A snapshot is a brief impression or view of something at a particular moment. It is a casual photo made typically by an amateur with a small handheld camera. In this book I have taken a photograph to give a short, limited imprint of what I experienced from 1987 to 1990 while serving as a dental officer in the United States Navy. During those years, I was fortunate to have been exposed to a wide variety of duty stations and situations. Of course, another person would capture a different picture because each individual encounters his or her own unique adventure, but through mine you may extrapolate to imagine how other photos in the album might appear. In my particular snapshot, you will be introduced to a nautical and military culture having its own language, rich traditions, and guiding mission: to conduct combat operations in support of the national interest (Part One). You will get a sense of what it was like to work in a large dental clinic, as well as in a small one (Part Two). You will go to sea aboard an aircraft carrier (Part Three) and travel to exotic foreign shores (Part Four). You will hear a brief history of the Navy Dental Corps, spend a few months in a shipyard, and board a Soviet warship during the Cold War (Part Five). You will find camaraderie and patriotism, and a love of and fascination with the sea.

I will describe the experience as an “adventure” because every day working in the Navy was an exciting or remarkable experience and you just never knew who or what would cross your path. It’s not just a job. It’s an adventure: that Navy slogan was absolutely accurate, in my opinion. There was no better way to describe it. There might be unannounced drills agitating the calm, or you could be suddenly assigned to a special project. There were always people coming and going, passing through your work spaces. You never knew what would be the joke or comical twist of the day. And sometimes when you awakened you were in port, other times you were at sea. It was truly a variety-filled adventure.

Occasionally, because of the dangerous nature of the Navy’s mission, there could be destructive incidents that altered schedules in major ways. “I’ll need bitewings on Petty Officer Smith so we can get his annual exam out of the way,” another voice directed. One sailor from the flight deck crew staggered down the ladder with a slightly swollen face and

toothache. He checked in by signing the log. Chief Gonzalez reassured him he would be well taken care of, then inquired, “What’s going on today up above?” The sailor, holding his hand to his aching jaw, answered, “Oh, just routine flight ops.”

I recall one particular day in the Dental Department aboard the USS John F. Kennedy. Each of the seven dental chairs was occupied by a patient and everyone was going about his usual duties. “Sprig, I need one of those elephant-stomper condensers right now!” someone yelled out as the whirr of high-speed handpieces droned from two other rooms.

Several decks above, an S-3B Viking was guided across the flight deck into its launch position. That day, the sun was shining without obstruction from any clouds over the calm blue ocean. The crewmembers sat in position, awaiting launch.

Of the various kinds of aircraft that operated from United States carriers, the Viking had the job of searching for and destroying enemy submarines. It was computerized and able to collect, process, interpret and store antisubmarine warfare data. Its crew of four could remain airborne for greater than seven hours in any kind of weather. This aircraft carried a diverse assortment of ordnance: torpedoes, mines, depth charges, rockets, and missiles. It carried sonobuoy loads and had the capability to analyze

and display underwater sounds and other data on TV displays. Its avionics system represented the most extensive, multi-mode, sophisticated application of electronic sensor and software technology in any tactical aircraft.

The jet aircraft was launched by the catapult. As it left the flight deck, it climbed gradually into the air ahead of the carrier just as it was supposed to do, but then began a descent that indicated

something was deadly wrong. Within seconds the Viking crashed into the water. Immediately, emergency rescue procedures were begun. The Medical Department was informed of the mishap. Because Dental was closely allied to Medical, its personnel reported to the medical spaces just up the ladder and prepared to assist.

Soon the rescue team recovered a pilot. I stood at the entrance to Main Medical and saw the badly contorted body of one of the victims carried in on a stretcher. Unfortunately, he was dead from his injuries. A few minutes later, another Viking crew member was rushed in. Several dental technicians obtained supplies and helped keep traffic moving unhindered. The team of doctors and corpsmen efficiently and swiftly began to stabilize the airman. Although severely injured, he was to survive.

Outside the confines of the vessel, the rescue squad struggled for a long time but, sadly, could not recover the third and fourth men, who were dragged down with the heavy metal aircraft to the ocean’s depths. I remember thinking about the unfortunate victims and what it must have been like for their families.

The dental staff played a minor role the day that Viking went down. However, just a few months before, on the afternoon of Sunday, 11 May 1989, when the submarine USS Bonefish suffered a devastating fire while conducting training exercises with the USS Kennedy (along with the USS Carr and USS McCloy), dental personnel were called upon to play a more involved role.

Because of the fire, the USS Bonefish rapidly filled with thick black smoke and the order was given to abandon ship. Of the ninety-one men aboard, eighty-eight escaped and were picked up by the USS Carr and helicopters from the USS Kennedy. Twenty-two of the rescued men suffered from severe burns and smoke inhalation injuries requiring treatment aboard the carrier. In order to treat this number of victims, the Kennedy activated its mass casualty response team.

