

ROYAL NAVAL COLLEGE, GREENWICH

from George Plawski

For openers, I can unequivocally stand by the claim that the nine months spent at Greenwich College, for all of us who were fortunate enough to have been sent there, remain as the most uniquely unrivalled experience of our naval career.

Our appetite for Greenwich was richly stoked well before our arrival.

As Midshipmen, we were frequently regaled by our predecessors with tales of ingenious mischief and undetected crime committed in an atmosphere of elegant permissiveness. Like a banquet which follows a wedding, we looked forward to the prospect as a natural corollary to our recent promotion to Sub Lieutenant.

How indelibly ingrained that event remains for us all, when following what felt like epochs of servile drudgery as cadets and midshipmen, we were finally elevated to that seemingly unattainable rank.

Only the pinning on of wings rivals the moment when we first paraded those coveted gold rings now embracing our egos as firmly as our sleeves; what a definitive symbol of status; what a decisive statement of achievement; what an irresistible magnet for girls.

Prior to boarding the ship for England we were accorded leave; surely a deliberately staged interlude by our wise superiors who knew from experience the transitory nature of this self congratulatory phase in which they permitted us briefly to strut before adoring families and friends.

For Larry Washbrook and me, that meant a trip to Vancouver.

To accomplish this, we engaged the services of the Air Movements Unit, incontestably the most useful component of the RCAF, which transported us to Trenton in a DC3. It was there in the billiard room that Larry's newly sewn on stripes began to show signs of insubordination. The sad fact emerged that, whatever her other talents may have been, Larry's girl friend was not a gifted seamstress. She had managed to attach the bottom part of the stripes with some success, but the top part with the tricky executive curls was clearly beyond her, which now detached and flapped forlornly like drying butterflies' wings.

Strange looks from the crabfats convinced Larry that something should be done, so he continued the game in his greatcoat.

We were fortunate to find seats to Edmonton the following day, with an overnight connection to Vancouver. Standby travel with the RCAF, however, was always uncertain, so for the return journey we reluctantly made a reservation with TCA. We became very nervous during the last week of leave as our daily inquiries revealed that no seats appeared to be available with Transport Command.

Just as we became resigned to having to cough up the money, we got word that there may be space on a C119 Box Car scheduled to leave for Trenton on the day of our TCA departure.

Accordingly, our parents first drove us to the AMU at Sea Island. Luck was a lady that night, as just before having to drive across to the TCA terminal our names were called, and with colossal relief we strapped into the webbed parachute seating along the side of the cavernous fuselage.

Just how lucky we were would not become apparent till the following day.

We huddled bravely in the unheated barn like space which acted like an echo chamber in magnifying the startlingly unnerving concussions which were produced, we were eventually told, by chunks of ice being flung off the props against the fuselage. Though frozen and deaf, we disembarked happy to have saved the air fare.

We heard the news the next morning.

TCA flight 810, the North Star on which we held reservations the previous day, took off behind us and crashed on Mount Slesse in the Cascade Range killing all 62 on board. [December 9th, 1956]

Our departure for England was scheduled for the 18th of Dec., from Montreal.

We were booked in First Class, as our new status dictated, on the Cunard liner Empress of Britain.

Before boarding, however, we were to act as the Guard of Honour at our classmate Hugh MacNeil's wedding, which took place in Hudson, PQ, on the 15th of December.

It was a spectacular occasion, and it was a privilege to guide Hugh and Alison under our outstretched swords to a grand career and a lifetime of happiness.

Our crossing was memorable for the lavish dining in our prescribed part of the ship, and the great parties in the proscribed steerage section aft.

The challenge, which we accepted in the interest of democratising the class barrier, was to sneak ladies into our cabins past the censorious eyes of the staff.

As we celebrated our last evening on board, the ship inched towards Liverpool immersed in a champion example of one of those impenetrable British fogs.

Early next morning, as the visibility lifted slightly, the Harbour Master was startled to notice that the liner now entering his port was flying a Jolly Roger from the mainmast.

