Chapter 6: 1954: The Statue of Liberty Is Green

Give me a fast ship
for I intend to go in harm's way.

John Paul Jones

On 29 July 1954 Commander Henry J. Brantingham relieved Commander William K. Brooks as captain of the *USS Colahan (DD-658)*. The brief fantail ceremony took place in early afternoon, at sea off the California coast, between San Diego and Long Beach. Deeply tanned and ramrod straight, thirty-seven-year-old Brantingham fit nicely into the role. "He is about what I expected in a captain," a shavetail ensign would write upon reporting to the warship some months later. (We will hear much more from this young ensign. He was Jack Sellers, who, for better or worse, would grow up to become Jackson.)

Fire & Ice, 1995

Commander Henry Brantingham

When Brantingham took command, the destroyer was eleven years old, winner of thirteen battle stars in the Pacific and Korean wars of the past decade, and she badly needed refurbishing at the Long Beach shipyard to which she was steaming. Everything was falling apart. In early evening, as the ship moved into Long Beach Harbor's breakwater entrance, the damned master gyro compass failed once again, and she was forced to steer by magnetic compass until safely anchored. The *Colahan* would spend three full months in the yards, four weeks on blocks in dry-dock. Only then would she be ready for further service in the Pacific fleet.

Hank Brantingham, the new captain, had donned chicken guts and a third half-inch gold stripe five years earlier, while he was teaching chemistry at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. His promotion to commander had come after distinguished and much-decorated service in World War

II torpedo boats and destroyers. He served as XO of the *USS Benson (DD-421)* and CO of the *USS Satterlee (DD-636)* toward the end of the war, then held brief postwar command of the *USS Sigourney (DD-643)*, a *Fletcher*-class sister of the *Colahan.* Most recently he made Arctic expeditions as executive officer of the icebreaker *USS Edisto (AGB-2).* Thus, he saw the *Colahan* as a career steppingstone toward promotion to a four-stripe captaincy and command of a destroyer division. But his ambition was to be frustrated in the years ahead. Commander was the highest rank he would ever attain. Perhaps this career stagnation stemmed from what happened early in his *Colahan* tour, just a few months after he took command (details of which are presented later in this chapter), or perhaps it grew out of his lack of regard for a man named John Fitzgerald Kennedy. One seldom knows these things for certain.

Fast forward to 1989, fifty years after Brantingham graduated from the United States Naval Academy and pinned ensign's bars on his khaki collars. The class of 1939 was featured in the academy's *Golden Anniversary Yearbook*. Two notable World War II events were listed for Hank Brantingham, one occurring in the Philippine Islands in March 1942 and the other in the Solomons in August 1943. He was the only officer or enlisted man to play a role in both of these historic events. The yearbook editors wrote:

> *[Brantingham] participated, as executive officer of a PT boat, in the evacuation of General Douglas MacArthur from Corregidor in March 1942, taking [MacArthur], his wife and son and some of his staff to Mindanao [from which the general then escaped to Australia]. . . . [Brantingham] participated, in command at the scene, in the rescue of LTJG John F. Kennedy (later President Kennedy) after [Kennedy's] PT boat had been rammed by a Japanese destroyer [in the Solomons' Blackett Strait in August 1943].*

In the very year that the *Golden Anniversary Yearbook* came out, Brantingham was interviewed by a *San Diego Union* writer at his home in La Jolla, just north of San Diego. By this time, the retired commander had undergone a heart transplant and was winding up a post-Navy career in the chemistry department at the University of California San Diego, which occupies spectacular coastal acreage in La Jolla. The newspaper article that resulted from the interview is reproduced here, with the addition of several bracketed corrective and explanatory comments.

Former PT-boat commander once piloted JFK, MacArthur to safety

(By R.H. Growald, San Diego Union, August 1989)

LA JOLLA — The makers of a movie glorifying John F. Kennedy's

World War II exploits in a Navy PT-boat invited the La Jolla man who rescued him to Hollywood.

"The producers of 1963's 'PT 109' didn't much like what I told them," says Henry J. (Hank) Brantingham, who once commanded PT 1. "I never heard from them again."

[Back in 1941, before America got into the war, Ensign Brantingham served as executive officer, not as commander, of a craft that was called PTC 1, not PT 1 as reported in the newspaper article. The PTC was a variation of a torpedo patrol boat. Yes, it carried a couple of torpedoes, but also a bunch of depth charges. The "C" in its designation stood for submarine chaser.]

Hank did hear from Kennedy 16 years after the Pacific adventure. Kennedy was running for the White House, and he came to San Diego. Would Hank [then a staff officer for Cruisers and Destroyers Pacific Fleet, headquartered right there in San Diego] like to join him in a publicity ride in a PT-boat in San Diego harbor?

"I declined," says Hank.

[If nothing else, Brantingham was constant in his personal convictions; he and his wife Elaine, arch-conservatives, favored Vice President Richard M. Nixon in the 1960 presidential election. But one might conclude that seldom has a naval officer made a bigger political blunder. Kennedy, then a liberal U.S. senator from Massachusetts, went on to become President of the United States, commander in chief of the American armed forces. Brantingham remained a three-stripe commander for the rest of his Navy career. Many who accomplished less went farther. His loyal widow blames the "vindictive" Kennedys — John and Robert and all the rest — for this injustice.]

Hank sits with his wife in their house and nibbles grapes, cherries and memories of saving the future President and Gen. Douglas MacArthur from the Japanese.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the Philippines, bringing America into the war, Hank commanded a PT-boat in Manila Bay [in defense of beleaguered Bataan and Corregidor]. The six PT-boats led by the legendary John D. Bulkeley battled the Japanese naval forces.

It was a kitten scratching a tiger. "Once I fired two torpedoes at a fat Japanese freighter. At 500 yards. A sure thing. No explosions. The torpedoes were duds," Hank says.

Action cut the number of the 70-foot torpedo boats to four. Ashore, Japanese troops smashed U.S. and Filipino troops. MacArthur was

commanding from a rock tunnel on Corregidor Island in Manila Bay. [In January 1942, amid constant air attacks by the Japanese, a routine radio message from Washington was received in one of those Corregidor tunnels. Ensign Brantingham was authorized to wear the silver bars of a lieutenant junior grade.]

President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered MacArthur to get out, to reach Australia, to command Allied forces. Bulkeley summoned Hank. PT-boats would get MacArthur, his wife, MacArthur's son and some aides off Corregidor.

MacArthur rode Bulkeley's boat with his family. Hank took the general's Navy chief and some Army aides. They left March 8, 1942, when the sun went down. The Japanese ruled the day.

They had 600 miles to go to the southern Philippines island of Mindanao, where a plane awaited MacArthur. That first night, Bulkeley's craft led. The next day they hid at an isolated island. The second night, Hank led the MacArthur PT-boats to Mindanao.

"At the dock the general made us a speech. We'd saved him from the jaws of death or something. [Sounds just like MacArthur, who had an affinity for pontifical pronouncements.] He said we'd all get decorations. He gave us something better. From the airfield MacArthur sent us a truckload of fresh pineapples, our first fresh fruit for months," Hank says.

One of the PT-boats, trying to hit a Japanese cruiser, was struck by Japanese aircraft and sank. Hank commanded the last PT-boat in the Philippines, PT 35.

At 5:30 a.m. Hank was told Japanese troops were closing in. At 7 a.m. he saw the enemy coming. He blew up his craft. He led his crew up into the mountains. Across the island they found sailboats. They sailed to the island of Negros. Hank found American troops and officials waiting for escape.

"Hundreds were waiting. They got about one plane a week," he says.

He joined the local U.S. Navy commander in setting up some kind of defense. The Japanese were coming. One morning, on a lake, they saw two San Diego-built PBY seaplanes land.

"The Navy commander told me, 'Nothing's going on here. Get out with your men.' We did," he says.

It was a sardine flight. "So crowded I was crammed under the navigator's little table. They had to throw out the guns and ammo to take off," Hank says.

The Navy sent Hank, a 1939 Naval Academy graduate, to Newport, R.I., to teach gunnery to future PT-boat officers. One was Kennedy.

By August 1943 Hank commanded a squadron of 10 PT-boats. They were based on Rendova in the middle of the Solomon Islands, east of New Guinea. The Navy briefing officer was former football star Byron R. "Whizzer" White, later to become a Supreme Court justice appointed by Kennedy.

White told Hank that five Japanese destroyers were charging past Kolombangara Island, a Japanese fortress. [The destroyers constituted what was popularly known as "the Tokyo Express."] Go get 'em, he was told. The Navy said it was [to be] a maximum effort. Hank was told to take his 10 boats and any others in the area. One of the five PT-boats added to his force was PT 109 commanded by Kennedy.