And on 23 October 1983, Navy dental personnel also had their daily routine jolted when a terrorist driving a truck loaded with explosives slammed into the lobby of the Marine headquarters and barracks of Battalion 1/8, 24th Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) at Beirut International Airport. Two- hundred forty-one American servicemen were killed when the resulting explosion leveled the four-story building where several hundred military personnel were asleep. The only medical officer around was killed in the explosion. Two Navy dentists assigned to the 24th MAU were within five-hundred yards of the blast and immediately responded by mustering a group of Navy corpsmen and dental technicians and providing the first emergency treatment to the wounded. The dentists were Lieutenant G.U. Bigelow and Lieutenant J.J. Ware, and the Navy dental technicians were DT3 W. Fly and DN M. Bernal. Lieutenant Bigelow worked with five hospital corpsmen in providing emergency treatment. Lieutenant Ware set up a battalion aid station and, assisted by ten hospital corpsmen and the two dental technicians, performed the initial triage, tagged and identified patients, started intravenous procedures, and provided other emergency care such as splinting, bleeding control, and pain relief. During the first two hours following the explosion, the two dentists and support team treated sixty-five casualties and prepared them for evacuation to treatment ships offshore. At the same time, medical personnel from nearby ships were brought to the disaster site to augment the medical support there.

To my knowledge, everything in this book is true, although some names have been changed.

Snapshot: Ship’s Dentists is not a book filled to the brim with character development and spectacular, entertaining human follies and predicaments. It is instead just a nonchalant description of one person’s adventure, told in an unadorned, straightforward manner. The spaces between human beings—their ideas, dreams, desires, divorces, personal tragedies, shortcomings and strengths, and outrageous shenanigans— are not drawn in. That would be for another, different book—one that offers more than just a snapshot.

I put this work together to give back to an organization that is like a big family—maybe the book might stimulate the interest of dental students so perhaps some might consider serving in the Navy. And as it portrays an alternative career path in dentistry, for nonmilitary colleagues it might open up new perspectives on this wonderful profession we share. And it may give people outside the dental occupation a perfunctory peek into navy and dental life. All in all, I hope it makes for an interesting adventure.

PART 1: INDOCTRINATION

It was in junior year during a recruiter’s visit to the dental school that I decided the Navy would be a great way to go. They never had to sell me on anything. I liked what I saw, had a strong sense this was a good deal, and willfully bought the whole idea even though I never considered myself a military type. My hunch proved to be correct as I was to verify years later when reflecting back on the entire experience. What the recruiters said turned out to be true, plus there were many additional benefits they didn’t even mention.

Before this, I had never given the armed services much thought. Yeah, I heard news stories about the Navy’s role in the attack on Libya in the 1980’s. And there were other military incidents that sporadically appeared in the headlines. Several of my uncles served in World War Two and I heard a few brief tales from their adventures. My dad was on a destroyer in the 1950’s for two years, but I don’t remember him talking much about it. In fact, I never knew he spent time in Newport, Rhode Island until I was preparing to go there for the first destination in my navy career. As a child, I remember reading his Bluejacket’s Manual (the Navy’s handbook for sailors), finding the “abandon ship” instructions on how to ward off sharks very interesting.

Upon graduating from the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine in the summer of 1986, I was not to report to Officer Indoctrination School (OIS) until January 1987. During the few months between my leaving the city of the Steelers and reporting for active duty, I sold TV’s, VCR’s, and luggage at a department store in a mall. Fresh out of the dental school curriculum, I caught myself referring to store customers as “patients” on a number of occasions. “I sold two TV’s to a couple patients this morning,” I reported to my manager, who immediately became engulfed with a puzzled look all over his face.

It was a snowy and frigid January when I packed some things into my new Honda CRX, the first car I ever owned, purchased just three months before, and departed my childhood homeland of Olyphant, Pennsylvania, a small coal mining town about a two hour drive west of New York City. The destination was Newport, Rhode Island, site of OIS. I had a few vague preconceptions, but did not know for sure what to expect there. I had applied to the Navy and Air Force, but throughout the application process felt more at home with the Navy, like I belonged there. However, along the trek to Newport, I wondered what I was doing joining the armed services while fellow graduates from my class were setting up roots, beginning to establish their own private practices. There were several reasons why I decided to sign up.

I was drawn primarily to the opportunity to work in a group practice setting where there could be team interplay among dentists, specialists, and other medical personnel. This would be advantageous to me because, as I wrote in a memo at the time, “I could strengthen and expand the skills and knowledge learned in school” by interacting with other providers. I already felt confident, but wanted to learn even more.

I also wrote, “This group practice concept is also advantageous to patients because it augments their level of health care and thus affects their lives in a more positive way.” Patients could have the benefit of having convenient access to an assortment of dental providers who could more easily consult and work with each other and thus, in theory, provide a higher level of quality care.

I was attracted to the reality that the Navy would provide freedom from private practice financial burdens. There was a huge education debt to pay and I did not want to add more to it by buying a dental practice or renting a building, for example.

Having just devoted tremendous amounts of time to the completion of four years of college followed by four more of dental school, I now had a desire to pursue personal goals not related to academia. Figuring out the business aspect of dentistry would require more time and sacrifice. I wanted a balanced lifestyle, with regular work hours. I did not want to take my job home with me, and I had had enough of studying for hours and hours every day.

