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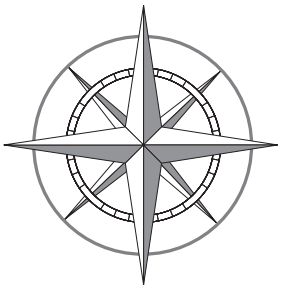

Pacific Youth

I WAS TEN YEARS OLD when we left for Manila. In 1953 international travel was rare, slow, and comfortable, and our family crossed the country by train and the Pacific by ship. In those distant days even very junior government employees like my father traveled first class.

Till then my universe had been a Brooklyn neighborhood evenly divided between Catholics and Jews. I walked to the nearby parochial school, and the Jews and the few Protestants attended the local public school. We all played stickball together in the street, pausing to let the occasional auto pass by. My mother, the tenth of eleven children, had been raised by older siblings after her own mother died and her father abandoned the family. My dad was raised in more prosperous circumstances, his father having risen from office boy to chief operating officer of a major American corporation. More than a dozen aunts and uncles and an even larger number of cousins lived within a few subway stops of our home, and relatives were constantly coming and going. One uncle occupied the third-floor apartment in our house. A cousin spent weekdays with us while his mother worked. Christmas and Thanksgiving celebrations were tumultuous, and

each summer the Dodgers faced off against the Yankees in the World Series. We could stand outside the local appliance store and watch the game through the window via the wonder of television.

Our family left from Grand Central Station, and arrived in Chicago the next morning. There we spent half a day sightseeing before boarding the California Zephyr. Once aboard, we dined on white linen as the country rolled by. As night fell I gazed out the window by my darkened bedside while the rhythm of the rails slowly brought on sleep, only to awaken as the train pulled into stations with place names hitherto encountered only in Saturday matinee Westerns.

In San Francisco we boarded the SS *President Cleveland*, one of the American President Line ships that sailed every few weeks from the West Coast to Hawaii, Japan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. The voyage to Manila took almost three weeks, with a day or two spent in each of the preceding ports, but there were movies, competitive sports, swimming, and other children to play with. This was not a cruise ship filled with vacationing retirees, but an ocean liner carrying businessmen, missionaries, and government officials and their families to and from their overseas postings.

My father was a lawyer with the Veterans Administration (VA). The Philippines had been an American colony until 1946, and thousands of Filipinos had fought at Bataan and Corregidor, and in subsequent resistance to Japanese occupation. These were all American veterans, and as a result, the VA's largest office was outside the United States.

During our voyage my two sisters and I heard our parents speak about the dangers posed in the Philippines by the presence of guerillas, which we assumed to be large simians. On arrival in Manila we moved into temporary quarters, a ground-floor apartment that backed onto a busy street. As each dawn approached, we could hear the calls of cocks, donkeys, and other less identifiable creatures. These, I assured my younger sisters, must be the beasts of which our parents had spoken.

In truth, the city proved quite safe, particularly for Americans. The United States had gained prestige and the affection of the Filipinos by liberating the country from a disagreeable Japanese occupation and then immediately granting it independence. Even the Communist insurgents (yes, there were guerillas) operating not far from Manila generally avoided targeting Americans, including those at the nearby U.S. air base at Clark Field. During our five years in the country, I never encountered anything

but courtesy and good humor from the local population, and I soon mastered the rather chaotic system of buses and jitneys that served as public transportation so was free to roam the city at a very young age.

After a few weeks, we moved into a walled compound with some half dozen houses surrounding a communal swimming pool and tennis court. We acquired a cook, two maids, a driver, and, after a younger brother was born, an amah. This establishment was pretty standard even for a quite junior American civil servant. In the early 1950s, the United States was very rich and the rest of the world very poor. The dollar was almighty.

I still remember the impressive names of our staff. The cook, Romeo, was soon replaced by Cornelius when the former's efforts to live up to his name discomforted the maids. The drivers were, successively, Ivanhoe and then Estolastico.

For two years I attended a Christian Brothers elementary school with one other American and one English boy. The rest of the students came from well-to-do Filipino and Spanish families, but instruction was in English. Although all my classmates were pleasant, helpful, and well able to converse in English, the three Anglos and the few native Spanish speakers formed a somewhat separate group. Thus to the extent I gained entry into local society at this stage, it was mostly among the country's former Spanish elites.

When I completed eighth grade my parents switched me to the local American school, called, appropriately enough, the America School. It was Manila's only international school and the students came from many countries, but instruction and social life were based on the American model. I joined a Filipino Boy Scout troop, but otherwise the next few years were spent largely in the company of my compatriots.

