



LIFE

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CLOSE-UP



GEORGE T. WEEMS, THE REGIMENTAL COMMANDER OF
MIDSHIPMEN AT ANNAPOLIS, NOW EXCHANGES THESE
FIVE STRIPES FOR THE SINGLE ONE OF AN ENSIGN

ENSIGN WEEMS

THE "FIVE-STRIPER," NAVAL ACADEMY'S TOP-RANKING
MIDSHIPMAN, BECOMES AN OFFICER IN A NAVY AT WAR

by OLIVER JENSEN

At Annapolis last week, June Week came in December. Because of the national emergency, 547 young midshipmen were graduated six months early from the United States Naval Academy, after a speed-up of an already intensive training. June Week, when midshipmen become commissioned officers, is traditionally a time of gaiety but this year, as the graduates swung across a cold, wind-swept parade ground, it was a grim and somber affair. Only a few days before, the national emergency had turned into war and out on the Pacific the U. S. Navy had suffered the most crushing blow in its history. Spectators hugging the chilly edges of the field and crowding into Dahlgren Hall for the graduation exercises watched the determined young faces of the new officers closely. On them will depend to great extent the future of American seapower. What kind of men, the spectators wondered, are they?

On one midshipman they could focus their attention. In the formations he stood in the forefront and gave orders to the assembled regiment. Followed by his staff of aides, he led his class-

mates to chapel for baccalaureate service. He carried off more than his share of special awards. On his sleeve he wore five stripes in narrow gold braid, the badge of the Academy's highest undergraduate rank. He is the prototype of the ideal naval officer, the man most likely in the Navy's opinion to become an Admiral of the Fleet.

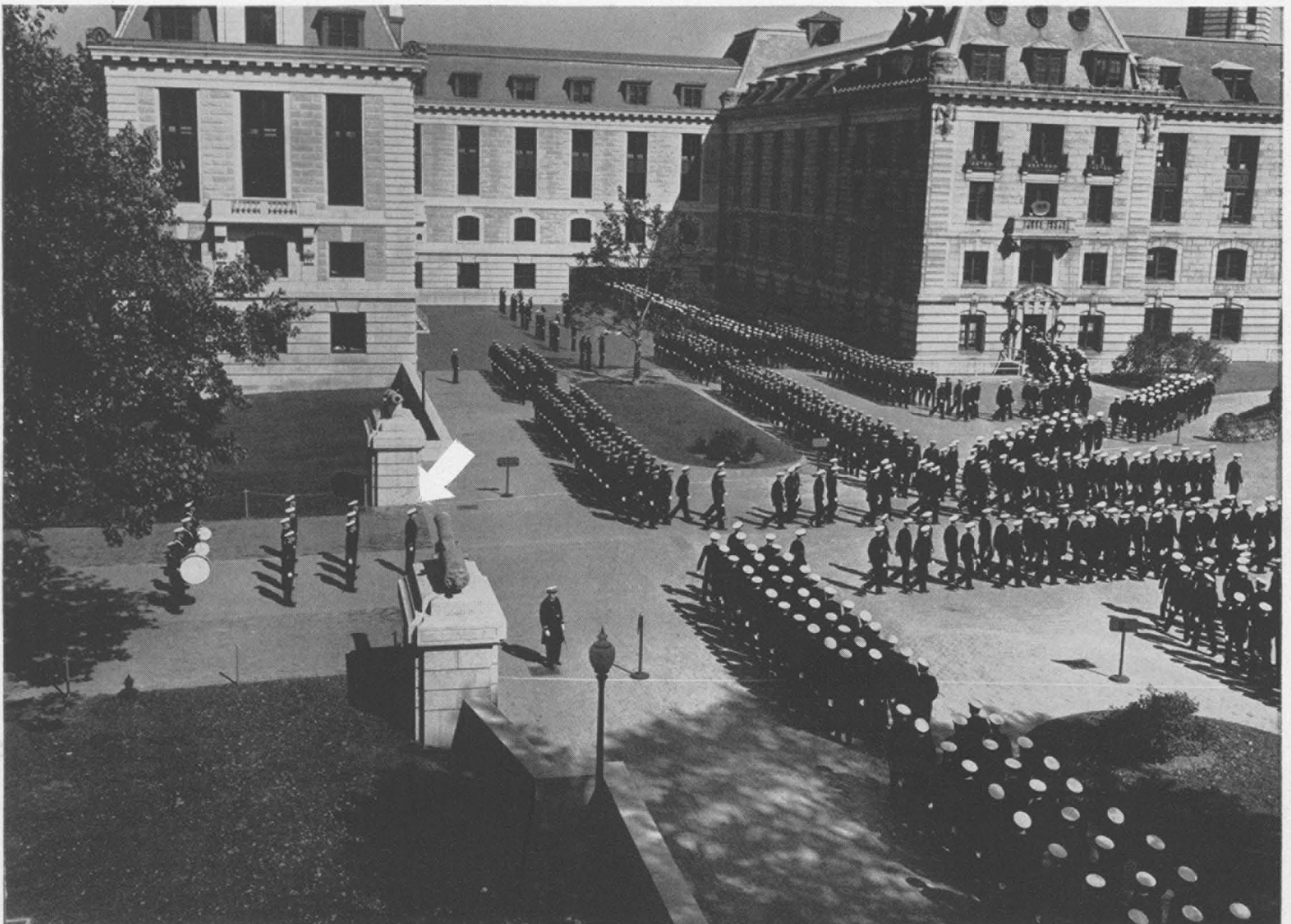
This top man is not the No. 1 graduate in his class, but the Regimental Commander of Midshipmen, the "five-striper." The No. 1 man is the graduate of highest academic standing whereas the Regimental Commander is chosen by the Academy officials on the basis, first, of his all-around abilities, and second, of the number of "grease marks" he has acquired during his course from officer instructors and from upperclassmen. A grease mark is an estimate made by them on a special printed form commenting on the midshipman's aptitude for the service. On it, they can check his "Attention to Duty," "Industry," "Initiative," "Loyalty," "Judgment," "Force," "Leadership" and "Bearing and Dress." Significantly, the commenting officer is asked whether,