I liked the idea that joining the Navy would permit me to buy some time so I could defer setting up roots, especially since I was unsure of where I wanted to live. This would be a great opportunity to explore more of the world and settle the question of location without having ties to any particular area.

The benefits were attractive. There were thirty days of paid vacation each year. Medical and dental care was free. There were regular and reasonable work hours. Continuing education opportunities were plentiful. There was a guaranteed income, with salary increases for seniority in length of service and higher rank. There was no need for disability insurance or malpractice insurance. There were tax-free allowances for housing and food. There were retirement benefits. Most bases had excellent recreational facilities. Dental school loans could be deferred for up to three years. There was the social prestige of being a United States Navy officer.

**There were opportunities** for branching out within the career of dentistry. For example, there was ample room for teaching. Or you could become a specialist or go into research. You could also get into the area of administration.

I had always held a deep fascination with the ocean. Now would be my opportunity to be close to the waves. Growing up in a state without a coastline, it was always a great thrill for me when my parents drove my brothers and me to the Jersey shore for vacations. After leaving the rolling hills of Pennsylvania, the ground gradually got flatter and seagulls began to appear in the sky. It was all very exciting. The most fascinating part was the actual moment when the sea and its endless horizon were first sighted. That had a great impact on me. The world suddenly became larger.

As a child, I collected seaweeds and shells, built sand castles, and dove into the incoming swells. It amazed me that somewhere beneath the water’s surface lurked such a variety of fish, crustaceans, and other creatures. Anything having to do with marine biology was fascinating to me. I read the books of Thor Heyerdahl and watched the television shows of Jacques Cousteau. In grade school history class, I thrilled at the tales of the great world explorers such as Vasco da Gama and Magellan. By joining the Navy, I could have a chance to live in more intimate contact with the ocean.

Finally, since my father was a Navy veteran, I would be proud to carry on where he left off. This would be something more the two of us could now have in common. I thought that alone would be something special.

So with all these reasons for joining the Navy, there I was heading to OIS in January of 1987, during a particularly brutal winter season.

Upon reaching Newport, it was fairly easy to find Gate One of the naval base. I stopped, obtained a car pass and, once through the checkpoint, followed the road a short distance to a narrow bridge that passed over a body of water, conveying me to the larger part of the base. A curious, strange system of silver, above-ground ducts lined the waterfront drive, white puffs of steam emanating from it, clouding the visibility as I drove along the roadway. I traversed to Nimitz Hall, where I was to live during the six weeks of OIS.

To check in, coat and tie were required for the men, while “comparable apparel” was required for the women. We reported for duty, gathering in the dormitory. One by one, new faces appeared. By 1600 (4:00 PM) on this sunny Sunday, most of the students had arrived. There were medical doctors, lawyers,

dentists, nurses, medical technologists, pharmacists, and hospital administrators. All in all, the entire class size was about seventy people, hailing from different parts of the United States.

I heard someone ask, as if we had just been locked up in a prison, “So what are you in for?” Another person added, “Running from the law?” and everyone laughed. “Come on, you must be running away from something …” One woman said she was recently divorced and starting a new life. One of the men indicated he wanted adventure, that he was just trying to escape from his small, boring, landlocked town. Another exclaimed that he just needed a job.

We were divided into groups called companies, the individuals of each company destined to work together as a close unit throughout the course. I became part of Golf Company. Lieutenant (LT) Lyons, a salty looking naval officer with thick, curled eyebrows, was assigned as our Company Commander. I thought he looked like a captain of an old whaling ship. We had a muster, which was naval talk for a meeting, and the lieutenant introduced us to the Navy. He would direct our group of Staff Corps officers through OIS.

There were two main types of officers in the Navy: Staff Corps and Line. Line officers were the warriors, ship drivers, pilots and such. Staff Corps officers were the support people like the doctors, dentists, lawyers, and chaplains. OIS was the orientation school for the Staff Corps officers. Some

referred to OIS as the “knife and fork school for doctors and lawyers.”

LT Lyons was reassuring and put us at ease that first day, but he also warned we had a lot of work to do and the going would get rough at times. We needed to be alert, he instructed, and follow the rules because there would be adverse consequences if we failed to do so.

We were cast into a new culture with rules very foreign to our heretofore way of life, such as the one that said books had to be organized on our shelves from tallest to shortest. I remember thinking, for the life of me, that I could not appreciate the importance of this. I thought to myself, “If Einstein would have worried so much about the proper arrangement of his textbooks, he probably would not have had time to come up with E=MC2.”

We were assigned a place to stay. I shared a small, basic room with another dentist. We each had a bed and bedside desk. There was sufficient closet space. My roommate was from somewhere in the Midwest.

There was the morning wakeup—much earlier than most of us were accustomed to—followed by jogging or aerobics, as well as pushups, sit-ups, and other physical fitness training. Afterwards we lined up to take showers prior to breakfast.

Since we did not have enough time to eat breakfast in the mess hall, we supplied our own food and stored it in the community kitchen where we had access to a refrigerator, microwave, and plenty of shelves.