Because Manila was the VA's only foreign post, there was no regular rotation of personnel. Many of the American employees had been hired locally after World War II and were free to stay as long as they wished. Several had married Filipinas, raised families, and settled in for life. Certainly my parents had no desire to leave. We received six weeks of home leave every two years and, given the month-long travel time each way, the result was an extended break.

But in 1958 the VA decided to join other government agencies in rotating its overseas personnel every two to four years. This was disagreeable for my parents, and much more so for those who had put down deeper roots.

I was happy enough to be going home, as I would be able to spend my last year in a real American high school. I prevailed upon my parents to let me fly to New York alone several months ahead of the rest of the family. As I look back I wonder at their allowing a child just turned sixteen to set off on flights that took him to Wake Island, Midway, Honolulu, San Francisco, and, eventually, New York.

The transpacific leg of the journey was aboard a Pan American clipper, the interior of which was configured much like a Pullman rail car, with pull-down bunks that allowed one to sleep under sheets and blankets behind drawn curtains. Unfortunately, this comfortable and commodious aircraft had to refuel repeatedly, which meant that no sooner had one dozed off than it was time to get up and prepare for another landing.

I spent two nights at a beachfront hotel on Waikiki, and then several days in San Francisco at the home of a girlfriend whose parents had also been part of the VA community in Manila. My aunt and uncle met me when I arrived in New York, where I remained for the summer.

Our family returned not to Brooklyn but to Washington, D.C., where my father took a position at the VA headquarters. My senior year was straight out of *American Graffiti*; or rather, *American Graffiti* was straight out of the Eisenhower-era high school experience. Mine was in the Maryland suburbs, where students and teachers all were white, and the student body was divided socially between those headed to college and those taking shop.

I took a part-time job that allowed me to buy a ten-year-old Ford for $100, which opened up the social world of dating, drive-in restaurants, and movies. The work was door-to-door magazine sales and this had several benefits. It familiarized me with neighborhoods all over the city and its suburbs, it taught poise and instilled self-confidence, and it required maintaining a sunny disposition in the face of repeated rejection. I stuck with this job for most of the next five years, emerging with the knowledge that I was rather good at persuading people to buy things they did not need or even want—not a bad qualification for the world of diplomacy.

The mother of a friend asked me what I wanted to do with my life. Something involving overseas travel, I responded, recalling our Manila swimming pool and household staff. She suggested I consider applying to Georgetown University, which then had the country's only undergraduate school of international affairs. I did so and, in the fall of 1959, I joined the freshman class at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service.

Like almost everyone who passed through that school between 1941 and 1976, I was most impressed by the year-long course on the development of civilization taught by Carroll Quigley. He was a spellbinding lecturer who, by the time I got there, had thoroughly mastered his technique and his subject matter. For three hours every week he maintained the rapt attention of more than 100 freshmen as his discussions ranged from the ancient world to the twentieth century without ever consulting a note or pausing for breath. He made us read Homer, Plato, Thucydides, and other foundational books of Western civilization. His obituary, written some fourteen years after I took his course, said that Walsh school alumni found his "the most influential course in their undergraduate careers." Bill Clinton, who arrived at Georgetown the year I graduated, cited Quigley in his acceptance speech to the 1992 Democratic Convention.

With its heavy emphasis on history, economics, and political science, the Walsh school provided a good grounding for a career in diplomacy, and in the summer before my senior year, I took the written entry exam for the Foreign Service. To my surprise, I passed, and some months later I entered the State Department for the first time, to take the oral part of that exam.

The building occupied by the department, called New State, was but a year old and the second largest federal office structure in the country after the Pentagon. Like most other government agencies at the time, it was open to the public. On entry, visitors could consult the receptionist in the lobby or not, as they chose, before venturing further into the building. Today visitors are warned to allow at least fifteen minutes for screening before gaining entry.

My oral examination was conducted by a three-man panel made up of two senior Foreign Service officers and one public member. After ninety minutes of mild grilling I was asked to step outside. When called back in, I was told I had passed and would be offered a commission. Their only criticism, based on the written exam, was that I needed to improve my spelling, a deficiency never remedied.

I explained that I had already enlisted in the Navy and expected to attend Officer Candidate School on graduation. They assured me that the department would hold open the appointment until my military service was completed. I was twenty years old and it would be forty years before I had to look for another job.

Getting into Officer Candidate School (OCS) was comparatively easy. Getting out successfully was the single hardest thing I have ever done. I

reported for duty in July 1963, and for the next four months my classmates and I were subjected to relentless pressure. Contrary to the depiction in the film *An Officer and a Gentleman*, no physical hardship was involved; no runs, hikes, or calisthenics, and certainly no instruction in hand-to-hand combat. We did march in formation everywhere, and for punishment marched some more, but that was the extent of the physical demands.