in time of war, he would: a) particularly desire b) be satisfied or c) prefer NOT to have this midshipman under his command.

Regimental Commander George Thackray Weems has a "grease," or aptitude rating of 3.9 on a scale in which 4.0 represents perfection. In purely academic standing, Weems graduated No. 114, in the top quarter of his class, but this is practically the only respect in which he is not superlative. He is National Eastern Intercollegiate 165-lb. wrestling champion, master of the midshipmen crew of the yacht *Highland Light*, member of the varsity lacrosse team, vice president of his class, president of the Trident Society and president of the French Club. "His attitude and demeanor are always perfection," say his superiors. "He has the poise of an admiral and the kid's only 20."

From all of this it might be assumed that Weems is either a genius or a bootlicker, or both. This is not so. In fact, he is not far above the average intelligence of his class. Seen in person, he does not seem to give off sparks or pulsate with

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At formation in front of huge Bancroft Hall, Weems (arrow at left) commands a regiment of 3,099 midshipmen. After assembly and inspection, he transmits through the four battalion commanders

the order to march into mess. Thousands of formations like this take place each year. Only a small portion of sprawling Bancroft Hall and the recently enlarged regiment can be seen in this picture.

inner cosmic vibrations. He has a normal healthy amount of animal energy, but his favorite recreation is sleep, a condition in which he takes refuge at any time of day or night, in his room or at parties, whenever opportunity affords. Perhaps this is to make up for his first year at Annapolis when, as a lowly, regulation-hounded plebe, he did not "rate" lying down on his bunk during the day. He is respectful to superiors but does not grease them, as the midshipmen describe apple-polishing, and held most of his many offices not from the Academy officials but from the votes of his classmates. Considering that he is well-known as a nonsmoker, nondrinker and non-sweater, and that in his position he might well have been, like many five-striper before him, "the most hated man in the regiment," these tributes are remarkable.