Within the first couple days we went to the barbershop to get haircuts. It was just like in the movies, with everyone lining up to take a turn, copious amounts of hair falling to the floor. Prior to coming to Newport, we were sent an information booklet that instructed us to groom our hair appropriately, but some of the “OISters” apparently did not get the information or did not pay too much attention to it. So the barbering session was the time for the Navy to even off the board. Now we all had hair with that high-and-tight, inspection-ready, tapered-in-the-back look.

We were hustled en masse through the uniform store, fitted swiftly for the wide assortment of uniforms we would need. There was the black coat and tie, black trousers and white epauletted shirt of the Service Dress Blue uniform, the formal uniform that could be worn year-round. There was the “winter blue” uniform, with its black pants and long-sleeved black shirt and tie which we would wear most of the time at OIS. This was the working uniform during the winter months. Someone remarked that it made us look like junior Nazi storm-troopers. During the summer, the working uniform would be either the khaki- colored short-sleeve shirt and pants or the “summer white” uniform with its white short-sleeved shirt and pants. No tie was worn with either of the summer uniforms. For formal occasions, there was the Service Dress White uniform, often called the “choker whites” because the gold-buttoned shirt needed to be fastened tightly all the way up the neck.

We purchased two pairs of black shoes (one pair with the killer shine, the other just a normal shoe), one pair of white shoes, socks, a plain gold tie bar, three different belts (khaki, white, and black), brass belt buckles, a lightweight black jacket, a lightweight khaki jacket, a heavy raincoat, winter gloves, white formal gloves, a garrison cap, an officer’s framed cover with gold hat band, a sweatshirt, sweatpants, workout shorts, and several yellow OIS T-shirts. I could never have imagined we’d need all

of this apparel.

Our heads were spinning as we progressed through the assembly line of the uniform store. We

just had to hope that the ladies taking the body measurements were not mixing up the numbers as they read their tape rulers. Fortunately, as it turned out, for most of us they did a pretty good job.

With all these uniforms came many inspections. A lot of time was spent trying to lift lint off the black cloth of the winter uniforms using sticky materials like masking tape. We also became experts at using Brasso to shine up the belt buckles. The art of shoe shining was perfected as well. We had to pin the various rank and corps devices onto precisely specified locations on the shirts and jackets. All of these things were evaluated closely during the uniform inspections.

The Navy had its own language, filled with acronyms such as AIMD, 3-M PMS and MDS, and phrases like aye, aye, Sir! The right side of a ship was called starboard, the left, port. The place to eat was the mess hall for the enlisted personnel and the wardroom for officers. Attention on deck! was yelled out when a high ranking officer entered a space, which was Navy for room. A wall was no longer a wall, but now became a bulkhead. A ceiling was the overhead, the floor the deck. And if you had to go to the bathroom, you had better ask, “Where is the head?” Sir and Ma’am were commonplace designations to be used when speaking to individuals. Boatswain was not pronounced as it would appear phonetically, but rather as “bo-sun.” Stairs were ladders. Nine o’clock in the morning became zero nine-hundred, and was written as 0900. January 24, 1987 became 24 Jan 87. A ship was a “she,” and a submarine a boat, never to be called a ship. To be assigned to a duty station meant that you were attached to it.

A hat now was called a cover and there was an entire protocol for when and when not to wear a cover. For example, when you were outside, you needed to be “covered,” that is, needed to have your

cover on. When you entered a private office, you were to uncover. However, you could remain covered when you walked around inside a public place like a grocery store, bank lobby, or Burger King.

There was a protocol for saluting. For example, Navy personnel only saluted when covered, unlike the Army people who could salute when uncovered. You were to come to attention while saluting except if you were engaged in walking at the time the salute was initiated. We were informed that about six paces was about the proper distance to be away from someone when the salute was to be initiated. The person of the more junior rank was to be the person to initiate. If you were carrying two grandiose bags of groceries and someone passing you saluted, there was no need to drop the bags to the ground in order to return the salute. The rules specified that this was not necessary in a situation like this. When overtaking a senior you would salute and say, “By your leave, Sir?” to which he would respond, “Very well” and return the salute. You could then proceed to pass him. The salute was a form of courtesy, respect, and camaraderie among service personnel.

We learned the names of each Navy rank, from lowest to highest in seniority for officers and enlisted personnel. For officers it was ensign, lieutenant junior grade, lieutenant, lieutenant commander, commander, captain, and then on to admiral. We also learned the equivalent ranks of the other military services, which had different names from Navy. For example, a sergeant in the army was a petty officer second class in the Navy. We also noted that a captain in the Marine Corps was actually much lower in seniority than a captain in the Navy.

There were room inspections. In addition to the obvious requirement of neatness and cleanliness, everything inside our two-man rooms had to be arranged symmetrically, with no deviations. If a briefcase was placed on the right side of a desk on the right side of the room, there needed to be a briefcase located to the left of the desk on the left side—a mirror image.

One day I brought my cross-country skis in from the car. They were just benignly leaning against the closet in my room when it was suddenly announced we were to have an immediate, short-notice room inspection. I really didn’t want to drag the bulky skis and poles all the way back to the car out on the frigid windblown parking area nor did I have much time, so I rearranged these so they were bilaterally

symmetrical with the layout of the room. I forget exactly where I put them but remember that the creative arrangement brought a grin to the face of the inspector, and my roommate and I passed.