He communicated his query to the equally surprised Captain, and it wasn't long before my steward, expressing an acute sense of urgency, roused me to inform me that it was imperative to affect an immediate departure by the first available brow to avoid what appeared to be a mustering firing squad.

Noticing my condition, he filled the bath with ice water while feverishly packing my bags.

"You got five minutes, Sir! Who are your partners in crime?" he demanded as he immersed me unceremoniously in the tub, my hands still smeared with the shoe polish with which the pirate symbol had been applied to a bed sheet.

Poirier and Washbrook, I squealed.

He disappeared immediately to rouse my companions, and presently our dazed and tousled trio paused for breath a safe distance from the ship.

It was Xmas Eve; we had no orders and no plans and Greenwich didn't open till the 6th of January.

Imperceptibly the grip of my hangover relaxed sufficiently to permit me to concoct a strategy.

I had been corresponding with a lassie in Ireland whom I had met on a visit to Belfast in the Algonquin earlier that year. I dug out her number and phoned.

Oh, well, Hello there,... Liverpool you say,...yes, naturally it would be nice to see you, though admittedly it IS a touch awkward really, what with Xmas tomorrow and family functions and that sort of thing, and with so preciously little advance notice, ... but what the heck, OK, why don't you pop over.

I eagerly accepted her kind invitation, but there is one little complication I felt obliged to mention,.... I'm with a couple of friends.

The sticky wicket line emerged after a considerable pause, but her recovery was brave and in keeping with the season's spirit, so ... Of course! She agreed, it would be unseemly to leave the poor fellows behind, therefore yes, I must bring them along and she'll see what.....

We were duly met at the ferry by my friend Gloria, accompanied by two young ladies, one of them of an appropriate height as a match for Larry, and we spent the next 3 days bivouacked with generous families which graciously accorded their hospitality to complete strangers.

However, it soon became obvious that due to the even more demanding festivities of the approaching New Year, our continued visit posed the embarrassing prospect of depleting three households of their liquour, so by mutual consent we parted company and transplanted ourselves to London.

We reported to the Canadian Joint Staff to collect our first duty free allowance, which for our rank amounted to 8 forty ounces a month, drew an advance in pay and settled into the Royal Hotel in Russell Square.

It was an adventuresome stay, and if any of you have the opportunity to check into this hotel, you might be startled to discover, wandering its corridors, a slightly bewildered ghost in the shape of a dripping wet, entirely naked young lady.

Do not be alarmed, - there is no malice in this apparition, - she is only a gossamer echo of an amusing event which Larry might be induced to flesh out for your edification, and to which, with sufficient encouragement, he might even be persuaded to supply the sequel.

For me personally, to visit London again was to return to an environment in which I had spent two exceptionally impressionable years as a child refugee, from 1946 to 1948, after escaping from Communist occupied Poland.

This foreign, fantastic metropolis, so full of novel, sense numbing sights and sounds, often frightening yet endlessly fascinating, managed somehow to ensnare my imagination, a feeling which endures to this day.

It was where this twelve year old had to adapt to a mystifying culture, attempt to absorb an impossibly bewildering language, and re acquaint himself with his father, a stranger after seven years of separation.

I became very familiar with the city due to my passion for discovery which consisted of spending the weekends endlessly traipsing around on buses.

For my father, my eccentric yet highly motivated curiosity proved particularly convenient since, as the Chief of Staff of the Free Polish Navy in exile, he was at that time intensely occupied with the task of directing the resettlement of the now superfluous Polish military personnel, and my

obsession afforded him a welcome respite from parenting duties. [My mother was still stuck in Poland and would not enact her remarkable escape till the summer of '47]

On the 6th of January, we dutifully reported to the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, whose impressive domed and colonnaded facade, originally designed as a naval hospital by Christopher Wren, then re designated as a naval college in 1873, would be our home for the next nine months.

The Hall Porter, imperiously flush with savvy gravity, greeted us in the skilfully rehearsed manner appropriate to a bemused but respectful butler.