"Yes, he was a skinny kid," says Hank. "We all were skinny kids."

Hank had no time to educate Kennedy on squadron tactics. So he told Kennedy to stick next to his boat.

"At 2 a.m., as advertised, here came the five Japanese destroyers. I began a run at the Japanese. Kennedy followed. I fired my four torpedoes. My torpedo tubes burst into flames. We'd greased the tubes to protect them from salt water. The grease burned brightly from the firing. The Japanese had been firing at my boat. They turned their fire elsewhere. I guess they saw the grease fire and thought they'd got us."

Fourteen of the 15 PT-boats emptied their torpedo tubes at the Japanese. "PT 109 did not. Rendova ordered all PT-boats that had emptied their torpedo loads to return. We did. Kennedy's boat, its torpedoes intact, stayed behind in the night. Kennedy's boat sat there."

A Japanese destroyer returned two hours later, Hank says. It bore down on PT 109. "In the book, Kennedy said he had switched off his engines so he wouldn't leave a wake. I always kept the engine running, idling, if not moving. And a wake? In the night?"

[Brantingham was referring to Robert J. Donovan's "PT 109: John F. Kennedy in World War II," a book published in 1961 when Kennedy was serving his first year as President of the United States. It was the book on which the movie "PT 109," starring La Jolla native Cliff Robertson as Kennedy, was based. Brantingham's role in the affair was cited in the book, and an actor portrayed him in the film.]

The destroyer sliced through PT 109.

Two of Kennedy's crewmen were killed. Kennedy swam, leading the survivors across a coral reef to an island. Kennedy carved a message on a coconut shell. A native outrigger carried it to Rendova. An

Australian coast-watcher, one of the radio band that remained in Japanese territory to scout the enemy, located the PT 109 survivors.

Hank took his PT-boat to the isle.

The survivors climbed aboard.

"Any coffee?" said Kennedy.

Fast forward again, to 1995, a half century after all this took place. Henry Joseph Brantingham, now retired from his second career at the University of California, takes a detailed look at his first career, which spanned twenty-five years (1939-64) in the U.S. Navy. At age seventy-eight, he publishes a slim autobiography called *Fire & Ice* (ProMotion Publishing, 3368 F Governor Drive, Suite 144, San Diego, CA 92122). The "Fire" in the title represents his front-line adventures in the South Pacific during World War II, while the "Ice" covers his postwar Arctic and Antarctic research aboard icebreakers in the early and late Fifties. At this particular point, in *this* book, we are most interested in Brantingham's version of the John F. Kennedy affair, the one he wrote himself.

It was early August 1943, and Brantingham, now a full lieutenant, was second in command to Lieutenant Commander Robert B. Kelly in Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron 9 at recently captured Rendova. Kelly has been called to Guadalcanal to explain, if he can, why he attacked and sank, in the dark of night, a large *American* ship that was damaged in the invasion of New Georgia and Rendova and was being towed away. Even worse, the vessel now lying at the bottom of the sea, thanks to Kelly, belonged to Admiral R. Kelly Turner, the Navy's irascible amphibious chief. "Young man, you sank my flagship!" roared the admiral when the junior officer appeared before him at headquarters. But we digress. Let Hank Brantingham tell what was happening, meanwhile, back at Rendova:

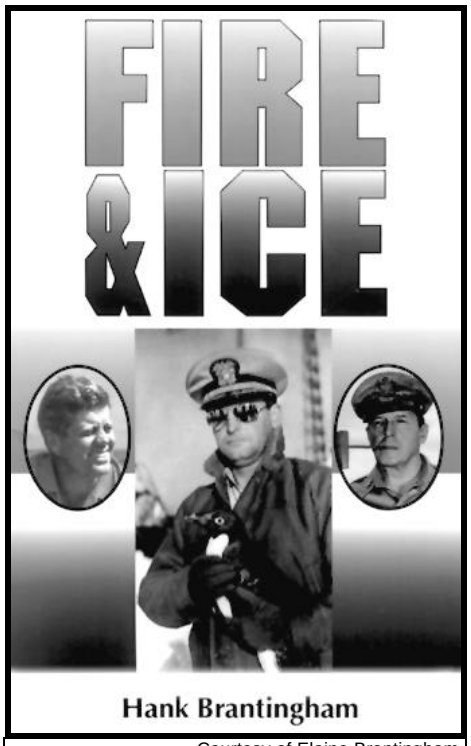
While [Kelly] was absent for a somewhat protracted period in Guadalcanal, I was, of course, acting squadron commander. Then, on the afternoon of August 2, 1943, our area commander called for the usual briefing before that night's operation. We were told that an all-out effort would be needed that night. We were briefed by our Navy intelligence officer, Byron White (later to become a Supreme Court justice), that five Japanese destroyers were on the way down the slot to arrive in our area sometime after midnight.

Our PT boat area commander marshaled all available boats to be deployed, regardless of previously made schedules. All ten of the boats of my squadron were used, plus some boats from other squadrons, to make a total of fifteen boats in all. It so happened that one of the other

boats, PT 109, was skippered by Lieutenant Junior Grade John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Since Kennedy was not trained in my squadron's methods of operation, and since I was in command of the evening's operations, I instructed Kennedy to pair off with me, and to attack, without radio command, when I made my attack.

Somewhat after midnight, radar contact was made with ships approaching from the northwest. I moved in to attack, while increasing speed, and aimed at a point ahead of the enemy ships, to attain a collision course. In that manner, when we fired the torpedoes straight ahead, they too would be on a collision course.



Courtesy of Elaine Brantingham

The cover of Brantingham's 1995 naval autobiography. Flanked by photos of LTJG John F. Kennedy and General Douglas MacArthur, Commander Brantingham embraces a penguin on the ice in McMurdo Sound, 1958.

Before we reached a close enough range, the enemy commenced firing their deck guns at my boat, and nearby splashes indicated they were getting the range. I finally pushed the firing buttons that launched all four torpedoes, two first, then another two, and then turned my boat away and slowed down.

At the time of firing, however, all my torpedo tubes caught fire. The black powder charges that expelled the torpedoes from the tubes had ignited the grease inside the tubes, placed there to protect against rust from salt water. Needless to say, my crew put out the fires very quickly. The fires may have saved us, because the Japanese shifted their fire to another boat or boats, thinking, perhaps, that they had already hit us. I could not confirm hitting any of them.

After the initial contact and attack, radio silence was broken, and the area commander was apprised of the situation. His orders were that all boats who had expended their torpedoes were to return to the base, and the remainder to continue on patrol in case they could find an opportunity to attack. Kennedy's boat was one of those that remained. I never found out why he did not follow me in on my attack.

In any event, an hour or so later, one of the destroyers, on the way back to Bougainville, collided with Kennedy's boat and sliced it in two.

About a week later, a single native paddled his canoe into the base, bringing with him a green coconut. Into it were carved a few words confirming that Kennedy and other survivors wanted to be picked up. Radio conversations with an Australian coastwatcher revealed Kennedy's exact location and a rescue rendezvous was set up.

I took my favorite boat, and, following another boat on its regular patrol, stopped off at the rendezvous point, a channel between two coral islands. Our three prearranged signal shots were answered by two more, and soon Kennedy, in a canoe with a native, came alongside. The native helped guide us through a passage in the coral reef to the inner lagoon, and the remainder of PT 109's crew — minus the two men killed in the collision — were aboard and on the way back to the base. I had no further contact with Kennedy, since he reported back to his own squadron. Another account of this matter is in the book "PT 109" but it seemed to differ, in some respects, from my firsthand observation."

Brantingham's account ends on this somewhat defensive note. Against the great backdrop of the Pacific War, Kennedy's collision with an enemy destroyer in the Solomon Islands ranks as a minor incident, a historical footnote. It assumed importance only when Kennedy was elected President. Military historians, doing the best they can, often speak of the "fog of war," meaning that nobody really knows what the hell happened. All those skinny American kids were out there doing battle with skinny Japanese kids, and no one was taking fastidious notes in little clashes like this one. The few "little" actions that caught the public's fancy years later invariably generated controversy. If there was a fuckup here, who was to blame? Surely no fault lay with Kennedy, the nation's current hero, the man who became the leader of the Free World.

What about this squadron commander fellow, Brantingham? Didn't he run off with the only radar set in the squadron, without saying a word to anybody? These accusations resurfaced with regularity throughout Brantingham's life. More than fifty years after the Japanese destroyer smashed JFK's PT boat, a retired septuagenarian had to defend the actions of a twenty-six-year-old naval officer in the heat of battle.