Before Weems lost his five stripes at graduation for the single gold stripe of an ensign, he received certain privileges and attendant responsibilities. The Regimental Commander can give any midshipman an order, but he is responsible for the regiment to the Commandant of Midshipmen, a sort of dean. He has a staff of nine other midshipmen, including a four-striper, a three-striper and other lesser undergraduate officers. Before each meal, when the entire regiment lines up at Bancroft Hall to be inspected, he stands out in front of his staff, receives the salute of all midshipmen and marches them into mess under the admiring eyes of visiting taxpayers. He is entitled to special use of one of the Academy knockabout sailboats, to a special room with the unique privilege of a private bath (known in Academy parlance as the "B hole," the room itself being the "A hole") and to special table service at mess with his staff. He does not have to go to formation before classes, but walks over alone. He does not have to undergo room inspection, although this is a recent privilege, dating from the occasion when a pair of white shoes was noticed on a midshipman's outer window sill. The window turned out to be Weems's. Rather than subject the Academy's best boy to the humiliation of a public report, the officers exempted Weems and his roommate from inspection. And although Weems could give anyone an order, he was probably the only first classman who dared not work "his" plebe. This boyish pleasure, a survival of a much-modified "fag" system, is supposed to have cost one five-striper his rank when the Officer of the Watch chanced in his room and found an obedient plebe busily stowing the five-striper's laundry.

Young Weems has the look of a naval officer, the sharp jutting chin, the wide, deep-set eyes, the short hair, the well-braced physique. He is 6 ft. tall, unmistakably American, a good-looking blond extrovert. This is a general appearance with which four years in

the Naval Academy seems to endow nearly every one of the hetero-physiognomied young men who enter it, along with the marine engineering, navigation, seamanship, ordnance and gunnery it teaches them.

Walt Disney embarrasses him

As a prospective admiral, Ensign Weems suffers from only two minor handicaps. One is seasickness. Walt Disney is responsible for the other. Weems's nickname is "Bee," from his childhood attempts to pronounce "baby," and the resemblance to Mr. Disney's screen character Baby Weems, the infant genius who overshadows Einstein in his first week on earth, is too close for comfort. People are always asking Bee if he has seen Baby Weems and he is always embarrassed. On the other hand, Bee has several great advantages over his classmates. One is a matter of temperament. He is always calm, unruffled and relaxed. In the opinion of the Commandant of Midshipmen, a man not given to effusion but who has known Weems all his relatively short life, "If Saint Peter walked in, Bee wouldn't be abashed."

Under a surface calm, Bee has purpose and determination, in a crisis assumes what his mother calls his "do-or-die" look. One of these rare crises occurred last spring before the Eastern Intercollegiate wrestling championship matches at Columbia University in New York. Bee had been suffering from a cold all during the preliminaries and was actively sick during one of them. But he swept through them in successive falls and in the finals pinned a Princeton man in seven minutes to win the title. The only man who has ever subdued Bee is his father, who was on the Olympic wrestling team in 1920 and won the sword at Annapolis for excellence in athletics when he graduated.

For a young man who is planning to become an admiral, there appears to be no specific necessity for a seafaring family background. Nelson's father was an English rector, John Paul Jones's a landscape gardener, Sir Francis Drake's a humble yeoman, Dewey's a doctor. Consequently Weems enjoys a comparative advantage in that his father, Lieutenant Commander Philip Van Horn Weems, U. S. N., retired, is not only a distinguished but an unusual naval officer.

"Weems, you've done the unforgivable," a Navy friend told Bee's father some years ago. "You've stuck your head above dead level." Philip Van Horn Weems, who came of an old Tennessee military family; graduated in Dick Byrd's class from the Naval Academy in 1912 with a burst of glory, in the ensuing years dragged his family back and forth across the country from one naval station to another. But in 1933, after he had increasingly specialized in navigation and

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Weems shared a room in Bancroft Hall with Midshipman Vernon E. Binion of West Palm Beach, Fla. who, as Regimental Subcommander or "four-striper," ranked next to

him. This room, which has its own bathroom, is accounted palatial by the midshipmen. As plebes, Binion and Weems would not have "rated" relaxing like this during the day.