We returned the gesture fumbling for some credible facsimile of the still unrehearsed role of Officers and Gentlemen.

We were joining, we discovered, a medley of Subbies from most of the Commonwealth countries, balanced at the Neanderthal end by a contingent of Royal Marines freshly released from action in the Suez.

The primary mission assigned to the RN College was to impart a civilising veneer to the Sub Lieutenants of the RN and the other navies, whose mode of entry lacked the refinement provided by our Military Colleges or University ROTP.

It was a meticulously crafted finishing school which served as a prelude to the technical Sub Lieutenants' courses to follow.

The next morning we mustered in the auditorium for the welcoming address.

The CO, Captain Roper, exuded the air of a typical RN hankie in the sleeve and poker up the butt stuffed shirt, but the rest of the staff, both Navy and civilian, appeared entirely approachable.

Mornings, we discovered, were to be devoted to the academic portion of the curriculum, and afternoons to elective subjects.

The former included lectures on naval history, physics, maths, English composition, etc. while the electives available to us had no limits. We were encouraged to choose any subject we wished, and if this meant engaging Bertrand Russell to teach symbolic logic or commissioning George Balanchine for a course in classical ballet, this would be arranged.

We were all assigned personal tutors, and just to illustrate the calibre of resident instructors, mine happened to be Professor Alan Bullock, the scholar of German history and already the acclaimed author of "Hitler, a Study in Tyranny".

There were no watches to stand, no curfew to keep, no duties to perform; our linen was laundered, uniforms pressed and shoes shined by our own batman who awakened us each morning with a cuppa; we had the use of billiard tables, tennis courts and a bowling alley, and banqueted daily in the James Thornhill decorated Painted Hall which happened to be one of the finest dining galleries in the Western World.

We could take swimming lessons, tennis instruction, or play golf at premier courses for ridiculously low rates. Our pay, already the equivalent of a Royal Navy Lcdr, was supplemented by foreign allowance and further augmented by a generous per diem during the college's periodic holiday closures.

We could purchase duty free tobacco and liquor, had the choice of two bars, and The Yacht, a renowned ancient pub, obliged Thames side just outside the gate.

Moreover, it was not necessary to pass the exams.

This inspired the Royal Marines to apply a unique solution to a physics test; stumped by the lack of questions relating to carnage and destruction, they submitted an essay describing the tactics to be employed when besieging the defences of a small town. This assignment somehow caught fire on the bewildered and now considerably alarmed instructor's desk.

The Marines proved equal to the challenge; a fire brigade was organised with exemplary efficiency; two squads brandishing fire hoses doubled in step into the classroom and on the order: FIRE! - engaged their objective in a saturating cross stream.

Their zeal cleared the occupants, brought down the chandelier and scattered burning papers all over the room which required they be disposed of out the window, their smoking descent strafed by the twin hoses right down to the sidewalk which resulted in the accidental soaking of two startled passersby, subsequently identified as the Admiral President of the College accompanied by the Minister of Public Works.

If you Doubting Thomases disbelieve any of this, it comes from an unimpeachable eye witness and future Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff, Hugh MacNeil.

So there!

.....I lied.

There was in fact one exam we were expected to pass, on the subject of Naval History, which was deemed as the minimum requirement for justifying the nine month stay.

We were also encouraged to contribute an essay on the topic of our choosing.

For his offering, Larry volunteered a surprising choice by submitting a treatise on the History of the American Theatre.

Apart from attending a performance of "The Pajama Game" at the Coliseum, his passion for this subject had heretofore remained unrevealed.

Imagine our surprise when his tutor not only rewarded his perceptive penetration of this theme with a solid "A", but proudly disseminated it to other instructors.

It was while it was doing its rounds that one of the recipients discerned some similarity to a book he happened to have read.

As a result, Larry's tutor felt obliged to advance a discussion on the distinctions separating the concepts of Research, - copying from numerous sources – and Plagiarism, - copying from a single authority.