The first two or three days I experienced severe doubts about what I had gotten myself into. It was certainly a different lifestyle from that to which I was accustomed. But, at dinner one evening, I discovered I was not alone, for there were many others who began to divulge their own similar wonderings. It was then that I realized this could actually be fun. I decided to just play this game by the given rules without trying to decipher the rationale behind everything. Also, this new culture began to remind me of Boy Scout experiences, with the uniforms, ranks, badges, inspections, salutes, and other things I had already delved into years ago. And from then on, OIS became a somewhat more enjoyable challenge.

In addition to gaining knowledge about naval customs and etiquette, and how to wear the uniform, salute, speak, and identify rank, there was a great deal of classroom time spent learning other subjects. And much of our after-class time was engaged in studying for the many written tests we were given concerning this material.

One subject studied was Military Law, in which we discussed the reason it was important for the Navy to have its own justice system rather than to use the civilian court system. It was a matter of convenience, for it would be time-consuming, costly, and disruptive of military operations to bring witnesses back to the States from anywhere in the world where the Navy operated.

We talked about the Universal Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), court martial, the difference between criminal and civil law, concurrent jurisdiction, specific and general intent offenses, and the “fruit of the poisoned tree doctrine.” We learned how to write up charges and specifications, how to properly search and seize property, and how to apprehend, arrest, and confine. We defined legal jargon such as contraband, pretrial restraint, and probable cause. We learned that, if we decided to run away from OIS, we would be “UA,” or engaging in “Unauthorized Absence.” We learned that it was important to avoid “missing ship’s movement,”—i.e. ship leaves port for two-week deployment without you because you

screwed up—since this could really mess up the Captain’s schedule, not to mention the logistics and expense hassles it would create just to get you back to your workplace.

We studied the Law of Armed Conflict, which was a set of principles to be adhered to during time of war. There was one problem: not every nation of the world recognized this. Nevertheless, it represented at least some attempt to limit unnecessary suffering of civilians, prisoners of war, and the wounded, sick or shipwrecked during hostilities among nations. One principle stated that you would only fight combatants, and that you would destroy no more than your mission required. You would not attack civilians and enemy soldiers who surrendered. You would not torture prisoners of war. We learned that medical personnel were classified as noncombatants, their purpose for existing in a theatre of war being for humanitarian purposes and not for engaging directly in armed conflict. In fact, those of us in the medical field had a special Geneva Convention designation inscribed on our military ID cards marking us as medical personnel. We could carry small weapons solely to be used for protecting ourselves and our patients from unlawful attack. All of this impressed on us the serious nature of what it meant to be part of a military organization.

We studied Human Resources Management, which involved programs to help military personnel. The first page of our notes on this subject addressed the U.S. Department of Defense’s “Human Goals.” The text began with the following: “Our nation was founded on the principle that the individual has infinite dignity and worth. The Department of Defense, which exists to keep the nation secure and at peace, must always be guided by this principle. In all that we do, we must show respect for the serviceman, servicewoman and the civilian employee, recognizing their individual needs, aspirations and capabilities.” This being said, Human Resources Management involved the attempt to live up to these words, taking the form of various programs designed to help personnel. I was very impressed with the emphasis the Navy gave to this subject.

There was the Equal Opportunity Policy, which set out to ensure that personnel, regardless of race, creed, sex, or national origin, received equal treatment and had equal opportunity, that the factors which affected individual promotion, training, assignment to duty, and any other action would be based

upon merit, ability, performance and potential. We discussed at great length the efforts that would be undertaken to try to make this happen, such as the formation of Command Training Teams that would conduct workshops on a regular basis. We reviewed grievance procedures, which served to guide an individual in the event that problems were encountered.

There was the Sexual Harassment Policy, the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program, and the Waste, Fraud and Abuse Abatement System. The latter intended to provide an easy means by which anyone could report deficiencies in policy or material to a central agency, which would then investigate further to eliminate misguided policies or actions such as the renowned purchase of thousand-dollar toilet seats.

There was the Family Advocacy Program which addressed child/spouse maltreatment, sexual assault and rape. It involved prevention, identification, intervention, and treatment.

There was the Overseas Duty Support Program which aimed to improve individual and family experience in a host country’s unique environment, promoting positive relations between the Navy and countries in which the Navy operated.

And since we were now government employees, we had to understand government ethics and follow certain standards of conduct. For example, we could not use rank, title, or position for commercial purposes, and there were rules governing the giving of gifts to superiors and the accepting of gifts from subordinates.

All of these programs were part of the Human Resources Management curriculum at OIS.

I think it was during the third week that we received immunizations for yellow fever and other such exotic diseases we could contract if sent to certain areas of the world. We were told that, because of the immunizations, we had to be quarantined on the base for a couple weeks, so we had to spend a few weekends without going into town. One OIS student lamented, “Now we’re all stuck together with each other with no place to go,” to which another added, “Yeah, kinda’ like how it must be aboard a ship, eh?”