"In our squadron we had a pretty firm commitment to radio silence, even to attacking without talking on the radio," said Brantingham in 1992's *JFK: Reckless Youth* by Nigel Hamilton. "When the leading boat saw something and attacked, the other boats were to follow right along without further ado and no further conversation."

Hamilton, weaving his deductions into the book's narrative, as any author

would, was unimpressed. “How Brantingham imagined that his own trailing team, in pitch dark and without radar or even the license to communicate by radio, would be able to first follow him and then sight the enemy defies explanation,” Hamilton wrote. After the first torpedoes were fired, Brantingham “made the fatal decision to go home,” Hamilton concluded. He just “disappeared into the night with the radar set,” running out on his subordinates and leaving poor Lieutenant Kennedy to his fate.

There was no doubt that mistakes were made. Nothing fails like failure. “This was perhaps the most confused and least effectively executed action the PTs had been in,” observed the Office of Naval History in its three-volume *History of Motor Torpedo Boats in the United States Navy.* “The chief fault of the PTs was that they didn’t pass the word. Each attacked independently, leaving the others to discover the enemy for themselves.” And so it goes, and probably always will.

But we should look at one more version of the sought-after truth, the Robert J. Donovan book, *PT 109.* It may be the best of the lot. Donovan, an old pro, toured Blackett Strait in the Solomons and interviewed virtually everybody associated with the incident, including President Kennedy and Commander Brantingham. In Brantingham’s own book, *Fire & Ice*, he appeared to be disparaging *PT-109* when he wrote, “It seemed to differ, in some respects, from my firsthand observation” . . . but maybe not. Perhaps he, like others, saw in Donovan’s book a straightforward account containing only minor variations on the story he told.

> *[On 1 August 1943] Division “B” under Lt. Henry J. Brantingham in PT 159 would patrol off the village of Vanga Vanga. The station of Division “B,” therefore, would be the farthest up in Blackett Strait. [The division was one of four in the group.] In addition to Lt. Brantingham it included, in order, Lt. (jg) William F. Liebenow Jr.’s PT 157, Lt. (jg) John R. Lowrey’s PT 162 and Lt. Kennedy’s PT 109. . . . Being the senior skipper, Brantingham was the leader not only of his own division but of the entire group. At twenty-six he had already had a lively career afloat. After graduating from Annapolis in 1939 he sailed in the old four-stacker Twiggs until, as one of fifty over-age destroyers, she was turned over to the British at Halifax. After some time in the neutrality patrol in the Atlantic he transferred to PT boats and wound up in Manila in the celebrated Squadron 3. As executive officer of [Robert B.] Kelly’s PT 35 he was a member of the three-boat expedition that spirited General MacArthur and his wife and son to the north coast of Mindano in Bulkeley’s PT 41. He came to the Solomons*

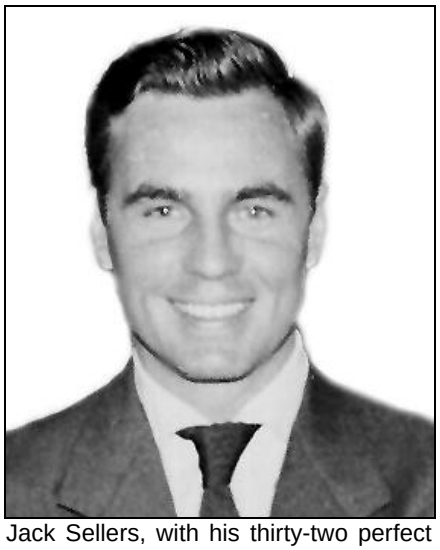
in Kelly's Squadron 9. . . . At dusk the four [Japanese] destroyers, clear of Bougainville Strait, were steaming down the Slot toward Vella Lavella. [The Amagiri, a new two-stacker, was among them.] Their course would take them near Kundurumbangara Point, due south into Vella Gulf, and through Blackett Strait. . . . Lt. Brantingham's four boats, having been assigned the station on the Kolombangara coast off Vanga Vanga, moved out first [from their Rendova base]. . . . Division "B" moved in two sections. Lt. Brantingham's PT 159 was paired with Lt. Liebenow's PT 157; Lt. Lowrey's PT 162 was paired with Lt. Kennedy's PT 109. Brantingham and Lowrey were the leaders of their respective sections. . . . [Midnight passed. It was now 2 August.] Lt. Brantingham was standing anxiously by the cockpit of PT 159 when he heard a voice below call "Radar contact!" Turning around to a ladder into the charthouse, Brantingham dropped below and saw a column of four luminous spots on the radar screen. They were so close to the shore and looked so small that he guessed they were enemy barges. He estimated that they were two or three miles away. Since the crude radar set was of little use in tracking vessels, Brantingham scurried up to the deck and looked in the direction of the spots. Unable to see a thing in the blackness, he went down for a second look at the screen. Within the space of a few minutes he shot up and down the ladder half a dozen times. He could tell that the spots were drawing steadily closer. He still believed, however, that they were barges, and he ordered his boats to make a strafing attack. "Keep your fire low," he instructed the gunners on PT 159. The tendency was to shoot over barges in the darkness. The confusion that was to strangle the whole PT operation that night was already under way. The four spots were not barges, but the Amagiri, Hagikaze, Arashi and Shigure, the punctual Japanese destroyers only minutes away from their destination at Vila. When Brantingham launched his attack, moreover, practically all of the other PT boats were left in complete ignorance of the fact. Either the 159 crew did not break radio silence to notify the other skippers or poor communications swallowed the message. In any case Kennedy, having no radar of his own and hearing no message, had no idea that enemy ships were near. Neither did he know that Brantingham had taken off on an attack. Most of the other skippers were equally uninformed. As Brantingham moved in to strafe, the Japanese opened fire. The heavy caliber of their guns immediately identified the ships as destroyers. Brantingham abruptly abandoned the idea of strafing. At eighteen hundred yards he pressed two chest-high buttons on the cockpit panel. Two

torpedoes leaped from their tubes. A moment later he pressed two other buttons. Two more torpedoes lunged into the sea. In those days the PTs carried obsolete Mark VIII torpedoes. Brantingham's not only missed their target, but one of them set the lubricating grease in its tube afire, lighting up PT 159. Meanwhile his section-mate, Lt. Liebenow in PT 157, caught sight of two of the destroyers and joined Brantingham in the attack. He fired two torpedoes, but they also missed. By now the Japanese had a target in 159's blazing torpedo tube, and it was all Brantingham and Liebenow could do to escape alive, turning and twisting at high speed and laying down puffs of smoke to confuse the enemy gunners. The puffs thrown out by smoke generators on the fantails looked in the distance like boats and made it more difficult for the enemy to ascertain the true target. By the time 159 and 157 were out of range, they had raced clear across Blackett into Gizo Strait. . . . Although a total of thirty torpedoes were fired by the four divisions, the Amagiri, Hagikaze, Arashi and Shigure pushed on to Vila without a scratch. While all this was taking place, Kennedy was continuing his uneventful patrol, paired with Lowrey in PT 162. The instructions were that Lowrey was to keep tuned to Brantingham by TBS radio and that Kennedy was to stay close enough to receive from him any orders that Brantingham might issue. Lowrey, however, did not know, any more than Kennedy did, that Brantingham and Liebenow had charged off on an attack. [The Amagiri, whose name means "Heavenly Mist," cut PT 109 in two. Two of Kennedy's crewmen were killed. Kennedy and the others made their way to a series of uninhabited islands. Several days later Kennedy carved a help message into a coconut. The coconut shell was carried by natives to American officers. After Kennedy became President, he kept the plastic-encased coconut on his desk in the White House. On the night of 7 August, Liebenow's PT 157, with Brantingham aboard, rescued Kennedy and ten PT 109 crewmen.]

Hereafter in this unorthodox memoir and ship's history, the *Colahan*'s adventures will be viewed primarily through the eyes of Ensign/LTJG Jack Sellers, who, long ago and far away, stood on her decks as the youthful personification of Jackson Sellers, *Old Tom*'s aging storyteller. Jack, an annoyingly lazy youngster in Jackson's fatherly view, served as communications officer of the veteran *Fletcher*-class destroyer, and he wrote many letters that survived to jog Jackson's fading memory. The chapters covering these years consist of modified and expanded excerpts from an autobiography written exclusively for

the amusement of Jack/Jackson's daughter, Kei Sellers, a beautiful and talented young woman who, bless her heart, remained a daddy's girl until the day in 1996 when she died. Several of the "asides" in these chapters are addressed to her. Most were written before her death, and they are retained, now that she is gone, for reasons that lie quietly and stubbornly in the author's heart, having, as they do, little relevance for the old ex-sailors who are most interested in this book. Also, some of the language here has been lifted from the preface of *The Original Tomcat*, the prequel to *Old Tom.* It is not considered plagiarism if you steal from yourself, but it certainly is a form of laziness. Shades of Jack, forever haunting Jackson. The author smiles and shakes his head in mild resignation. Before he can finish the story of the *Colahan*, however, he must first get little gold bars pinned on Jack's collars. So, in this chapter, our erstwhile hero joins the Navy . . . .

