

CLOUDBUSTER

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Cruising with Covey

By DAVID Y. COVERSTON, Y1c, USNR

As the last cadet marched out of Kenan Stadium last Wednesday, leaving behind the exercises commemorating the second anniversary of this Station, I found myself looking back through a mental book of memories compiled during two years and a month of duty here. Upon the request of the CLOUDBUSTER, and with your permission, here are a few excerpts from which I consider to be one of the most vital chapters in Naval history.

My first view of Chapel Hill came in April of 1942. At that time the village teemed with civilian college students and as yet was unaware of the impending deluge of aviation cadets. The villagers viewed the few officers and men who had preceded me with a great deal of curiosity, and asked several hundred questions a day, questions that none of us could answer any better than they could.

Headquarters at that time were set up in Swain Hall, formerly used as the NROTC headquarters and now used as the mess hall for V-12 students. Commander John P. Graff, at that time a junior grade lieutenant, had his office there, with the notation "Executive Officer" following his name and rank. In the next office, surrounded by blackboards and other schoolroom gear, sat a dozen or so officers, busily making up the rules and regulations that were to guide the incoming cadets.

About a week after my arrival, the entire group was moved into what was called "K" Dormitory, now known as Alexander Hall. Then the fun began. Dungarees became the uniform of the day. Officers and men worked shoulder to shoulder, setting up bunks, work-

ing on watch bills, and endeavoring to get ready for the first battalion.

Finally it was ready, and on May 23, 1942, the school was commissioned. Before a huge crowd, Chaplain C. N. Neyman, USN, delivered the invocation and Dean R. B. House of the University of North Carolina introduced the chairman of the day, Honorable Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy during World War I. Governor Broughton extended the greetings of the State to the Navy, and President Frank P. Graham of the University welcomed the unit to the campus. Commander Thomas J. Hamilton, USN, spoke and Commander O. O. Kessing, USN, read his orders and took command. The watch was set by the Executive Officer, Lt. (jg) John P. Graff, USN (Ret.), and Chief Boatswain's Mate Boerstler, USN, piped down.

On May 28, 1942, the first battalion arrived, 242 strong. The Navy, the Country, in fact, the whole world, eagerly watched the new experiment.

Three months later, on August 22, 1942, they had their answer. At graduation exercises held in Kenan Stadium, featuring an address by Admiral William Glassford, Commandant of the Sixth Naval District, the initial group of pre-flight hardened lads marched in review, muscles bulging, eyes sharpened, filled with the fighting spirit that marks a true American.

September 19, 1942, the CLOUDBUSTER was born, bringing to the Station stories of interest concerning the station, personal sketches of officers, men, and cadets, plus the ever-pleasing MISS LACE of Milton Caniff, creator of "Terry and the Pirates."

The first football season opened, the lineup laden with officers and cadets who in years previous had been seen on All-American and All-Star teams. They played a heavy schedule of eleven games, winning eight, tying one, and losing two.

During October of 1942, Kate Smith, "The Songbird of the South," came aboard and presented her broadcast to the cheers of all hands. Also on the program were two Hollywood favorites, George Murphy and Jane Wyman. Major John Smith and Captain Marion Carl, Marine flying aces, visited the station at the same time, Major Smith being featured on the broadcast. The Marine aces had shot down thirty-five Jap Zeroes between them.

November rolled around and Commander (now Captain) O. O. "Scrappy" Kessing, the first Commanding Officer, received his orders and went to sea. The Command was taken over by his former Executive Officer, Lieut. Commander John P. "Packy" Graff, who was promoted to Commander, and the Executive Officer's job was taken over by Lieut. Commander James P. Raugh.

The year 1943 came into being, and the Pre-Flight School sponsored a dance in honor of the President's birthday.

During the month of January the New Navy Dispensary was completed, and the entire staff moved from their cramped quarters in Alexander Hall into the spacious and super-modern structure used today.

March of '43 saw Navy Hall opened for the benefit of the cadets, and today it is one of the most used buildings of the School.

April came and the regiment was treated to the warbling of lovely Helen O'Connell, a former singer with J. Dorsey's band who was here visiting some lucky cadet. The same month the Synthetic Devices building was opened for the benefit of Naval Personnel.

Another visitor during the month was Major Joe Foss, USMCR, the first flyer to equal Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker's combat record of World War I. Major Foss had shot down twenty-six Jap Zeroes.

The first anniversary loomed into sight. The reviewing stand filled with dignitaries, a typical "Scrappy" Kessing letter was read, the cadet regiment passed in review, and a proven program turned its eyes toward another year of training, which could only end in ultimate victory. 7,223 cadets had entered the school during the first year of its existence.

The heat of July 1943 brought several thousand V-12 trainees to the campus, and competition for the favors of the co-eds became intense on week-ends. It was all in fun, however, and the cadets still held ground.

The huge outdoor swimming pool opened in August, cadets, crew, and villagers alike delighting in its cooling depths.

Football season came again, and this time only cadets were allowed to participate. Being younger, inexperienced, and not so big, they only played six games, winning two, tying one, and losing three.

Just before Christmas, Lord Halifax, British Ambassador visited the School and gave it high praise. A few days later Vice-President Henry A. Wallace came aboard, commenting favorably on the precision-like working of the activity.

1944 appeared on the scene, bringing Larry Adler and Paul Draper to entertain. One of the cadets leaped on the stage and assisted the harmonica master without revealing that he had been a member of Borah Minnevitich's Harmonica Rascals.

Last month, our second Skipper took leave of the station for a more combative part in the war. Commander John P. Graff was off for Africa. He turned the command over to Lieut. Comdr. James P. Raugh, his former Executive Officer, and bade us all a fond farewell. The new C. O. immediately appointed Lieut. Comdr. Howard L. Hamilton as his Executive Officer.

The first part of this month, a contingent of Free French Cadets arrived on the station to learn English and to tone up their muscles. A few days later, Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker, the leading American Ace of World War I, spoke to the cadets and received one of the greatest ovations ever given a speaker at this activity.

This brings the story up to date. It has been a lot of fun watching this Station grow from a handful of officers and men to its present size of 1,353 cadets, 219 officers, and 157 crew members, and an experience I am proud to have had the privilege of being in.

13,803 cadets have entered this school, and today many of them are fighting in combat areas all over the world. Our first two Skippers are also in combat areas, one in the Pacific theater of war, and the other in the European theater of war.