

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NAVAL AVIATORS' MESS DINNER

[AND ASSORTED DIGRESSIONS]

1987-2011

It all began in the late seventies when resident west coast Naval Aviators gathered at Christmastime at the Billy Bishop Legion to exchange reminiscences of past glories as all brothers in arms have done since time immemorial.

Though this very attractive space is rich in aviation lore, the focus is on the RFC and RCAF, while the subject of Naval Aviation is, like a lawyer's conscience, in a state of permanent remission.

In pondering this situation, I stumbled across an idea which had been hiding in plain sight; re locate our meetings to HMCS Discovery, where we would benefit from an authentic Naval atmosphere, and while we are at it, why not make it a mess dinner?

Agreement was unanimous, so in the fall of 1987 I approached the CO of Discovery, Cdr. MacIlwaine, with my proposal.

It was enthusiastically accepted. I was informed that we would have to obtain our own caterers, pay the wages of the bar staff and cover any breakage or damage, otherwise we were welcome.

I readily agreed, confident that our days of fomenting serious mayhem were firmly behind us, and set about learning the minutiae of organisation.

In those pre internet days it was necessary to spread the word by snail mail or phone. We divided the names into 3 groups, after which Stan Wood, Hal Hallaran and I called everyone on our respective lists. I took the mailout on for myself. Meantime I began to become acquainted with the personnel with whom I would need to coordinate the event.

Though at first I discounted them as teething problems, it didn't take long for some unexpected complications to make themselves apparent.

The lesson I was learning was that dealing with a Reserve Division was very different to the accustomed routines of the regular force; it required assimilating the rules imposed by the unique nature of the organisation.

Though the command structure as well as positions of Mess President, Secretary, Event Coordinator and Accountant, etc. were assigned, these people only gathered as a team during their periodic Divisions, which was a time when all were irrevocably busy. Consequently it frequently happened that, just when it became necessary to finalise some important detail, the person responsible was unapproachable. Faxed queries sometimes took weeks to answer, and waiting around cap in hand during their musters became a tedious but necessary part of the endeavour, not always crowned with success. As a result, it sometimes became necessary to contact people at their civilian workplace or at home, an awkward situation which demanded a

great deal of diplomacy.

To further bedevil the issue, I would discover as the years went by that there was to be a continual change of personnel. Every year or two, I would have to work with a new command structure or a fresh event coordinator, which basically required starting from scratch.

Nevertheless, everything somehow got cobbled together; the CO and XO gladly accepted our invitation, everyone arrived nattily attired in mess kit, suits or blazers, and as the excitement of the initiation swept over us, from the first stroke of Ben Oxholm's gavel we sensed we were on the threshold of a promising adventure.

Our second dinner, which in one step evolved from an occasion to a tradition, required to be appropriately celebrated. To accomplish this, I engaged the Discovery Navy Band. It boasted a lady band leader and proved a most welcome addition. We provided the musicians with sandwiches and beer, rewarded them with the previously agreed sum of \$150, and I resolved to invite them to enhance our dinners from now on.

The following year a new Commanding Officer was at the helm. Imbued with our recent successes, I penned my usual letter and confidently tendered it to the CO.

To my dismay, the answer was like a response to an indecent proposal; the request was curtly and categorically denied.

This was as unanticipated as it was disconcerting; delicately enquiring for the reason behind the decision, I was directed to speak to the President of the Mess Committee, a Lieutenant Commander who was employed by the Bank of Montreal. I phoned him at work, and was told that we were black balled due to a series of complaints. Since none had reached my ears following the dinner, I asked him to be more specific. He told me that these came from 3 sources: the bartender, the caterer and the band leader.

Somewhat stunned, I called each in turn.

Martin the bartender was most bewildered. Not only did he not tender any complaints, he and his son, who acted as his helper, enjoyed very much working our group, and were particularly proud to serve Jake Kennedy with whom the entire profession is on a first name basis.

I had a similar conversation with the caterer. Neither he nor his staff had any problems whatever, and would be delighted to be engaged on a future date.

That left the band leader. Her response was emphatically different. She advised me in no uncertain terms that this had been a nightmarish evening, and stated flatly that "she'd never play for that group again."

Pray tell why? I enquired.

Because, she informed me, "I was insulted, propositioned and pinched black and blue!"