The pressure was, in part, academic. Courses in engineering, navigation, and seamanship were pretty daunting for liberal arts majors, or, in my case, international affairs. After a few frightening weeks, however, it became clear to me that I would pass academically by a safe margin. Of more enduring concern was the steadily increasing number of demerits I was accruing, which could eventually preclude graduation.

Demerits were awarded for every imaginable infraction: a single thread out of place on a uniform; a speck of tarnish on a belt buckle; books and underwear not arranged in the precisely mandated order in one's locker; shoes not shined to the prescribed level of refraction; marching out of step; arriving five seconds late for any event or movement. The system was one of extreme, apparently pointless regimentation, combined with inadequate sleep, voluminous course work, and endless harassment from only slightly more senior cadets.

There was, of course, a point to all this. The intent was to apply maximum mental pressure with a view to washing out a significant proportion of aspiring officers and teaching the remainder habits of order, discipline, and stress management. Washing out held no mild consequences. We were already in the Navy. Those who failed to complete the course did not go home; they went to boot camp at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, and then on to the fleet as a lowly seaman apprentice. The prospect of this fate led one of my classmates to attempt suicide, not an unusual occurrence. In this respect the similar incident portrayed in *Officer and Gentleman* was quite accurate.

That movie reflected another, happier reality. Newport, Rhode Island, a lovely summer resort, lay just outside the gate, and we were set loose after parade each Saturday morning and not expected to be back before Sunday evening. Hundreds of young ladies descended on Newport Beach from Boston and beyond each Saturday night to socialize with aspiring naval officers. Woe to any of us who failed to reappear at the barracks by Sunday evening, but until then we were on our own. The contrast between the freedom and possibilities of a Saturday evening and the stress

and regimentation behind and before us only heightened the exhilaration of the moment.

Another feature of our apprenticeship was a particularly unpleasant form of peer rating. We were all required to respond, in writing, to a questionnaire that had us comment on the failings of our classmates. Some days later we were each interviewed by the officer responsible for overseeing the military aspects of our development. The setting was strange, like a confessional, in which the aspirant was directed into a closet-size room to be grilled by his superior through a sort of transparent screen. After reviewing my less than spotless record for military punctilio, this officer informed me that my classmates found me to be an arrogant, supercilious jerk. This was disconcerting, as doubtless was the intention. I became more subdued and deferential for a few weeks, but I doubt this revelation improved my social skills for any longer than that.

The OCS experience was much like pledging a fraternity, something I had done at Georgetown. There was the same hazing by more senior classmates, the same effort to break down one's self-regard to instill solidarity in hardships overcome and pride in entry into an exclusive society. And it worked. Toward the end of the course, a physician told me I had flat feet and offered to have me classified 4F; that is, physically unfit for military service. Since I had already passed the Foreign Service exam, this meant I could avoid any military obligation and embark directly on my chosen career. But I was hooked, determined to graduate and don the uniform of a naval officer, and I begged the doctor to do no such thing.

I was commissioned on November 22. My parents came for the event. Following the ceremony we drove into Newport to visit the summer homes of the Gilded Age rich, but as we pulled up in front of Commodore Vanderbilt's "cottage," The Breakers, the car radio reported that President Kennedy had been shot. The sun went out, my parents went home, and I spent what should have been a celebratory weekend looking out at a cold rain and watching somber television coverage.

I spent the following three years aboard the USS *Bon Homme Richard*, an attack aircraft carrier in the Pacific. I was able to visit, once again, the places I had known as a child—Hawaii, Japan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. We also spent a month sailing through the Indian Ocean, the first carrier to do so since World War II. The Shah of Iran flew aboard the carrier at one point, and our pilots put on an air show, bombing the open ocean and breaking the sound barrier a few hundred feet overhead. The

Shah was duly impressed and purchased American weapons throughout the rest of his reign.

By mid-1964 the conflict in Vietnam was heating up and we spent more of our time sailing around the Gulf of Tonkin launching what were called "armed reconnaissance flights." Our planes took off with full bomb loads and returned empty, or didn't return. A young aviator in the bunk above mine was one of those who didn't come back.

On August 4 I stopped by the ship's Combat Information Center on my way to the bridge, where I was to stand the mid-watch. Two days earlier North Vietnamese torpedo boats had attacked an American destroyer, the USS *Maddox*, that had been operating in the gulf under the overall command of our captain. On this evening I overheard the highly confused voice communications between the *Maddox* and a second destroyer, the *Turner Joy*, operating deep in the gulf. We listened as these two ships maneuvered and fired at what they believed to be North Vietnamese torpedo boats.