Jack was feeling his oats in the summer of 1954, although nothing at the moment was the way it should be, the way it was going to be; he was certain of that. At age twenty-two, he was living at home and driving a Yellow Cab after being fired — well, reluctantly let go — from the *Evansville Sunday Courier & Press,* the first newspaper to give him a job. Nevertheless, he had youth's high hopes. He would join the Navy and see the world. He would sail the seas like Horatio Hornblower . . . sip coffee from small cups at Parisian cafes . . . write books like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald . . . make love to beautiful women . . . and get the hell out of Evansville, Indiana, from which he had seldom ventured more than a hundred and ten miles, the distance to Indiana University's Bloomington campus.



Jack Sellers, with his thirty-two perfect teeth, one of the blessings of his youth. He kept them all until July 1997, when 65-year-old Jackson, Jack's metaphysical successor, lost a wisdom tooth.

In June 1954 Jack left Indiana University and returned to his hometown on the banks of the Ohio River, still an undergraduate, still two credits short of a Bachelor of Arts degree. For reasons closely related to laziness, he had failed to write a mini-thesis in the Journalism Department's "Public Opinion" course. Two crucial credits stood in the balance. Relatives, friends and teachers, all of whom wished him well, were concerned.

They need not have worried. Jack was also under pressure from the United States Navy, which took a no-nonsense attitude toward the matter. If he wanted a ticket to his Hornblower

dreams, he had to earn his sheepskin. In his tender maturity, Jack was cocky enough to believe he could write the paper in no time at all when he found the time, and he was right, about this if not much else.

Backbreaking summer labor in Evansville factories had provided funds for his first three years at Indiana University. Surely there was an easier way to make money, Jack told himself the previous summer, just prior to his senior year. So he found a soft job as an Evansville cab driver, which advanced his education in an entirely different direction. At the advanced age of twenty-one, in the summer of 1953, he lost his virginity in a freebie at Fay's whorehouse on Fifth Street near the police station.

This summer, following his so-called graduation and his brief stint at the *Sunday Courier & Press*, Jack went back to work for the Yellow Cab Company. Driving a taxi was a pleasant way to spend time while he waited for the Navy to call him, and it gave him a modest income, but his parents were distressed. Bragging on him was more difficult for them now.

What is Jack doing after graduation?
Driving a taxicab.
Oh.

Finally he began the "Public Opinion" project, doing research in the Evansville Library across the street from the Carlton Theater, one of four downtown movie houses. Within a couple of weeks, the paper was finished. It documented Adolf Hitler's rise and fall in American popularity in the 1930s, as

24 September 1954

From: *Officer in Charge*
U.S. Navy Recruiting Station
Office of Naval Officer Procurement
Cincinnati, Ohio

To: *SELLERS, Raymond Jackson, 281 87 78, OCSA, USNR*
2708 E. Gum St.
Evansville, Indiana

You are directed to proceed in time to report to the Commanding Officer, U.S. Naval Schools Command, Newport, Rhode Island, on 18 October 1954 for four months indoctrination. Upon satisfactory completion of the prescribed period of indoctrination you will be appointed Ensign, USNR, with the designator 1105 and ordered to further active duty.

reflected in *New York Times* editorials. The incomplete grade was changed to a *B*, and the Navy was satisfied.

A few days after Ensign Jack Sellers reported aboard the *USS Colahan* the following summer, Indiana University awarded his degree, mailing it to him. That was good enough for Jack. He wasn't interested in graduation ceremonies and the like. He sent the diploma to his mother, who had done her share of worrying about a son who "graduated" without receiving a diploma. Jack wrote a smug little poem to accompany the document:

Education is not worth the bother
Without a diploma, says my dear mother.

So here it is, ma mere cherie, (accents?)
You take the honey, I'll keep the bee.

In his senior year at Indiana University, Jack made an overnight journey to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he took mental and physical tests for admission to the Navy's Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island. He was bright enough for the Navy but not bright enough to stay out of trouble. That night, with time to kill in a river city, he went out and caught his first dose of clap. Mortified and worried when symptoms showed up a few days later on the Bloomington campus, Jack sought medical attention from an off-campus doctor, to keep the disgrace from being noted in university records and possibly following him for the rest of his life. He dropped his shorts to reveal his shame. "Ah," smiled the elderly doctor as he gazed on this evidence of sin. "To be young again!"

Jack's orders from the Office of Naval Officer Procurement, arriving in the early autumn of 1954, opened the door to his boyhood dreams of travel and adventure. Like all healthy young men of that American decade, when World War II was a vivid memory and the Korean conflict a recent one, Jack faced compulsory military service. Unlike most young men, he did not regret it, especially since he was destined to serve in the Navy as an officer, a certified gentleman, a man with prospects. Such things were important to him. He was a child of the Great Depression, a product of uneducated dirt farmers. He wanted a life that had nothing to do with soup kitchens and shucking corn.

Bob Brophy. Jack lost touch with this friend. Thirty-six years later, Jackson reached out, but it was too late.

"Designator 1105" was code for the Navy's line officers, who were fondly called "cannon fodder" in contrast to intelligence officers and others who seldom

came in harm's way. Jack preferred line officer status. Let the sissies sit at Navy desks and shuffle paper. Horatio Hornblower had not been an intelligence officer. In a marvelous series of C.S. Forester novels, Hornblower had trod the rolling decks of a warship, and that was what Jack wanted to do. Youngsters never fear harm until they come face to face with it, until they finally see for themselves that they are not immune to it.

Jack's Navy adventures began in mid-October when he boarded a train bound for New York City. Since it was an overnight trip, he traveled on a Pullman sleeping car, courtesy of the United States Navy. This was the heyday of train travel, when dining cars still had linen tablecloths and heavy silverware, and a young man, embarked on a journey in elegant surroundings, could gaze out the window, beyond the reflected image of his handsome features, and see much more than the passing scenery.

Kei, your father has reached the age when he can make unselfconscious reference to his youthful good looks. Young Jack was handsome. At the time, in the Fifties, such a pronouncement would have aroused debate, with Jack arguing modestly against the notion. But Jack <u>was</u> handsome. Or, more accurately, handsome enough, as a moist young woman, smoking a postcoital cigarette, once told him after pondering this burning question. Nowadays my craggy, sagging and liver-spotted face bares little resemblance to Jack's, and this natural consequence of long life allows me to pass positive judgment on Jack's countenance, since his is no longer mine. But I am not seriously bothered by it, growing old and ugly. It happens to all men who are not struck down in smooth-faced youth. A snippet of movie dialogue occurs to me: "The only thing an old man can do is eat," grumbles a septuagenarian as he digs into a feast. He pauses, salivating, with laden spoon halfway to his mouth. "You know, it's not too bad."

Now let us hear from our hero, in his own words, with occasional asides and narratives from his fond but often exasperated biographer. Jack has joined the Navy. Like the good little boy he essentially was, he wrote letters to Mother and Dad in Evansville, always with the salutation "Dear Folks," always with the concluding endearment "Love, Jack." In Jack's family, in those days, long-distance phone calls were reserved for life and death matters, or for serious business at least. Letters, costing three cents for surface delivery, six for air-mail, were the middle-class media of long-distance chitchat.

William Sloane House, New York, 15 October 1954:
Dear Folks:

I slept almost all the way to New York. I ate dinner shortly after leaving Cincinnati and then had the porter make up my berth. That was about 6 p.m., and I didn't wake up until we reached Pittsburgh around midnight. I went to sleep again and didn't wake up until Philly.

I got into New York City at 8:20 Friday morning and went directly to Sloane House (YMCA), which is about a block from Penn Station. I couldn't get a room until 1 p.m., so I checked my bag and caught an underground train for Battery Park, the southernmost tip of Manhattan Island, where I could get a good look at the harbor that is New York's raison d'etre. I rode the Staten Island ferry (five cents for a half-hour ride) across the harbor to St. George, where I ate lunch before making the return trip. In case you didn't know it (and I certainly didn't), the Statue of Liberty is green. I always expected it to be gray.

