews). But the whole matter is largely on a personal basis, as at any other college, and is, I feel, quite irrelevant to a critique of the Academy in regard to its ability to produce qualified officers. It is as illogical an argument as my quoting young ladies who don't like MIT men in criticizing that school's ability to educate young men as engineers. After nearly four years here I feel that I'm in a position to say with authority that regardless of what "brainwashing" we might or might not incur, it is quite definitely not along romantic lines.

Mr. Boroff has categorized us as lacking spontaneity, naturalness, and freedom of mind. I find this to be untrue; unless questioning the orders of seniors, or even openly opposing them, can be termed freedom of mind or naturalness. And what do you suppose would result if this occurred? Any stu-



MIDSHIPMEN are encouraged to work on individual chemistry research projects in the chemistry laboratories at the Academy.

dent of military philosophy can tell you that it would result in the complete breakdown of any effective fighting machine. But if this is not the freedom of mind that Mr. Boroff was referring to, then I say that freedom certainly does exist. We are not dictated to in regard to our thinking or brainwashed to stereotyped reasoning. On any given topic, be it Medicare or nuclear testing, you can find as many opinions as you find midshipmen. It is unfortunate that because we dress alike and march in step we must be accused of lacking the individuality to reason on our own.

Mr. Boroff states that we cheer in the mess hall when penalties are announced, which is also untrue, at least during my stay here. And as for the "gloomy respect" which we are attested to have for our rigorous existence, I can say that we might complain about having less free time than our civilian contemporaries, but given the choice we wouldn't trade. And any man in the country who has served his "hitch" can support me when I say that a certain amount of "griping" is natural to any military unit. None of us came here expecting to be free to come and go as we please. It's discipline, which is necessary in the Service, and we do understand that (even though we sometimes voice a little discontent).

Mr. Boroff refers to our training cruises as "junkets" which are, by definition, pleasure trips. Speaking from personal experience, I can say that cleaning bilges and chipping paint, not to mention cold lookout watches and hot (100°+) engine room watches, was far from a pleasure trip. These are the types of duties we performed on Youngster cruise in enlisted billets. During Second Class summer there was a questionable amount of pleasure in somersaulting over barbed wire and in marching a few miles to the barracks, under a hot sun, with packs and rifles (Marine training). And there was equally dubious pleasure in crawling through a submarine's confined engine spaces while tracing a pipeline or in a midnight to four a.m. watch on a cold bridge in the Arctic while on First Class cruise. But neither were these duties wholly displeasurable—for that's our business; our job. And we like our business.

To be sure, there were many very pleasurable moments. We've seen far away lands and have made friends in distant parts of the world. The latter is in direct opposition to Mr. Boroff's accusation that "midshipmen go around in all American groups insulated against indigenous culture." We're en-

couraged to make as many foreign acquaintances as possible. I today correspond with friends in Italy and England—friends I made while on cruise; hardly possible if I had been "insulated." All of us here full well realize the unfortunate existence of the "Ugly American" and do our utmost to compensate for him while on cruise. And sending midshipmen to cruise with allied navies on foreign ships, as the Academy does annually, could hardly be called insulating.

Mr. Boroff cites the remark of the superintendent of a swank suburban school system, who, when asked if any of his boys entered the service Academies, referred to the military life as "that kind of thing." It is indeed unfortunate that honorable service to one's country must be referred to as "that kind of thing." Men risk their lives daily on, above and under the sea so that the old saying "Sleep well, America. The Navy guards your shores tonight" might hold. It is unfortunate that these men do so only to be thought of as doing "that kind of thing." It is unfortunate that men died at Leyte Gulf, Iwo Jima and Guadalcanal doing "that kind of thing." Yet the Academy's purpose is to produce officers who will dedicate their lives to just "that kind of thing."

Mr. Boroff concludes his article with the statement that "Annapolis gets good boys, but not the very best." This is not true if we can rank men like Halsey, King, Leahy and Nimitz, five-star admirals all, among the very best. And any man who died in the service of his country, be it in peacetime while flying patrol, or in wartime on the shores of Okinawa, can without a shadow of a doubt be counted among the very best. If the Naval Academy's methods can produce men like these, there is no need for radical change. Modern technological advances dictate a change in curriculum, true, and these changes are taking place. But the basic system in itself, with its principles of military discipline, the instilling of a will to win, and unswerving allegiance, is no more outdated than the principles upon which this nation was founded.

There are at least two viewpoints to every issue. If the Naval Academy's system of training is to be discussed in the press—before the public—both sides ought to be heard. Mr. Boroff has every right to his opinion, and I have every right to mine. We both have the right to express our views openly—that is why the Naval Academy exists; so that as free men we may continue to do so.

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