Before the sun set again President Johnson had gone on national television to announce that the North Vietnamese had twice attacked our ships. He asked Congress for authorization to respond militarily, and this was quickly granted in what became known as the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. A couple of days later the *Maddox* came alongside the *Bon Homme Richard* to refuel, by which time the episode and the ship had become world famous.*

After the Gulf of Tonkin incidents, all pretense of restraint was abandoned; thereafter, a new rhythm developed. We would spend a month off Vietnam launching combat missions, then three days in Subic Bay, the big U.S. Navy base north of Manila, following which we would resume bombing North and South Vietnam. Our six-month deployment extended to ten. When we finally returned to San Diego, ours had been the U.S. Navy's longest cruise since the end of World War II. Four months later we returned to the war.

The very monotony of this life at sea had its appeal. Every day was the same; the same horizon, the same routine, the same people. We had no newspapers, no radio, no television, and certainly no Internet. Life was

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*Subsequent inquiry revealed that, while a North Vietnamese attack had occurred on August 2, the incident two days later was more likely a case of overly jumpy commanders responding to ambiguous radar and sonar signals.

comfortable enough. Each stateroom contained two desks, two chairs, and two bunks. Laundry and linen service were provided by the ship's stewards, who were all either African American or Filipino. Stewards also cooked and served meals in the wardroom where we dined each night on white linen, and there was a movie every night for those not standing watch.

We junior officers headed divisions of fifty to one hundred men. Since most of the men knew their jobs much better than we did, our responsibilities were not very onerous. I was in charge of the division that controlled the ship's antiaircraft guns. Some of these weapons were of World War II vintage, guided by a mechanical computer the size of a small automobile. Other guns were newer; their computer systems might have fit into a large steamer trunk. At one point, I decided I should have some basic understanding of what my men did and, accordingly, got hold of the textbook used to train aspirant fire controlmen third class, the lowest rating. Two chapters in, I gave up. The material was much too complex for me.

The most challenging of our duties was watch standing. This task came with progressively more responsibility as one moved from subordinate positions to become qualified as officer of the deck. For the duration of a four-hour watch this individual was in effective control of the ship, subject only to the orders of the captain or the executive officer. The captain spent much of his day on the bridge; the executive officer spent nearly all of his below decks, and, normally, neither was on the bridge at night. For these hours, the officer of the deck maneuvered the ship and its accompanying escorts according to plans provided him when he assumed charge. As the largest ship in the battle group, and with the most senior captain, the carrier was always in tactical command of its escorts. These included three or four destroyers, and often one or two auxiliary ships from which we were to refuel or replenish stores and ammunition. The newer, larger carriers often carried an admiral who controlled the movements of the formation; but the *Bon Homme Richard* was a less commodious, World War II vintage vessel so we went through the war without a flag officer aboard.

One morning while the captain was attending to business far below decks, the Combat Information Center alerted me that two unidentified radar contacts, surface ships, were closing on our task force, traveling a speed of fifty knots. If these were North Vietnamese torpedo boats I did not want them to get anywhere near the carrier. I ordered one of our

accompanying destroyers to intercept and investigate, even as I called for the captain to return to the bridge. We soon learned that these were American, not North Vietnamese craft. I was later told that I had caused the cancellation, or at least the postponement, of a clandestine operation to insert agents into North Vietnam. I was also assured that it was their fault, not mine, for not alerting us that they would be entering our area of operations.

Conning an aircraft carrier accompanied by up to half a dozen other vessels through the night only a few dozen miles off the enemy shore; passing not infrequently through swarms of North Vietnamese fishing boats; assigning newly arriving ships their place in the formation; steering a complex zigzag course; determining how many of the ship's boilers would need to be lit to provide adequate wind over the deck for flight operations as dawn approached; watching the colorful choreography as the flight deck crews, in multihued jerseys, armed and maneuvered the F-8 Crusader fighters, the A-4 jet bombers, and the A-1 prop attack aircraft for takeoff; then increasing speed and turning the entire formation into the wind as the captain came on the bridge: these were awesome responsibilities for a twenty-three-year-old lieutenant junior grade. It would be decades before I would experience anything comparable.

Our ship spent the last six months of my active duty in dry dock at Long Beach, a suburb of Los Angeles. There was little work for the crew to do, and, like many others aboard, I moved to a nearby beach community and pursued an active social life. Several nights a week, I drove up to Beverly Hills to see the girl I had met more than a decade earlier in Manila and had visited on my way back from there in San Francisco.

The ship eventually completed its repairs and went out to sea for an initial shakedown cruise, and as the senior and most experienced watch stander aboard, I had the honor of taking the ship out into the Pacific one last time. On our return to port a few days later I saluted the quarter deck and walked down the gangway for the final time.