The charge for my room is $1.85 a night. That seems extremely reasonable, doesn't it? Haircuts can be had in most of the barber shops for fifty or sixty cents, and they are never more than a dollar, even at the most exclusive places. You can get a shave or shampoo for sixty cents, too.

I don't know whether I told you or not, Mother, but I want you to save all my letters. Get a box to keep them in. If you save them, I'll probably write more.

When I got back from Staten Island, I caught an express train and went to Times Square and nearby places, where I bought three theater tickets. Tonight I will see "Tea and Sympathy" with Joan Fontaine. Tomorrow afternoon I will see "The Seven-Year Itch" with Sally Forrest. They are making a movie of that one now, with Marilyn Monroe and Owensboro's own Tom Ewell. [Owensboro lay on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River, about twenty miles from Jack's Beech Grove birthplace.] And Sunday at the New York City Opera House I will see "Carmen." I'll see a drama, a comedy and an opera. One, two, three.

Love, Jack

P.S. In case you are wondering, I wrote this on a public typewriter. New York has everything!

William Sloane House, New York, 16 October 1954:

Today I walked down Fifth Avenue. That, my dear folks, is the real New York. It's just the way I thought it would be. Big and long and fashionable. Believe it or not, there were dozens of people strolling along that busy street with their French poodles (an uglier dog you couldn't find). One woman was beating the hell out of an especially big and ugly poodle that insisted on cocking his leg at every tree and signpost and sometimes even the side of buildings.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 19 October 1954:

Dear Folks:

This letter is a manifestation of the Navy's regimentation. In other words, I have been "requested," along with 124 other fellows in my company, to write a letter home telling you that I have arrived safely, et cetera, et cetera. Well, I did arrive safely, et cetera, et cetera, and I'm sitting here in slightly worn blue pants and shirt, with black clodhoppers substituting for shoes, writing this letter. All in all, though, I'm pretty satisfied with my first day here. Classes won't start for another week and I'm eager for them to begin. I always feel better when I get into the thick of things. We have a CPO who growls a lot but who is probably a damned efficient non-com. From what I've seen of him so far, I believe I'm going to like him — although he has already scared several of the boys. I've made several tentative friends and I believe I'm going to do fine work here. I want to make my naval career a completely successful and happy one. I'm going to work hard and, as our CPO said, keep my eyes open, my ears attentive and my mouth shut.

Your Son, John Paul Jones

Chief Boatswain Mate Norman W. Maudsley was the chief petty officer of K Company, Class XIX, U.S. Naval Officer Candidate School, Newport, Rhode Island. The class book *Seachest* reports that Maudsley enlisted in 1936 and spent most of his sea duty aboard heavy cruisers — the *USS Vincennes* in 1937 and the *USS New Orleans* from 1938 to 1945. Other service included shore duty on Guam and tours on a destroyer and a minesweeper.

It was not surprising that Maudsley "scared several of the boys," including Jack if the truth be known. The chief possessed the same sharp mannerisms as Lieutenant Commander Claude N. DeBuhr, the *USS Colahan*'s executive officer, whom Jack would encounter the following summer. DeBuhr could scare boys, too. Maudsley and DeBuhr even resembled each other. Both were tall and lean with stern demeanors and strange grins, just the kind of men that boys feared.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 20 October 1954:

I have a great deal of extra clothing to buy — four pairs of shorts, four pairs of socks, sneakers ($2), black low-cut shoes ($5), two more hats and a few other things I can't think of. If you could spare five dollars, I would be eternally thankful. Please send me two pairs of those shoe trees that I have out in the garage. Also, send me all my underwear.

Essentially a Southern boy, Jack could use all the underwear he could get,

even the long kind worn by menfolk in chilly Kentucky weather. As autumn turned to winter, it became bitterly cold at the Rhode Island naval base. Everything is relative, of course, even the climate, but this was the farthest north Jack had ever ventured, and it was damned cold here compared to the Ohio River Valley where he grew up. By October of 1954 the wind off the bay already cut deep, and snow would fall later in powdery and dull flakes under a gray sky, without the slightest hint of moisture. There would seldom be enough warmth to make the snow glisten.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 24 October 1954:

Tomorrow I start classes. I'm really looking forward to it and believe that I'll learn a lot here. I've already drawn books and they look interesting. I'll be taking Navigation, Seamanship, Naval Weapons, Engineering and Damage Control, Orientation, and Operations. Almost all our books are classified "confidential" and cannot be taken from the base.

I'm getting along fine and I am gradually falling into the swing of things. Last night I shaved, showered and shampooed my hair in twenty-five minutes. For me, that's a record. And I'll probably get even faster. I feel good, too. The routine is healthy. I guess I look funny, though. My crewcut makes me look like a comic-book conception of a German U-boat commander.

Today is Sunday and I found time to walk around this place with Jack Park, a friend from Texas [Jack H. Park, Rice Institute, BA]. Newport is on an island in Narragansett Bay. The base is located on Coddington Point, a little section of land that sticks out toward Coasters Harbor Island, where the Naval War College is located. When I get my blues back from the tailor, I'm going to make a more extensive tour. There are many places where we can't go when we are in dungarees.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 26 October 1954:

I have just finished my second day at school. It's not as tough as it's cracked up to be. Oh, it's tough all right, but not for someone who is not afraid of books. Contrary to the feelings of most of my fellow students, I would much rather be studying than marching or doing other military tasks.

My schedule is quite full. I get up at 0600 (to you, that's 6 a.m.) and make my bed (in the correct manner), dress (in the correct manner), march to breakfast (in the correct manner) and then hurry back to my work detail. This week I am assigned to "windows & blinds" for the starboard side of the lower barracks. Three other boys work with me. Then we muster and march to class. After morning classes, we march to lunch and go back to the barracks, often to find that some of the bunks have been torn up by the CPO or the commanding

CPO Norman Maudsley gave the boys a hard time until they became officers. Then he gave them snappy salutes.

officer, who — to say the least — disapprove of our efforts. Can you imagine someone making up his bed, very very neatly, every morning before breakfast, and then getting down on the floor, on his back, and wiggling around under the bed in order to straighten out the tiny bits of sheet that stick through the bed springs? Well, all the fellows who have lower bunks have to do that every morning. I have an upper bunk, so the task is easier for me.

The afternoons are mere repetitions of the mornings. We march to class (always march!). Classes end at 4 p.m., but instead of relaxing until dinnertime, we practice marching in company formation. After dinner, we have a whole forty-five minutes to ourselves, with nothing to do but polish shoes, wash out white hats, write a quick letter, fold clothes (there's even a correct way to fold underwear and a correct shelf to put them on), and do other little things that one must do.

After these forty-five minutes of respite, in which you only have 101 things to do, you study for three hours — until 10 p.m. Then you shave, shower, and get your things put away by 10:30, when the lights go out. At 6 a.m. the next day, it's the same thing all over again.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 30 October 1954:

Well, the first week of classes is over. I've learned a lot, and I've not learned a lot, too. There is so very much to cover in each course that one just can't get through all of it, unless you are a genius — and I'm not. Weekly grades were posted last night. I came out fine. In fact, I'm quite satisfied with everything except my grade in Engineering. We are studying naval boilers in that fool course and I just can't get excited about it. So I got a 2.80 in that one, with 4.00 equaling the highest possible score and 2.50 representing the lowest passing grade. My work in Engineering is probably equal to a C minus or perhaps a little higher.

Everything else, though, is in fine shape. There are four sections in my company, and in the two sections that sleep on the lower floor, I was one of two students who received as many as three perfect marks in three separate courses. In other words, I received 4.00 in Navigation, Gunnery and Orientation — three of the six courses I'm taking. In Seamanship and Operations I received 3.50 and 3.13 respectively. Navigation and Gunnery are each considered twice as

important as any other course and are consequently weighted double when it comes to computing our final grade.

I hope to get up to Boston in the near future. I can't go on liberty this weekend because I haven't as yet bought my low-cut black shoes. And I can't go on liberty next weekend because I was such a "bonehead" this week. Brother, what a life! Chief Maudsley said I should have bought my shoes by now. I started to ask him when the hell I had time to go get them, but I thought better of it and clammed up. When I went over to Small Stores with the rest of my section, they didn't have any shoes to fit my wide feet, so I didn't get any. Consequently, I don't rate liberty either this weekend or next. The Navy is not interested in excuses, only performance. The captain who ran the USS Missouri aground was completely blameless, but he got the axe just the same.