At dinner in the Weems house in Annapolis, there is usually a crowd. In this picture, taken before a football hop, Weems's father, Lieutenant Commander P. V. H. Weems,

U. S. N., retired, sits at far end of table. His mother sits with back to camera. To the left of his father are Bobby Link, Weems's hop date, and Weems. Other men are classmates.

ENSIGN WEEMS (continued)

published books on his theories, he was retired. Only the selection board of the time knows surely whether this happened because Weems held too-advanced theories to suit the conservative brains of the Navy. Much the same thing happened to Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, the great naval strategist and historian, although the Navy, to save face, later granted him the rank of rear admiral. Immediately after this, Weems's books were snapped up in England by the Royal Air Force. Commander Weems, who is now acknowledged as the world's leading authority on navigation, particularly aerial navigation, operates the Weems System of Navigation as a combined school, advisory service and manufacturing concern. He invented the Longines-Weems navigation watch and holds a number of patents and copyrights on such widely used products as the Weems Aircraft Plotter and several sextants and computers, and publishes a number of technical navigation books. His work has brought him worldwide recognitions and friendships with such well-known aviators as Lindbergh, Balbo, Ellsworth, Post and Gatty. On the other hand, it did not make him an admiral, and his son Bee is too evenly balanced ever to become such a specialist.

Besides having a father held in great respect by Navy men, Bee Weems has had the advantage that his family lives in Annapolis, in an old colonial home only a few blocks from the Academy. During liberty hours from the Academy, the house fills up with Bee's midshipmen friends, who wander about at will, eating gallons of ice cream, drinking milk and Cokes, playing croquet, ping-pong and badminton outside, dancing inside the house. There is not much entertainment for midshipmen except the movies in Annapolis and Bee's "grease" with his classmates and classmates ahead of him has never suffered from the fact that he had a place to give "tea fights" only three blocks away from Bancroft Hall.

Family life in the Weems household is hectic, versatile and absorbing. Mrs. Weems, an extraordinarily pretty woman, says proudly of its nonconformity, "You saw *You Can't Take It With You?* Well, that's our home." She is related to William Makepeace Thackeray, has worked for Cissy Patterson's *Washington Times-Herald*, keeps herself surrounded with as many intellectual people as possible, has a dread of going to seed. Her favorite pastime, however, is boosting Bee and whenever she starts, other Weemses shout: "There goes the Bee Saga!" Bee's sister "Missy" lives at home while her husband, Lieutenant Charles Robbins Dodds, is at Pensacola Naval Air Station, and spends her time creating spirited works of art to which she likes to give lurid names like *Wages of Sin*. The

Weems family makes up its own jazz orchestra for spirited if not always tuneful jam sessions. Mrs. Weems plays the piano, father the violin, Bee the flute, his brother, a lieutenant in the Marines, the saxophone, Missy's husband the accordion, and the boy next door the drum.

A rule might be established that a would-be admiral should take care to have an adventurous childhood. Admiral Tromp voyaged to the East Indies at the age of 8 and was taken prisoner. Admiral Farragut entered the Navy at 9, David Dixon Porter served in the Mexican Navy at 13, and at 22, Sir Francis Drake was a captain fighting under Sir John Hawkins in the Gulf of Mexico. Weems does not measure up to these specifications, his chief excitements having been a summons in connection with a minor traffic violation and a trip to the Boy Scout jamboree in Europe in 1937.

If another rule, based on Lord Nelson's romance with Lady Hamilton, be established that an admiral should be a man of stormy passions, he falls down again. Bee "drags" his various dates with an eye possibly cocked to the fact that their fathers are ranking naval officers, but always with the detachment of a man who knows that he cannot marry until he is out of the Academy two years. If he does, he loses his commission. If an admiral, like David Farragut ("Damn the torpedoes!"), is a man of strong, profane language, Weems again fails to qualify. Although Weems Sr. favors "Dad blame it!" and his sister a heated "Hot spit!" Bee himself never indulges in anything stronger than an occasional "Shucks."