To pass the time during the quarantine, many movies were watched in the dorm TV room on the VCR. There was Officer and a Gentleman and other navy films in the collection. They had a piano there, on which someone attempted to play Anchors Away. Some nonsmokers actually took up smoking because

“it was just something to do.” We also played volleyball and racquetball at the gym. I had a double- cassette tape recorder with me and, at the request of one of the physical fitness instructors, spent some spare time putting together a compilation of music on cassette tapes to be used during the early morning running and aerobics training.

We lived for lunch. It was something to look forward to, our social hour. Often during morning classes you would see the Menu of the Day passed around by the students, and you’d see eyes light up with joy in anticipation of the upcoming meal.

I visited the USS Simpson, a destroyer anchored at the pier. It was the first time I boarded a Navy ship, its grey color and sturdy metal frame presenting what looked like an ominous and uncomfortable habitat for its sailors.

As I said, it was a harsh winter. The base actually had to close down twice during our stay because of the severe blizzards that passed through. LT Lyons said to see a base close was a rare event. I recall deep snow drifts and twisted and bent stop signs nearly knocked over from the high winds.

I hiked around the base on a few occasions and remember stopping at the end of the long pier near Nimitz Hall to gaze out over the water, trying to contemplate how those sturdy, rugged seagulls could thrive in such cold conditions. I dreamed about the hot summer sun and sand of Virginia Beach that lay awaiting me after I would depart OIS and New England to head south to my next duty station in Norfolk. The thought warmed me as I gazed out over the frigid Narragansett Bay.

In our orientation to the Navy, we looked at naval history. Names like John Paul Jones, Stephen Decatur, Isaac Hull, Oliver Hazard Perry, David Farragut, George Dewey, Robert E. Peary, and Chester Nimitz were evoked from the pages of the history books. Vessels such as “Old Ironsides,” the Monitor and Merrimack—and don’t forget the Maine—sailed again. Famous quotes such as “Don’t give up the ship!” and “Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!” and “I have not yet begun to fight!” were restated.

In the subject of Administration and Career Development, we learned some of the fringe benefits to which naval personnel and their dependents were entitled. One of these benefits was shopping privileges or access to the following facilities found on most bases: Navy Exchange (department store,

general store), commissary (grocery), Mini-Mart (convenience store), gas station, automobile service station, post office, bank, laundry, dry cleaning facility, package store (liquor store), dental and medical clinics, legal aid office, MWR (Morale, Welfare and Recreation Office), theatre, and chapel.

We talked about the different types of orders we could receive, the most common being PCS orders (Permanent Change of Station), which involved detachment, another new term, from one duty station to another. A duty station was where you were assigned to work. When they said “permanent,” they meant long-term, perhaps three to five years, before you would have to move on to a new duty station. PCS orders were the civilian equivalent of an employee getting a job transfer within the same company, moving from one office in California to another in New York City, for example.

If the orders we received said “You are hereby detached within twenty-four hours,” it meant we needed to move all our possessions within twenty-four hours. This order was not too common, however, except that it could be found sometimes during war.

You could also receive temporary orders, which I would see during subsequent years when I would leave work at a dental clinic to attend continuing education for a few days somewhere where travel was involved, for example to Bethesda, Maryland, home of the Navy’s dental school.

We learned to calculate Travel Time, which was time allotted an individual in moving to a new duty station, not to be deducted from his accumulated leave days.

We learned that once every year we would be filling out Officer Preference and Personal Information Cards, otherwise known as “Dream Sheets.” It was interesting to me that we had some freedom to actually request specific duty stations and that somewhere there was an individual called the detailer who would try, some more so than others, to grant your wishes when it came time to move on. Of course, despite your desires, in the end it would be the “needs of the Navy” that would ultimately determine where you would indeed end up. You basically had to be flexible. But I must say during my time on active duty, I was able to observe a good effort put forth by the detailers to grant our wishes, certainly mine.

We discussed shipping our personal property from one place to another. They had it all figured out. You would first contact the expert, the Personal Property Office, who would fill you in on details such as how much total weight of goods you would be allotted to have shipped at government expense. They would tell you that live plants, perishable items, alcoholic beverages, aerosol cans, flammables and acids were not authorized for shipment. They would tell you that you needed seven copies of your orders to make the move happen. I would learn that, in the modern Navy, the copy machine was essential. Over the years, I found myself making copies of everything. I don’t know how they functioned without this in the days of John Paul Jones.

We learned how to figure out our pay (taxable income) and allowances (non-taxable income). Base Pay was the main type of taxable income and was based on number of years in service and rank. BAQ (Basic Allowance for Quarters) was a set amount of money we would be paid to cover costs of housing. VHA (Variable Housing Allowance) was begun in 1980 to give service people more tax-free money for housing, the amount tailored to meet costs (which of course varied in different areas of the United States) above that which was covered by BAQ. BAS (Basic Allowance for Subsistence) was a set amount of money we would be paid to cover costs of meals. Per Diem was allowances authorized to defray the cost of meals and lodging incurred during travel.

