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Twenty-five years compressed into a page. An assignment that conjures up memories of the hallucinatory essays we used to crank out for freshman English the midnight before. (If Dostoyevsky had written Moby Dick, and Bartleby the Scrivener had been First Mate of the Pequod....)

First the facts, then the gloss: no pets, one wife, two kids, three degrees, four stripes, five aircraft, six articles, and about a dozen moves. In short, the Navy. First as a pilot, then as a lawyer.

Just guessing, but I am probably one of a small handful of i969ers still on active duty in the armed services. Maybe the sole remnant of the tide of Navy OCS commissions that sheltered many in our class from the unpleasantness in Southeast Asia. For me, what began as a temporizing move became a career metamorphosis.

Reported to flight school during graduation summer. Brief tour in Vietnam at the tail end of the war. Played peekaboo with a few tracers, but nothing with my name on it. Realized after another two years of being a stick jockey that flying was a postfraternity avocational interest, not a life’s work. Parts is parts, machines are machines.

Eventually talked the Navy into a lateral arabesque from the flight line to the law library. (Exchanging a $20 million aircraft for a $200 desk was a tough sell to the brass.) Unable to use my ticket to Yale Law due to the Hebert rule (students on federal scholarships not permitted to attend schools which had defenestrated their ROTC programs), so ended up at University of Virginia Law School in 1974.

Meanwhile, had married my steady girlfriend, Mary Ellen Ciarletto (Albertus Magnus ’69). A lot of fun then, a lot of fun now. Doubles as a trophy wife when circumstances suggest. Co-owner of the kids, mortgages, and daily thrash—what Zorba fondly referred to as “the whole catastrophe.” During the past twenty years she has bumped around with me to duty stations in Florida, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Guam. We have come to savor the enduring satisfactions of middle-class middle age.

Am currently plunked down in the Pentagon, as house counsel and a policy planner for the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict. Translation: We have the Department of Defense portfolio for peacekeeping and what the Marines euphemistically used to call “small wars.” In a post-Cold War security environment it is often difficult to distinguish the damsel from the dragon. That used to be true at a lot of mixers, too.

Am also part of a team working to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Trouble. A regrettable spin-off of the technological diaspora of the last fifty years has been the growing capacity for individuals and small groups to indulge in mass mayhem. We should not expect nuclear weapons to show up in the Penny’s catalog, but the trend is ominous. Even more dangerous is the darkside potential of bioengineering. Our children are the last generation to be safe.

By the time you read this, I will have moved on from the five-sided wind tunnel on the Potomac. Having been to see the wizard, my next duty station will be the Navy’s version of Kansas (Norfolk, Virginia), where I am being posted as the Judge Advocate for the Atlantic Fleet. Analogous to being managing partner for a smallish firm (seventy-five attorneys) with branch offices in Iceland, Bermuda, Key West, the Azores, Quantanamo Bay, Cuba, and other naval installations east of the Mississippi and west of Oz.

My two daughters have wildly different appraisals of my time with the Navy. Eight-year-old Melissa once described me to a playmate as “the Captain of the Pentagon.” Our fourteen-year-old Rebecca has a more realistic slant: “Well, you know, he’s a lawyer who like has to wear this uniform thing, write all this weird secret stuff, travel around to strange places, and talk on the phone more than I get to.” Exactly. A great opening sentence for my retirement resume.