"Remember you are not your own master"

The reason for Weems's success in his first four years in the Navy is something which is as crystal clear to naval officers as it is obscure to civilians. The Naval Academy gives one of the most scientifically planned vocational trainings of any educational institution in the world. It is not designed primarily to produce genius but to turn out men with similar loyalties, habits of thought, and powers of leadership and character, to command and when necessary fight the ships of the U. S. Navy. The training is as rigorous and uniform as that of a Jesuit. The Navy wants officers of high but uniform standards in everything. Men like Mahan, and even Weems's own father, who have attained too great eminence in any special field, often do so at the expense of the well-balanced pattern of character and accomplishment which marks young Weems for a great career. The Navy even prescribes the average. "Work hard," says *Reef Points*, little handbook issued to all new plebes, "but don't get the reputation of being a 'cutthroat.'" It prescribes humility. "Remember you are



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RESINOL OINTMENT AND SOAP

ENSIGN WEEMS (continued)

not entirely your own master nor even your own property," says *Naval Leadership*, a handbook for junior officers, pointing out that the Navy, a despotism within itself, and its officers, however high in rank, are merely creatures of the Republic. "Never argue," the Navy counsels its young, "don't buck the Powers-That-Be. It seldom pays. The case of Nelson is the only one where it ever did."

From this, it might be assumed that the Navy wants no such individualistic geniuses as Nelson. This is correct. There is no place for the erratic in a modern, disciplined fleet, which is not a heterogeneous collection of stars but a team. In the service, discipline and teamwork are maintained by a closely knit and tremendous body of regulations which outline in the most minute detail the exact procedure to be followed by every one in every conceivable phase of life from the loading of a 16-in. gun to the method of arranging neckties in a locker. From reading the regulations, a prospective midshipman soon learns that just about the only possession he can have which need not conform to pattern is his toothbrush. The regulations include a fascinating body of privileges of rank, known in the Navy as "rates." Because of these, the lowest officers in the Navy, the plebes, must bob along at double time and make "square corners" through the corridors of Bancroft Hall, and do not rate traveling along certain paths or going through certain gates. Because of others, admirals receive salutes of 17 guns, and are entitled to four ruffles of the drum and eight sideboys when they come aboard a ship. Into this peculiar, ordered life of regulations, young Weems fits perfectly.

He will not get rich

An admiral does not, in this period of history, expect to get rich. As a first classman, Weems received a salary of \$65 a month, out of which came his uniforms and enough regulation expenditures to bring his monthly expectation of spending money down to \$11. As a full admiral, of whom there can be only four at a time, the most he can expect to receive is \$12,000, about one-fifth the annual income of Lana Turner. Bee would like to be rich. If he went into business, he explains, "I would like to be an executive," but he has not thought out the problem much further. He is much more interested in his immediate future as an ensign. He would like to get on a destroyer, not for love of the "cans," on which he will undoubtedly be often thoroughly seasick, but because notice and promotion come sooner on a small unit. After that, thinks Weems, he might take a flier at the new big Navy bombers.

"Historically," wrote Admiral Mahan some years ago, "good men with poor ships are better than poor men with good ships." With the Naval Academy pouring thousands of men of the caliber of young Bee Weems onto a growing fleet of the best ships afloat, it is distinctly possible that the U. S. is going to have the best of each.



Weems toots his flute at home while his date for the hop ("drag," in Annapolis slang), Bobby Link of Binghamton, N. Y., sings accompaniment. They have raided the icebox.

LIFE'S COVER



In last week's bitter warfare over all the world, no men were more important than the aerial gunners. On the cover is one of America's best. He is Private First Class Delbert C. Gilliam of Smackover, Ark., photographed in the rear topside blister of a bomber. Although he wears the Army Air Force's heavy winter uniform of sheepskin coat and goggles, he keeps his hands gloveless even in the intense cold. This is so that when the time comes, and he sees a Jap or German plane ahead, he will be all set to fire away with his powerful 30-cal. machine gun.

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