We practiced writing performance evaluations for workers under our command. These reports were called Fitreps (Fitness Reports) for officers and Evals for enlisted. In addition, we were exposed to the various forms of naval correspondence, which could appear as instructions (to establish long-term policy), notices (to establish short-term policy), or memorandums (informal messages).

All the topics mentioned above were included as part of the Administration and Career Development curriculum.

We also spent considerable time looking at Leadership, Management Education and Training (LMET). This was a review of the basic principles underlying effective leadership and personnel management. We studied command climate and the various leadership styles, as well as team building, for example.

Outside of the classroom were other projects and requirements to fulfill. Twice we went to the pool. The first time was to take the swimming test, which included jumping off a ten-foot tower, treading water for five minutes, and swimming fifty yards. The second visit to the pool included jumping into the water with clothes on, then inflating the clothes to serve as life preservers. All of these represented skills that could possibly be needed for survival if the call to abandon ship was issued some interesting day.

You just never would know when you might have to jump from the deck of a ship into the deep ocean, and then have to find some way to stay afloat, awaiting rescue.

One person from our company could not get herself to do the tower jump because she was so terrified, so the staff had to work with her on many additional days until she was able to do it. Our company really came together to urge her on, and everyone was so happy when she conquered this obstacle.

We spent a large amount of time drilling, which meant marching. We were given instructions in standard military formations and the basic maneuvers of close order drill. We learned moves like “Right Face,” “About Face,” and “Halt.” We could maneuver straight ahead as a group, at oblique angles, in circles, all over. Whenever OIS students travelled by foot on base in groups of two or more, they had to march. So from time to time you would see several small groups of people marching along the sidewalks and fields of the base.

Whenever our whole company moved from a classroom in one building to another building, we marched, and the Company Duty Officer (CDO) of the day—someone from our group; we took turns— called out the commands. One time, there was a pretty girl in civilian clothes walking ahead and to the right of the group, approaching us. Of course, the guys could not help but notice her. When she was to our right and soon to pass us, our perceptive CDO called out “Eyes, Right!” so we could continue to look at her for a little longer before she faded out of sight.

We visited the dental clinic to get our first Navy checkup. Navy personnel were required to have an initial dental workup followed by subsequent annual exams, called a T2 exam, which comprised a comprehensive hard and soft tissue evaluation that included an oral cancer screening exam (OCSE) and

use of the mouth mirror, periodontal probe, and appropriate x-rays as needed. It also included a blood pressure recording and health questionnaire review. At OIS, an initial charting of existing dental restorations and conditions was compiled, thus completing the construction of our official dental charts, which would be carried along with us from thenceforth wherever new duty stations took us.

We had to accumulate thirty-five aerobic points a week while at OIS, and had to pass a physical fitness test that involved pushups, sit-ups, pull-ups, and a one and a half mile run.

We were introduced to Damage Control, which involved procedures necessary to the survival of a ship following damage acquired from bomb explosions, collisions, or any other destructive enemy contact with the ship. Damage control involved fire-fighting, restoring damaged piping systems, making the ship watertight and airtight, maintaining reserve buoyancy and stability, and carrying out decontamination procedures in the event of radiation exposure. Any rupture, break, or hole in the ship’s outer hull plating, particularly below the waterline, could let in sea water. If flooding was not controlled, the ship could sink. So in order to remain afloat, you had to either plug the holes or establish and maintain flood boundaries within the ship and thus prevent more extensive flooding. To plug the holes you either had to put something in the hole or over it.

Damage control equipment was stowed in repair lockers. The equipment included patches for ruptured water or steam lines, plugs made of soft wood for stopping the flow of liquids in a damaged hull or in broken lines, wooden beams for shoring (a shore was a portable beam or such to brace an object that could become loose, like a hatch or bulkhead), and tools such as axes, crowbars, wrecking bars, and hacksaws. Other kinds of patches included rags, pillows, mattresses, metal plates, and flexible sheet metal plating. Other basic materials included wedges, sholes, and strongbacks.

Armed with this knowledge, one day we marched in the pouring rain for what seemed quite a distance to the USS Buttercup, the simulator that demonstrated very realistically what conditions would be like if water began flooding a ship’s compartments. It was another awakening to the serious game into which we had joined.

One by one, our company personnel climbed down the ladder into the spaces below the upper deck of the Buttercup. The scenario to be played out was that our ship had been struck by enemy bombs that ripped through the hull. The lights went out. Saltwater began spraying and gushing all around. As we groped in the dark, trying to work together to repair the damage, the water level gradually rose past knee- level. Cold water pelted our faces as we moved through various areas to mobilize available tools and patches. It was difficult to see. As soon as we plugged one leak, another would appear. We were trapped in the enclosed space like sailors had been in time of war. As the sea level climbed higher, we struggled further. Eventually we finally succeeded in stopping its further flow. We crawled out of the ship, more appreciative of what needed to be done in situations like this.