Larry lost his A, but remained credited for the thoroughness of his precise, though unattributed, quotation.

Among our several electives, Charlie Poirier and I decided to expand our musical horizons, he by taking up the Spanish guitar, while the Chopin in me earnestly desired to satisfy an unrequited ambition to learn to play the piano.

Sadly, the schism created by the guitar teacher's insistence on the need to cut the nails of one hand while cultivating those of the other affronted Charlie's sense of symmetry sufficiently to cause an irreconcilable split.

I on the other hand reported to the piano room primed finally to reify my dream, and eagerly awaited my professor who happened to be the college organist.

For some reason he failed to arrive; a venial setback, I decided, and showed up punctually for the next lesson. Again he neglected to appear, which prompted me to launch some inquiries. These revealed that the gentleman in question was in the habit of holding court at The Yacht in the afternoons; I was not encouraged to rely on his participation, and a budding Paderewski was thus muted forever.

The effect of too much time on the hands coupled with a surfeit of disposable tender steered us irrevocably in the direction of mayhem, for which it turned out we displayed a natural aptitude. In this regard we were only acting as members of a relay team, carrying the baton passed to us by our predecessors who themselves had set a formidable standard. We learned that Canadians from one of the earlier classes succeeded in leading an elephant onto the hallowed parade ground at Whale Island entirely disrupting the passing out parade, while another group, dressed in City of London coveralls, armed with tools, flags and tape, established a work site on Piccadilly. Engaging the cooperation of the unsuspecting Constabulary to direct traffic around it, they pulverised a section of macadam, then seemingly pausing for a tea break, vanished from sight.

Tough acts to follow indeed; we never did reach such lofty levels of lunacy, but some of our capers are still enjoyable to recall.

We began gingerly with gateway misdemeanours designed to test the boundaries of tolerance.

Unwilling to wreak acts of destruction ourselves, we found it amusing to mobilise others to the task, and were quick to note that the Royal Marines required a minimum of provocation to start a full blown riot.

It was common for the instructors and college staff to gather in the billiard room, which housed the College bar, for a civilised tot before dinner.

The inciting moment, with remarkable punctuality, arrived 45 minutes after the opening when the Marines were just starting their fourth pint. This was the cue for Charlie to enter unobtrusively from a side door and roll a Canadian football into the centre of the throng.

An instant of tantalised silence accompanied the last errant throes of the ball, followed by a screaming scrum intolerant of all obstruction. The Marines instinctively understood that possession constituted the sole objective of the exercise, and all surfaces including billiard tables, the bar or fallen bystanders were in play.

The dinner announcement would call the skirmish to a halt; the bar staff would sweep up the debris, reassemble the room, and Admiral Fisher's damaged scowl would once more dominate the austerity of the space.

During our tenure, our trio were by no means the only ones dedicated to the gestation of sport and shenanigans. There were numerous ingeniously perpetrated escapades in which we missed participating. One of these involved a group which invaded the Army training facility at Sandhurst with a car filled with straw and studded with firecrackers. With the steering wheel tied to a pre set angle, they set the straw on fire and released the vehicle to careen in flaming circles around the parade ground, then used the ensuing chaos to smuggle an abducted Subaltern out of the gate to Greenwich. He was subsequently delivered back to Sandhurst resplendent in the uniform of an RN Sub Lieutenant.

Another infamous caper concerned the celebrated schooner Cutty Sark which majestically ruled a dry dock just inside the west gate. Returning to the College late one night, we were confounded by the sight of this entire ship's rigging, from topsail to bowsprit, festooned with buntings of toilet paper. It was impossible not to marvel at the sheer audacity of the act which foretold only one of two possible consequences: an OBE or a court martial.

We knew a decision had been reached when our batmen awakened us with a message from the CO to muster forthwith on the parade square. We hardly had time to admire the true extent of the adornment revealed by the morning light when we were brought to attention.

Captain Roper was in blistering form.

