

Army-Navy 1962

- Adventures in getting there

One of the highlights of the Midshipman year at the U.S. Naval Academy is the Army-Navy football game. Unless you have experienced it, it is almost impossible to explain the emotions associated with this annual event. It usually occurs on the second Saturday after Thanksgiving in Philadelphia, although sometimes the game is played at other locations. During my four years at USNA the game was always played at the old Municipal Stadium in South Philly. Fortunately, Navy won all four games during my tenure as a Mid. Back then if Navy won the game, Plebes were allowed to “carry on” between then and Christmas Leave. That amounted to a period of just a couple of weeks, but to be exempt from “Plebe indoctrination”, it was a virtual eternity for Fourth Classmen.

The trip from Annapolis to Philly was made in a huge convoy of buses large enough to transport about 3,800 Mids to the game. Before the game both the West Point Corps of Cadets and the Brigade of Midshipmen march onto the field in company mass formation...first one, and then the other. The march-on is one of the highlights of the game. It is quite a spectacle for those in attendance or those watching the game on television. The Corps and Brigade man the stands when the march-on is completed. For the 1962 game, First Classmen were permitted to travel to Philly on their own as long as they were in formation for the march-on. And therein lies the story of what happened to several members of the Sixth Company, Class of 1963.

Jim Carter, Lionel “Owl Man” Banda, Bob Borlet and yours truly planned to drive to Philly the next morning after being given overnight liberty on the Friday before the game. We stayed at Carter’s house in Arlington the night before, and left the next morning for the game, timing our departure to allow us to arrive for the march-on. All of us except Carter were in uniform. He planned on changing when we got to Philly. All went well until we got about 20 miles from the stadium. At that point we hit heavy traffic and came to a screeching halt. We crept along at a stop and go pace and it just got worse the closer to the stadium we got. Surely most of the traffic was bound for the game.



The Culprits...Carter, Banda, Borlet and Praeger

We started worrying that we may be late for the march-on. Plus several of us were in bad need of a head call. I was about to bust, and since we were stopped, I jumped out the car and headed for some trees on the side of the road. Into the tree line I went unzipping my trousers and whipping it out as I went. The tree line turned out to be very thin, and I found myself standing in someone’s

back yard relieving myself. I don't know if I was seen or not, but I quickly reassembled myself and ran back to the car, which by now was creeping slowly along.

But it was not me that was suffering the most. Lionel was driving the car and his bladder was increasing in volume with each mile. He was in misery as we crept along. Finally we came to a service station and pulled off. Lionel couldn't get out of the car himself. We literally had to carry him, in a sitting position, into the head. I have seldom seen such a look of nirvana as appeared on the Owl Man's face as he emptied his bladder for two or three minutes.

Then back to the road. We crept along keeping a close eye on the clock, which was also creeping along toward march-on time. We finally found a parking place near the stadium, but had just minutes to make formation. Jim changed as quickly as he could into uniform as we all urged him to go faster. The end result was that Carter was dressed in the Service Dress Blue blouse and trousers, but his shirt was a light yellow oxford button down and his tie was a bluish paisley print. No time to do any better, so off we ran toward the stadium.

The Brigade of Midshipmen came into view. All 24 companies were lined up one behind the other in a field outside the stadium in company mass formation. Between us and the formations was a cyclone fence with strands of barbed wire on top. The fence was about 50 yards from the Brigade formation. The gate was too far away to allow us time to use it without being late, so we charged the fence and started climbing. Three of us made it over without incident. Borlet's tie got caught on the barbed wire and he almost hanged himself. It took us a few seconds to rescue Bob before we started our dash to safety.

While we were climbing the fence Mids in ranks noticed us and started to cheer. Officers were running in our direction, Form 2s in hand. As more and more companies saw us, and saw the officers closing in, the cheers became louder coming from all up and down the line. After rescuing Bob, we put our heads down and sprinted for the Sixth Company, disappearing into the ranks before being intercepted to the cheers of the Brigade. We were winded, but safely into formation just before the march-on started, and except for Jim's yellow shirt and paisley tie, indistinguishable from anyone else in the company. The disappointed officers gave up and headed back from whence they had come.

Navy won the game and we all celebrated at our favorite downtown Philly restaurants and pubs and then made our way back to Annapolis later that night. I can't remember if we drove back or took the bus. It doesn't matter, because there is nothing like the afterglow that results from beating Army, especially during the time that you were a Midshipman. That great feeling is still there years later after a victory, but it is not as sweet as when you lived it.

So there you have another story of some of the antics of the ne'er-do-wells from the Sixth Company. A lot of time has passed since then, but when we get together, "...when two or three shall meet, and old tales be retold...", as the song goes, we have discovered that we still haven't grown up.