That was a big story a few years earlier. The *USS Missouri (BB-63),* "The Mighty Mo," the battleship on which the Japanese surrendered in 1945, had run aground on a mudbank in Chesapeake Bay. She was stuck there for fifteen whole days. For the Navy, it was a big embarrassment. For the skipper, Captain William D. Brown, it was the end of a distinguished career. He was court-martialed, dropped 250 places on the Navy's promotion list and reassigned as commander of a group of mothballed submarines in Florida.

Yesterday my section was assigned to watch detail. I was Mate of the Deck in one of the barracks from breakfast to dinner and from 8 p.m. to 12 p.m. — about nine hours altogether. I had to miss all my morning classes. And while on watch I had to greet two CPOs and one lieutenant and accompany them through the barracks.

This place is chuck full of officers. Everywhere you turn, you are faced with the prospect of greeting and saluting an officer. And some of them are high-ranking officers, too. The U.S. Naval War College is on Coasters Harbor Island here, and I suppose that accounts for all the gold stripes floating around. Also, the instructors here at OCS are mostly officers, with a few chiefs sprinkled in.

The other day I was coming back from dinner. I rounded a corner and almost ran into a lieutenant commander. I saluted and said, "Good afternoon, Sir." That was well and good. The only trouble was, it wasn't afternoon; it was evening — and the salute was a Boy Scout salute (three fingers). C'est la vie! War is hell.

There's a fellow in my section whose name is Fitch. We call him "Sonnafa."

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 4 November 1954:

The pace is terrific around here sometimes. I'm constantly fluctuating

between periods of great confidence, in myself and in my ability to get out of here successfully, and periods of great disgust at myself for not being able to get all the work done. During these latter periods I wonder if I really am capable of getting through. I'm not a mental giant, and sometimes it seems that a high intellect is what it takes. Everyone else is having trouble, too, but that is no consolation at all. I'm interested in seeing Raymond Jackson Sellers get through this course, period!

I live day by day, cramming stuff into my head at night and during the daytime study periods, then disgorging it in class. We are tested every day.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 6 November 1954:

Yes, my uniforms do fit nicely; they were tailored to fit; but I gather from your letter that you thought my uniforms were like those worn by officers. Well, my dear family, you are to be disillusioned, as I was disillusioned three weeks ago. The only officer candidates who wear officer uniforms are the midshipmen at the Naval Academy and the aviation cadets in Florida. The OCs at OCS (that's here) are rated "seaman apprentices" and therefore wear uniforms appropriate to such an abysmally low position. In other words, if it wasn't for the "OC" patch on my left arm, you couldn't tell me apart from the ordinary gob. The reason the naval cadets get to wear flashy uniforms is that the Navy has a tough time recruiting men for that program, and so they make it as attractive as possible. Everyone wants to get into the OCS program, so the Navy can afford to make it tougher and less dignified. We will order our officer uniforms in about a month and will get them after Christmas, but we will not be allowed to wear them until we are commissioned.

Jack had never even hear of the *USS Colahan* at his point in time, but she was out there, operating under Captain Brantingham in the San Diego area. And both she and the captain got into trouble on 8 November.

There were two good reasons for these daily soundings. First, and certainly foremost, was the categorical imperative of staying handsomely afloat. If a ship leaked long enough, it might sink, God forbid, and even if it didn't, it would become a sluggish barge transporting seawater from one point in the ocean to another, much like an overladen cart carrying coal to Newcastle. Second, a warrior had to keep his powder dry, so that it was ready to use at any moment. One could not fish ammunition from a flooded magazine and confidently expect to harm the enemy with it. More likely, he would harm himself and\or his weapon.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 9 November 1954:

The days seem to be passing fairly rapidly. Of course I'm very busy, and I suppose that is the reason for it. Perhaps I can get some snapshots of myself soon, and I'll send them to you so you won't be so surprised at my crewcut when you see me at Christmas. I haven't yet decided how I will come home — by rail or by air. It will depend upon how much money I have and how good of a deal I can get. I'm expecting to be interviewed soon by one of the interviewing officers who will determine where I will go and what I will do after graduation. They are trying to get most of us to sign up for a volunteer program, such as flight training, submarines, underwater demolition, etc. The Navy evidently needs naval pilots very badly, and the officers who are responsible for recruiting flyers out of this OCS class are giving us the old cock-and-bull story about us having a "moral obligation" to do whatever would best serve the United States. Well, however true that might be, they are barking up the wrong tree as far as I'm concerned. I joined the Navy to go to sea and see the world, and, as you probably know, I rather admire old blood and guts Hornblower, the greatest naval officer in all fictiondom. So, when I go before the interviewing officer, I'm going to stick to my guns and volunteer for small combatants first, auxiliaries second and large combatants third.

Small combatants are destroyers and smaller. Auxiliaries are cargo ships, transports, tenders, et cetera. And large combatants are cruisers and up. I'm also going to try to get into the Deck Department (navigation and seamanship), the Gunnery Department, or CIC (Combat Information). For the last one only, I would have to go to another school after I get my commission, so that just about eliminates that one right now. The Navy seems to have some screwy idea about sending me to an electronics, radar, communications, or some other type of school, but once again they are barking up the wrong tree. The great part about it is that I don't have to go to school if I don't want to, and so I'm pretty certain I won't go. Since it's fairly difficult to get on a destroyer without extra training, I'll probably wind up on an auxiliary, which, after all, won't be too bad. I'm also going to volunteer for Atlantic duty instead of Pacific duty. Perhaps in that way I'll get to Europe.

I'm getting mighty damned tired of the food around here. I think Navy food is overrated. But then, perhaps it's not the food, but rather the conditions under which we have to eat it. The silverware is always spotted and the tin trays are always wet and disgusting. And the way those jokers throw the food at you is enough to turn your stomach. It would be more efficient (and I'm surprised they haven't thought of it) if they would just give me a bucket instead of a tray. That way I wouldn't miss so much of the food tossed across the counter. Maybe I should write a letter to the Secretary of the Navy.

Oh well, I guess I can stand it for four months. "It costs only a little more to go first class," as my commanding officer [Lt. James C. Linville, former captain of the USS Bobolink, a minesweeper] keeps saying. But I can always look forward to the weekends. Last Saturday night I went into Newport with three other OCs and ate dinner at a very nice place. We all ate seafood of some sort (which, incidentally, is comparably cheap around here) and we had a great time just enjoying the privilege of eating our food slowly and smoking cigarettes with our coffee. If anyone had said "Hurry up!" that night, I would have popped him in the mouth. Afterwards we went dancing at one of the nightspots and found that girls were just as we remembered them — soft and sympathetic. We were paid thirty dollars last week and will be paid again next week, so money is of no immediate concern.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 11 November 1954:

Today is a holiday. There is no school and I have a few moments to write. I have my first quarterly examination in Operations tomorrow so I'll have to hit the books pretty hard this afternoon and evening. The Navy will not pay for my transportation home for Christmas, but I might be able to get some sort of deal by rail. I can be sure of one thing, though — it will be expensive. I will have to ride Pullman for such a long trip. I don't know yet what connections I can make between here and Evansville. I'll let you know later.

I doubt seriously, Mother, if I'm losing any weight. The quantity of food, if not the quality, is high, and I'm not getting any exercise at all. I've started doing a few pushups every night in an effort to keep in shape. I'm learning a lot about the Navy, of course. Sometimes I think I'll come out of here the greenest ensign ever, but at other times I'm not so sure. They cram an awful lot into a fellow. (That long tail on the end of "into" was caused by a guy next to me yelling "Attention on Deck!" as an officer came into the barracks.)

Jack's parenthetical remark makes sense only in the original hand-written letter. It requires explanation when encountered within the *Times New Roman* typography of this book. Here is what happened: In K Company's huge study barracks, Jack was engrossed in composing his letter. He was hunched over the bench table he shared with several other lowly officer candidates. Suddenly an officer came in. The OCs reacted in accordance with Navy protocol. The first seaman apprentice to spot the officer yelled "Attention on Deck," thereby alerting everybody to come to attention and pay proper homage to this anointed intruder. The OC who let out the deafening yell was sitting right next to Jack, who was in the throes of composition, telling his parents that the Naval Schools were cramming "an awful lot into a fellow." The scream in his ear jolted Jack

upright just as he was scripting the “o” in “into,” and his pen jerked spasmodically to the right, leaving an inch-long tail on the word.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 15 November 1954:

Today starts my fourth week of studies and my fifth week here. So far I’ve gotten no “trees,” and with luck will probably not receive more than two or three while I’m here. “Trees” are the same as “smoke-ups,” except that “trees” are issued every week instead of once a semester.