We learned from him that Her Majesty was scheduled to inspect the Cutty Sark that very afternoon, and the Queen's Secretary could be expected to find fault with this method of dressing ship, presumably on the grounds that it failed to comply with orthodoxies enshrined in QRRN Communications manuals.

Therefore, the persons responsible, two steps forward, MARCH!

Four unsteady RN subbies mustered out of the ranks and were escorted on the double in the direction of the ship. We later learned that the task of removing the offending ornamentation proved unexpectedly difficult for three of the participants due to their sobriety, in which condition, deprived of last night's devolution to a more primal tree climbing state, they could only clear the least challenging hangings; their leader, recently commissioned after years of instructing in tall ships, singlehandedly removed the rest.

For our trio, the compellingly addictive attractions of delinquency dictated that we evolve beyond low level pranks to more serious misdemeanours.

Successful criminals are typically characterised by a mastery of some particular skill, and though we were not formally aware of this fact, we instinctively adopted this pattern. For us, this specialisation consisted of stealthy or surreptitious entry. Proficiency in this art is indispensable as a pre condition for a variety of aspirations and as useful as a skeleton key.

For reasons similar to those which justify why people climb mountains, our targets became girls' boarding schools. Charlie and I succeeded to gain entry into what we presumed to be unoccupied premises near Greenwich, and after leaving romantic billet doux's inscribed in lipstick on the washroom mirrors, we suddenly realised that our presence had been discovered.

There ensued a highly satisfying escape from well motivated pursuers through a labyrinth of dark and unfamiliar corridors culminating in a heroic vault over a towering fence into Greenwich Park to evade a guard dog.

On a subsequent school raid, we allowed ourselves to be joined by a group of inadequately trained RN wannabees which proved to be a disaster when one of these accidentally blundered into the adjoining building causing the startled occupants of a bedroom to call the police. This might have resulted in much unpleasantness except for the pedigreed common sense of the British Bobbies who, upon ascertaining our identity as subbies from Greenwich, judged our frolic excusable on grounds of juvenile exuberance and dismissed us on the promise of good behaviour.

To keep our side of the bargain, we were obliged to move our enterprises away from the College. Indispensable to this undertaking was a getaway car, which Charlie and I procured in the form of a-thirties-something Vauxhall for the sum of 20 pounds. The vehicle possessed a

disconcerting habit of burning more oil than petrol, and though recalcitrant on the starter, it never failed to rev up after a vigorous push.

Though there was no shortage of volunteers eager to accompany us on our nightly endeavours, the above experience taught us to keep our group small. We recognised, however, that due to our giveaway accents, much could be gained from enlisting an acquiescent Brit. After screening potential accomplices, we settled on Hugh Willis, as much for his fearlessness and daring as for his irrepressible good humour.

Our motorised foursome could now scout further afield, and presently we settled on yet another girls' school, this time somewhere in Knightsbridge. We approached our target under cover of darkness to examine our options. Steps descended to a sub terrenal entrance which could not be breached, nor could we open the main entrance door to its left, but between them, a window on the first floor offered a promising prospect. As it was too high to reach from the sidewalk, Charlie improvised a human ladder wherein he would act as the lower rungs, and Larry, standing on his shoulders, would provide the extension. This ingenious arrangement worked splendidly, and presently Larry was up there manipulating the window when an unforeseen *défaut de construction* became evident in the form of a tilt to the right. No more than the Tower of Pisa at first, this displacement unfortunately embodied momentum, and now Hugh and I perceived Newtonian physics in action where Larry was about to play the role of the apple.

The height of the fall would technically only measure the distance, foreshortened by his burden-bowed legs, from Charlie's shoulders to the sidewalk. With Charlie grimly gripping Larry's feet, however, this dictated a trajectory the 3 o'clock apex of which terminated directly over the sub terrenal vault. Once begun, stabilising this living pyramid was out of the question; toppling like Big Ben's minute hand in freefall, Larry described a slow motion arc and disappeared into the abyss.

A terrifying silence followed the dull thud.