We learned the types of fires and how to extinguish each. We watched Trial by Fire, actual black and white film footage of a fire aboard the USS Forrestal on July 29, 1967 during the Vietnam War. A Zuni rocket was fired accidentally, igniting an A-4 Skyhawk attack jet. Within minutes the ship was in flames. Pilot John McCain, a future U.S. Senator and presidential candidate, managed to narrowly escape death by jumping from his parked aircraft onto the turbulent flight deck where he scurried off to safety. A camera captured the ensuing attempts by crewmen to extinguish the conflagration. As the fire spread, more bombs and other ammunition ignited and exploded. You could see and hear one firefighting party after another get blown up, eerily disappearing from the flight deck and the movie camera’s lens as the next group of men moved in. That day, one-hundred thirty-four sailors perished and one-hundred sixty- four more were injured. Following the screening of this footage, we discussed the tragic mishap and explored what might have been done to prevent it. This nightmare film remains etched in my mind to this day.

While at OIS, we engaged in Olympic Games, pitting company against company. Our company named our team Larry’s Lobsters, using one of those plastic lobster bibs you get at seafood restaurants as our official banner. Morale was generally very high in our group throughout our tenure at OIS, including during the Olympic competition.

We were to be photographed in our dress blue uniforms. As I was on my way to get this photo taken, I found myself taking a wrong turn somewhere down an unfamiliar passageway. Upon opening the door of a room at the end of the passageway, I entered and nearly had a heart attack when about seven junior personnel jumped up out of their chairs as one of them yelled out crisply and loudly “Attention on deck!” After regaining my senses and realizing they were just observing another naval custom, I remembered to respond, “Very well.” I realized I was not at the photo shoot, so I turned smartly around and exited.

A ship always had sailors on watch in order to keep an eye out for the safety of the vessel and its crew. For OIS, the passageways and spaces of the dormitory served as our ship. We took turns at watch standing, ensuring that the logbook was properly inscribed and only authorized personnel entered our assigned zone of responsibility.

We learned what it meant to swab the deck. We typically did this during field days. The decks were swept, swabbed, and waxed. Field day was cleaning time, when “all hands turned to” and

thoroughly cleaned the OIS dormitory spaces and passageways in preparation for an inspection by the Company Commander.

After the quarantine ended, we were allowed to leave the Naval Base and go into town. With the downtown streets and sidewalks covered with snow, icicles hanging from the edges of roofs, and more snowflakes descending, adding to the white covering, Newport was reminiscent of a delightful, peaceful seaside New England village. Evidence of its kinship with the sea was rampantly evident. Seafood restaurants and tattoo parlors abounded. Scrimshaw and crafts from the sea were displayed at various shops. Everywhere were buoys and fishing nets. Icy cold winds blew across the wharves, the bells on the yachts clanging rhythmically.

From its beginnings in 1639, Newport was a haven for pirates and a major port for the profitable slave trade. It was also a big-time center for the trade of molasses and the rum that was made from it. As a busy seaport, it even surpassed New York and Boston at the time. The first naval battle of the American

Revolution took place off adjacent Jamestown when the sloop “Katy” captured the Royal Naval sloop “Diana.”

In the 1800’s the unspoiled beauty and relative isolation of the island was recognized by the wealthy, who began building the enormous homes they called “summer cottages.” In an effort to outdo one another, great ornate mansions emerged.

At a restaurant that granted significant discounts to Navy personnel in uniform, I ate lobster for the first time in my life. A group of us from OIS filled an entire large dining table. After dinner, on the way back to our cars while walking along bedecked in our black uniforms, a sports car filled with teenagers flew by and someone menacingly yelled “Squids!” at us. This was a nickname given to Navy sailors. One member of our party was appalled and could not believe anyone would yell such a thing at us who, as he declared, “represent defenders of the United States.” I just laughed and shrugged it off because adolescents, especially Americans, were notorious for rebelling against any kind of authority, especially anyone in a uniform.

On another weekend, I drove with my roommate up to Boston. We visited, among other landmarks, the USS Constitution, the oldest commissioned warship afloat in the world. Launched in

1797, she had thirty twenty-four pounder long guns on her gun deck, with shot that could pierce twenty inches of wood at one-thousand yards. The crew was composed of between four to five-hundred men who slept on hammocks.

In those days there was a daily ration of rum or whiskey served from the grog tub. In modern days, the only alcohol aboard ship was contraband or the wine in the chapel, or the cans of beer reserved for extensive periods at sea during which each sailor would be authorized one can.

The USS Constitution had a sick bay, where injured or sick personnel could be medically treated. There were three large installed kettles in which food was cooked. Up above, on each mast, was a “fighting top,” from where Marine snipers fired at enemy ship personnel.

At the completion of Officer Indoctrination School, we had a dinner at the Officer’s Club and a graduation ceremony in which we displayed our drilling abilities. In later years I would realize on several

occasions that the knowledge garnered at OIS gave us distinct advantages: we were introduced to a unique nautical/military culture; we were sufficiently prepared to navigate a naval career and ready to handle positions of greater responsibility. Immediately following the graduation ceremonies, we departed to duty stations all over the world. Most of my OIS comrades I would never see again. I think we were all exhausted from the work we had to do in this boot camp experience. When I drove off the base to head south, there was a feeling of intense relief, like the weight of the world had been removed from my shoulders.