My section as a whole is getting better academically. The first week of classes was pretty rough for them, I guess, because they racked up twenty-three “trees” and thus turned in the poorest record in the company. Last week they had twenty-one “trees.” This week (thank goodness!) they only got four. I hope everyone in my section keeps up the good work. I would like to see all of them graduate.

A friend of mine, Bob Brophy, has invited me to his home this weekend in Essex, Connecticut. I’m looking forward to it. We will catch a train for Essex on Saturday afternoon and be back here in the barracks by Sunday evening. Perhaps I’ll get a good home-cooked meal.

I’ll get paid again today. Will get forty-seven dollars this time.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 19 November 1954:

I have one more class today and then I will be at the end of another week, which means I have one less week to spend in this mental salt mine called OCS. I’m looking forward to my trip to Connecticut tomorrow.

I got my quarterly grades today, and I’m satisfied enough with them. They could be better and they could be much worse. Here they are (and remember that 4000 is perfect and 2500 is the lowest passing score):

Engineering 2852, Navigation 3500, Operations 3218, Orientation 3492, Seamanship 3336, Weapons 3160.

Since you insist that I answer <u>all</u> your questions, Mother, I will do so in a numerical sort of way:

1) No, I have not yet received any demerits, although one student in my section has collected fifteen and another has gotten ten.

2) All I did last weekend was go to a movie and eat a good dinner, without greasy spoons and dirty serving trays.

3) Our barracks is probably cleaner than your house, Mother. We clean everything until it shines. If it doesn’t move, we shine it. If it moves, we salute it.

4) No, I do not do my own washing and ironing. I send everything to a commercial laundry.

5) You get "trees" here for not knowing the answers on tests, not for missing class, which is an impossibility around here. It's not like college. You can't skip classes.

6) No, it's not cold here yet. It's been quite warm, in fact. Today there was a heavy sea fog which restricted visibility to less than a block. It hung around all day.

Tomorrow we will go aboard an aircraft carrier before getting liberty. I'm looking forward to it. Also I might get a good look at some smaller ships. I'm especially interested in seeing a destroyer.

Last night I was measured for officer uniforms by a representative of the Naval Uniform Shop of Brookline, N.Y. Before an officer candidate can be commissioned, he must possess a certain minimum of uniforms, as prescribed by Naval Regulations. The requirements were explained to us last night, so I quickly ordered my uniforms in order to avoid a last-minute rush. My initial order will cost $278. That includes one service dress blue serge, two gaberdine service dress khakis, with an extra pair of pants, one white twill uniform, and a raincoat. All will be custom tailored. I could have saved about thirty dollars by buying my uniforms at the Naval Exchange, but I want some good ones. I'm going to be an officer for three years, plus five years of reserve service. My uniforms will be finished by the first of January, when I get back from Christmas vacation. At that time I will have to start buying the accessaries, which include shirts, four more pairs of shoes (black, brown and white), belts, hats, socks, emblems, shoulder boards, gloves, ties (including a black bow tie for dinner dress), cuff links, a tie clasp and other items — all of which will probably cost another $150, if I am lucky. If I'm assigned to the Mediterranean Fleet, I will have to buy about three more white uniforms. If I am assigned to the North Atlantic coast, I will surely need one or two more blue uniforms. It's going to be quite expensive, but Uncle Sam will help me out by giving me three-hundred dollars at graduation and allowing me the opportunity of drawing as much as three months pay (about $1,000) in advance, if I so desire. Of course I won't need that much.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 23 November 1954:

I should have written sooner, but I've been rather busy. As you might guess, I'm always busy. I study and eat and march and sleep, and if I'm lucky I get to smoke a cigarette once in a while. Right now it's a question of whether I should finish this letter or whether I should take care of one of nature's basic requirements. I'll finish the letter, though. I figure I can wait until after dinner for the other. You have to wait until you have plenty of time, before doing something like that. These damned pants have thirteen buttons — one for each of the orig-

inal thirteen states. They should play "The Star-Spangled Banner" in the heads.

Chief Maudsley advises me to order another blue uniform, so that's another sixty-five or seventy dollars to be added to my uniform bill. War is hell.

I had a great time in Connecticut last week. Bob Brophy and I hitched a ride with a fellow OC who was on his way to New Haven. We didn't do anything much that evening except listen to music and read, but it was wonderful and quite restful. Bob has a nice family. His father is president, or at least an executive, of a timing-mechanism manufacturing company. They have a nice New England home that stretches back from the road and rests in the middle of a wooded area. Squirrels play around in the trees outside. Bob's mother fixed us a delicious meal Saturday evening and more of the same on Sunday. Bob had lots of classical records and good books, and his father supplied the liquor and other necessities for cocktails. All in all, it was a pleasant relief from this daily OCS grind.

Bob is the type of person I admire very much. He's manly and yet has a positive interest in such things as music, art, literature, et cetera. He's a lover of art without being effeminately artistic. He has a healthy outlook upon everything. That includes women and liquor. In a lot of ways, he reminds me of Bob Hart [a friend at Indiana University], except that he's much smaller (about my size) and doesn't feel a constant need to prove himself.

Thirty-six years is a long time, a lifetime for some. While perusing Jack's Navy letters in 1990, I was reminded of Bob Brophy and Jack's visit to Bob's Connecticut home in the fall of 1954. I had nearly forgotten both the young man and his kind invitation. Bob and Jack were friends; they liked each other at first sight, but when they received their commissions in early 1955, they went their separate ways with the casualness of youth, always looking ahead, never back. They got busy with their own affairs and never saw each other again, never communicated.

I turned to *The Seachest*, the Naval Officer Candidate School's 1954-55 class book, and found Bob's captioned photograph: *Robert P. Brophy, University of Pennsylvania, B.S., Economics.* Yes, I remembered him clearly now. He possessed many admirable qualities, as Jack's letter made abundantly clear. The book's directory listed Bob's Connecticut address — a very old address, to be sure, but one that might still provide a link to this long-ago friend. On impulse, I wrote to him, quoting from Jack's 1954 letter, sharing with him Jack's pleasure in the visit to his home thirty-six years ago when Jack was so far from his own. Two weeks later, my letter was returned, marked with the ultimate finality: "Deceased 2/8/88." Bob had died at an age when he too

would have enjoyed looking back to times when we were young, to times when tomorrow would last forever. My letter, long overdue, was a couple of years too late.

I was feeling down in the dumps yesterday, but I'm all right now. I guess it was just that I was sleepy and tired and was discouraged at the prospect of spending the next three months doing the same damned thing, day in and day out. Also, a couple of courses gave me some trouble yesterday and I was at a loss to understand how I could possibly find time to study more and do better. Somehow, though, I managed to really hit the books last night, and as a consequence I did very well today. I tried "letting up" last week, so as to relieve myself of some of the pressure, and although I found it easy to pass, I couldn't get myself to feel satisfied about it. So I guess I'll just have to reconcile myself to this ration of crap until I get commissioned next March, after which I can start living like a human being again. I think I'll start spending my Saturday nights in a hotel in town. That way I can get some sleep and won't have to get up early Sunday mornings, as I would have to if I stayed in the barracks.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 26 November 1954:

Classes are over for the week. It's Friday night and we are getting "base liberty" for the first time. That means that until 8:30 p.m. we have nothing to do. We can't go anywhere but at least we don't have to work. Some guys are leaving for the base movie and some are going across to Coasters Harbor Island, where the big Naval Exchange Shop is, to buy Christmas presents. "War Paint" is the movie, so that lets that out as far as I'm concerned; and I have no money at the present time to buy Xmas presents. I only have enough cash to buy myself a sumptuous dinner tomorrow evening; but next week will bring another payday, and then I'll be loaded again.

The ride I arranged for Christmas has pooped out, so I'm not certain how I'll come home. I might fly to Evansville or Louisville. You might have to help me out when it comes time to go back to dear ol' Newport. Of course, the important thing is to get home fast, not to get back to the base fast, so I could probably take a bus back to Newport, which wouldn't cost too much, probably not more than twenty-five dollars.

This is Friday, as I said before, and we got our weekly grades. Mine went like this: Engineering, 335; Navigation, 265; Operations, 375; Orientation, 380; Seamanship, 360, and Weapons, 340. I thus raised my average in everything except Navigation, in which I nevertheless have my highest accumulative grade. All in all, I'm doing pretty well.

King Company lost two officer candidates this week because of academic reasons. They've already moved on to Bainbridge, Maryland, where they'll go through boot camp and then serve out their two years of active duty as seaman apprentices. It was quite a blow to some of the boys who don't feel safe academically.