Instantly we swarmed down the steps. Larry was out cold, but he was still breathing. Our first aid training kicked into gear, and a life saving bottle of rum was administered to his lips. The effect was immediate and encouraging. Larry reacted to the medicine like a baby to a mother's breast. We helped him up to the sidewalk and propped him against a wall. There was blood behind the ear, and his eyes swam in uncoordinated circles, but clearly he was going to survive. We bundled him into the car and for the rest of the trip, like a stuck record, he kept repeating the same question: what the hell happened?

Our final caper was staged in Cambridge and was entirely unplanned. Ostensibly we drove there to visit a chum on a Rhodes scholarship, but mainly in search of adventure. After pub closing time, while executing some general mayhem in the dormitories, we lost track of Larry in the dark. He smoked in those days, and now the glow of his cigarette betrayed his position across an open square. In stage whispers I gave him directions, and we observed his progress by watching the loping arc of his fag as he trotted toward us. Suddenly there was a crack; the cigarette's trajectory catapulted upwards and in a succession of little circles descended to the ground. We located Larry in the vicinity of a kerb surrounding a statue which adorned the centre of the square, and escorted him to the Vauxhall.

As we drove through slumbering Cambridge, we passed a church, its spire a black tusk piercing the star studded sky. The association linking spires and church bells must have struck us simultaneously; we stopped and piled out of the car.

An inspection of the obvious entrances disclosed that the building was forbiddingly locked; decidedly not the anticipated condition for a house of worship which I assumed should be ready night and day to embrace a penitent in need of emergency spiritual attention.

A further search, however, revealed a basement window round the back which resembled a loading chute. When this eventually succumbed to our ministrations, we were confronted with a stygian black hole which sucked in all hint of purpose, depth or content. As usual, only Hugh possessed the recklessness required to unfathom this chartless mystery; gently he lowered himself inside, and as he let go, he landed in something that felt like a pile of rubble. One by one we tumbled inside; collecting ourselves into a group, we groped along a wall finding a door which opened with a disquieting screech on what seemed like a stairwell. We stopped, and the tomb like silence magnified every breath and shuffle, stiffening our neck hairs and honing our alertness to levels of hunted quarry.

Are churches haunted, I wondered?

Surely the priests must be trained to perform some kind of regular exorcistic defumigation. Could one be overdue?

We inched our way along the stairs gripping each other like the blind men in a Breughel painting till we emerged in what may have been the vestry. Another door and we were inside the church; now we could start orienting ourselves by the glimmer of starlight seeping through the stained glass windows. After identifying the altar, we crept along the nave past the transept and then, near the stairs leading up to the choir, there it was!

Coiled around a wall fitting, its accessibility testifying to a disciplined congregation, the rope, like a ready fuse, dangled provocatively from the blacked out firmament above.

Larry uncoiled what was now the tail end of a satanic snake and gave it a vigorous pull.

A fearsome metallic clang shattered the solemn gloom!

As we took turns on the rope, the night roiled with harrowing alarm; the clamour alerted the resident detachment of negligent guardian angels who, with snapping wings, capitulated to the mysterious and terrifyingly compelling event.

The spell was broken, and now with eyes like cats' we scurried through the church, retraced our steps to the basement, frantically struggled to help each other out and bolted to the car. A spirited push revived the napping motor and in a torrent of tension relieving hilarity, we left the holy chaos behind us.

We didn't get far; finally sapped of energy, we pulled over somewhere on the outskirts of town and like rag dolls collapsed into a heavy sleep.

A strange knocking sound tried to penetrate my slumber. I dismissed it as a dream, likely a nudge from an overburdened conscience, when it came again, this time with unmistakably aggravated intensity.

The dream which materialised outside my window, however, bristled with authenticity.

With an air of implacable authority, shod in high lace up boots, caparisoned in a uniform harnessed in leather, with a white helmet and elbow high gloves stood the intimidating embodiment of all the majesty of The Law.

I rolled down the window.

Good Morning Sir! Blurted out of me unconvincingly.

Good Morning, The Law replied, and then got right to the point.

Did you by any chance have anything to do with the ringing of the church bell last night?

My impulse was to reply in a, - who, us? - kind of tone, but turning to my companions for support nipped that evasion in the bud; I was accompanied by a troop of chimney sweeps! [So that was the rubble in the basement...]

Yes, it was us, I admitted weakly.

Where are you from, he inquired.

Sub Lieutenants from Greenwich, I offered.

There was a momentary pause, but during it something fundamental had changed.

Very well, he said, I trust you will not do this again. Follow me, gentlemen! –

Gentlemen?

- whereupon he donned his helmet, mounted his bike and pointed it at London.

He escorted us at a modest pace to accommodate the limitations of our carriage, then a safe 10 miles out of town made a U turn, and as he passed, he chopped off a natty salute and disappeared behind us.

This jaw dropping display of dignity and authority remains ineradicably etched on our memories.

It stands in silent rebuke to the knees on chest, handcuffs, fingerprints, fines, jail sentences and bribes we were shortly to experience for much more venial transgressions during flight training in Florida and Texas, but that will be another story.

Greenwich College lived up to its role in becoming the most cultivating stage of our naval careers.

How incredibly fortunate we were to be offered this great city as our playground with so few restrictions and so much time to explore.

We were free to visit the Continent when the college closed for Christmas, Easter and the summer break. Some of us bought cars and toured Europe for the first time.

London in the fifties was, like most cities, a calmer and more embracing place than today, and vastly more affordable. Many of us took advantage of the galleries and museums and the exploding theatre scene. Although at the time there was only one all night restaurant, it happened to be a greasery off Fleet street which served the newspaper publishing crowd and sat conveniently astride the road back to Greenwich.

There was never a problem about drinking round the clock; at pub closing time we all convened in our beloved den mother Mary Dowse's White Room, to which Ted always claimed an eponymous connection, where our pictures hung on the wall and the bar maid Joan was a friend of Larry's before she married Wally Schroeder.

When Mary finally shooed us out around one thirty, we could repair to some blind pig or to any hotel lobby which could legally serve drinks all night provided you could convince the barman you were a guest, which was particularly easy at the accommodating Regent's Park Hotel off Piccadilly Circus, after which everyone congregated at Covent Garden where the pubs opened at five for the benefit of the unforgettable pastiche of brawny fishwives, bloodied butchers and con men mixing easily with tuxedo clad revellers and their diaphanous escorts.

At ten thirty we lined up at The Yacht for an eye opening restorative, then trooped in for the eleven o'clock lecture for some well deserved shuteye.

Under no circumstances am I suggesting that any of us followed such a routine; it's just to illustrate the possibility.

Among the numerous extracurricular activities available at the college was a thriving theatre department which produced shows of remarkably high calibre; landing the part of my namesake in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* cemented my addiction to theatre.

We also produced variety shows for which we wrote the scripts, music and lyrics, in one of which the pivotal attraction featured Larry performing pirouettes on tip toe attired in a tutu; you simply had to have been there.

The nine months spent in Greenwich was the richest period of my life, and importantly, I was supremely aware of this at the time.

The technical Sub Lieutenants' courses were a distinct anti climax. At their termination, we were asked to choose where and in what capacity we wished to pursue our careers.

Charlie and Larry requested pilot training, whereas I had never entertained this as a possibility and opted for TAS, specifying the west coast.

When we were all accorded our wishes, suddenly it dawned on me that this would mean an existential separation from my running mates.

There was something horribly askew in this arrangement.

Hastily, I scribbled a letter to Ottawa expressing my sincerest thanks for having endorsed my initial request, but as I had in the meantime experienced this searing epiphany which revealed that I would actually be overwhelmingly more useful to the Navy as a pilot, would their Lordships consider.....?

Without any fuss, my appointment was revised, and I wish I knew whom to credit for endorsing this life altering change of direction.