I had my billet interview today with one of the interviewing officers. It looks like one of two things is going to happen to me upon graduation: either I'm going on some type of auxiliary ship (cargo, tanker, transport, etc.) or else I'm going to communications school for twelve weeks and then to a small combatant ship (destroyer, destroyer escort, escort vessel, etc.). The latter, I think, is the most likely. In a way, both of them appeal to me.

In that same interview I was given the results of the battery of tests which were given to me soon after my arrival. My math was poor — 40 percentile, which means that sixty percent of all those who have taken the tests scored higher than I did. My other tests were fairly high, though: Word relationships, 69 percentile (thirty-one percent of former students scored higher); mechanical comprehension, 69 percentile; relative movement, 80 percentile, and spatial relations, 91 percentile. The tests proved what I've always suspected. I am not a genius. I'm somewhere in that happy middle-upperclass of bright but not ultra-bright individuals. That suits me. After all, I could have been born an idiot. Anyway, I'll just go my merry way, hiding my native stupidity behind a cloak of education.

We all got liberty Wednesday night and Thursday, and I went into town and got a plush room at the Viking hotel. I ate lobster for dinner at a seafood joint. (Seafood is amazingly cheap around here. With cocktail and all the rest, my check was only $3.50. The same meal would have cost me six dollars at Smitty's in Evansville.) And then I went back to the hotel, read for a while, and slept for ten hours. It doesn't sound like much, I guess, but take my word for it: It was wonderful! The most simple pleasures take on a divine quality after a week in the barracks. I can't afford a hotel room this weekend, but I'm going to get that dinner at least.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 27 November 1954:

I'm writing you again because I have several things to tell you which I don't want to forget. I consulted a travel agency in town today and have come to the conclusion that it is too expensive to fly home for Xmas. If I were going just one way, it would be cheaper to fly, but since I have to come back here, and since the railroads will sell round-trip tickets to service men for only a couple of dollars more than the one-way fare, I feel that I will have to choose the railroads. Of course, it will take me longer to get home, and I will have to ride

coach all the way, since Pullman does not offer that special round-trip deal, so I guess I can count on being quite uncomfortable during the twenty-four-hour trip. You can expect me on my birthday [19 December].

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 1 December 1954:

Please don't worry about having to give me any money. I don't need it and don't want you to give it to me. I wrote you before that you might have to help me get back to the base after Christmas, but that was because I wanted to get home quick and therefore was planning to fly. Now I have found that flying is just too expensive. I'll have to catch a train.

Also, please don't begrudge me any dinners or hotel rooms that I supply for myself. I have few enough pleasures around here as it is, and if I can take my eighty dollars a month and make the weekends as pleasant as possible, I intend to do so. I can't stand these barracks week after week. I never dreamed that it would irritate you to hear that I had spent some money for one decent, leisurely meal and one good night's sleep out of a whole week of lousy meals and short nights. This is not a pleasure cruise.

I found out today what I will do after graduation. I was the first in my section to be given any inkling as to what was going to happen after March 4. I'm going to communications school here at Newport for twelve weeks after I get my commission. I've already been given personal history forms to be filled out. They will be used by Naval Intelligence in clearing me for the assignment. I don't particularly like the idea of going to another school, but I figured it was worth it if I could thereby get into small combatant ships, which, as you know, is where I want to go. So I signed up for communications and got it right away. It will probably be quite pleasant going to school as an officer, and when I get out of that school I will probably be assigned as communications officer aboard a destroyer, probably in the Atlantic Fleet and perhaps in Europe. A communications officer reports to the ship's operations officer. He has access to all of the Navy's codes and signals, and for that reason he has to be cleared by Naval Intelligence.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 5 December 1954:

Well, there's not much to say this week. Things are as inevitable as the tides around here, and often just as dull. God, will I be glad when this is all over! Grades came out last Friday as usual and I'm still what is known around the OCS barracks as a "virgin," which is an OC who has not yet been awarded a "tree." There is some talk about starting a club called "The Ancient Order of Virgins," but I don't guess we will, because we'd be pretty lonely all by ourselves, with 90% of the guys belonging to a club that might be called "The

Ancient Order of Whores."

We had our pictures taken about a week ago for the class yearbook. The pictures should be pretty nice, because the photographers fixed us up with white officer jackets, blue and gold shoulder boards and officer caps before snapping us.

The beautiful white officer's jacket was a break-away garment designed to provide assembly-line efficiency to the task of photographing 375 officer candidates. The jacket, donned like a hospital smock and tied at the back, could be snatched off Jack's shoulders in an instant, as indeed it was, and then it could be used to decorate the next seaman apprentice waiting in line to get his picture taken.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 7 December, 1954:

I'm still plugging along. The company had its second swimming session this evening. We jumped off a twenty-foot-high ledge into a pool and swam underwater for thirty feet. This is supposed to prepare us for abandoning ship at sea. I hope I never have to. We have two more swimming sessions scheduled, damn it!

Boy, is it cold here! There's snow about four inches deep outside. It's a dry, cold snow that drifts all over the place. It fell yesterday in a horizontal fashion, if you know what I mean. The wind was blowing hard and cold. You can imagine how miserable I felt at grinder yesterday morning. I've never been so cold in my life. ("Grinder" is a word used to describe the getting together of the First and Second Battalions the first thing every morning. The OCs are inspected and sent off in sections to their various classes.)

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 12 December 1954:

I tried to call you last night, Mother, to wish you a happy thirty-ninth birthday, but no one answered the phone. I called about 6:15 p.m. (that's 7:15 for you), and, since I went on watch immediately afterwards, I couldn't get back to the telephone exchange to try again. I sure flubbed that one, didn't I? I should have sent you a card or something instead of assuming I could catch you at home when I called.

If the call was placed at 6:15 in Rhode Island, it was 5:15 in Indiana, not 7:15. The young man who wrote this letter was twenty-two years old, just a kid, and had never lived so far from home. Time zones confused him. The reference to his mother's thirty-ninth birthday was a family joke. Shirley Sellers turned forty-one in December of 1954.

I guess I'll be home by this time next week. That's something to look forward to. I'm not certain when they'll turn us loose this Friday. It might be noon and it might be 5 p.m. Of course I'm hoping it's the former. I have a ride with an OC who lives in Manhattan. I'll go as far as the George Washington Bridge with him, then catch a subway to Penn Station, and hop a train for the Midwest. I'll probably come home via Philly, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and Louisville. I might be home late Saturday night.

Yesterday my company went aboard a destroyer. The living spaces aboard those things are pretty cramped. I was impressed with the wardroom, though. (That's where the officers eat and hold meetings.) It had soft chairs, a tablecloth on the dining table, books and other little things that surely make it the most comfortable place on the ship. I hope this week passes quickly. I'll be happy to get home.

U.S. Naval Schools, Newport, Rhode Island, 15 December 1954:

Well, we are rid of the First Battalion. Three hundred shiny-faced young men were commissioned ensigns in the U.S. Navy at noon today. For a while this afternoon the whole base was flooded with junior officers. We, the humble seaman apprentices of the Second Battalion, made a special effort to salute them every chance we got. That made them feel good, because they wanted to impress the girls, wives and parents who were there for the occasion.

I'll sure be glad to hop into some civilian clothes this weekend. Everybody is rearing to go. Some of them are even counting the hours. It's difficult for me to concentrate on my studies. This should be a very nice Christmas.

Elsewhere in this final letter of 1954, Jack referred to the Meunchinger King Hotel, calling it the "strangest and most interesting" hotel he had ever seen. But another hotel, the Viking, with its modern rooms and furnishings, was by far the most popular hotel among officer candidates in Newport. The OCs stayed there on weekend nights when they could not bear to return to their sterile barracks, and visiting relatives stayed there, too, on the recommendation of the OCs. Jack checked into the Viking only once; thereafter, he spent his nights in town at the Meunchinger King, which he and very few others preferred. It was an old mansion that had been converted into a hotel. Every room was different. The hallways were marvelously crooked. They went this way and that, sometimes branching, often rising several steps to another level. It was an adventure just finding the room to which you were assigned. The rooms were cold but the mattresses were soft, reminiscent of featherbeds, and the quilts — hand-sewn *patchwork* quilts, for Christ's sake! — were provided generously.

The dining room was quaint, suggesting the 19th century. Small jars of preserves, marmalade and jelly sat in the center of lenin-covered tables. A bowl of creamed butter came with the toast, and coffee was served in ceramic pots. To Jack, a native of the Midwest, the place possessed the ambience of New England and the nostalgic soul of America itself. He never enjoyed a hotel more.