They sure don't make lady band leaders like Kenny used to, I mused as I thanked her for her input, and my thoughts drifted to his tale of the Wren staff car driver who swerved to avoid a child and fell off the chesterfield, but that's another story.

I riffed through the names of those attendees who might have been responsible, but though I

could think of one or two who specialised in seduction, the behaviour described was incompatible with the consummation of such intent, rendered even more unlikely by the lady's misfortune to have been genetically selected toward gender ambiguity.

I decided to phone King Wan, the XO of Discovery who'd attended the dinner; he was equally taken aback since he neither noticed, nor received any reports of these supposed transgressions.

Armed with this information, I contacted the Mess President.

He had no comment about the first two complainants, but sided firmly with the band leader's account and refused to budge from his position.

There was only one thing left to do: refer the matter to the highest authority, dauntingly represented by the person of Brig. Gen. Bendt Oxholm, CMM, [ret'd]

Ben of course found all of this utterly ridiculous, and assured me that if I failed to receive a favourable reply, he would have a word with the Admiral.

Encouraged by this, I requested a meeting with the PMC which took place in the bank.

I argued that since two of his plaintiffs' complaints proved fictitious, and the third clearly lacked credibility, I was frankly offering him the opportunity to change his mind.

He unwisely stuck to his guns.

At Ben's intervention the matter was reviewed in Victoria which in turn resulted in an official reversal of the original decision.

Although this victory was sweet, it carried a price in the creation of a minefield, through which I was obliged to tiptoe with extreme delicacy over the upcoming years, and the PMC and I became like God and Christopher Hitchens; when we met in the street, we nodded but did not speak.

Coincidentally, we became subjected to a creeping deterioration in mess services, which continued through successive changes of staff and administrations. Moreover, I began to sense that the addition of a mess dinner to Discovery's schedule was not, as I had imagined, a feather in their collective hats, but rather an imposition on their routines.

First we were told that we could no longer use the wardroom furniture, which from now on would need to be rented; next we were obliged to hire special cleaning help; then it was suddenly discovered that we should be supervised which required us to pay for a duty officer; annoyances indeed, but still amply offset by being able to meet in such agreeably traditional surroundings.

The event was starting to gain popularity from coast to coast, and as my list of Naval Aviators grew, so did the number of invitations which needed to be sent. Before our fifth mess dinner in 1991, I began to receive substantial assistance from Bob McNish whose computer magically manufactured address labels relieving Rita and me from stuffing, sealing, stamping and hand addressing well over a hundred letters each year.

Rita had swung into the fray right from the start; she immediately sensed the strength of

the bonds which cemented our naval air community together, and recognised that these were friendships for a lifetime. She came to know many of you personally and the rest by reputation, and I'll wager that she can repeat all the Washbrook anecdotes without blushing.

Her enthusiasm and encouragement has everything to do with our dinner's continued success.

It wasn't long before our list ballooned to close to two hundred. Thankfully Bob could now reach many by e-mail. [I was not introduced to this abstruse witchcraft till after the millennium].

Bob continued to assist me in a variety of vital ways; as spiritual adviser, father confessor and general helper for some fifteen more years. I am most indebted to him for taking a great deal of work off my shoulders, and he might have been able to launch the whole thing by himself if only he could spell.

1991 was the year when Rod Bays felt obliged to discontinue his News Letter. We were all keen to express our appreciation for the twenty years of toil which Rod invested in keeping us together, so to acknowledge this most important contribution, we invited him to attend the dinner as our honoured guest.

We canvassed funds for his and Shirley's air fare as well as for an appropriate gift which, in addition to contributions from the 68 attendees, brought in 31 donations from those who did not attend the dinner, including Shel Rowell whose cheque came from Nepal, and Hal Fearon's which arrived from Bangladesh.

Rod was presented with a Don Connally painting of a Sea Fury, donated by Ben Oxholm.

We are most fortunate that Ted Cruddas chose to accept the torch from Rod, and has so competently and devotedly continued this mission for the next twenty years.

For this dinner I engaged the Discovery Band again, but only after ascertaining that the leader was male, and I am proud of the restraint shown by our group as at the end of the night he confessed that he'd neither been insulted, pinched nor propositioned.

From 1992 onwards we were an established event drawing a transcontinental audience. Each dinner assumed its own character dictated by the President, providing unforgettable moments such as Jake's famous affirmation of presidential authority when, in 1994, he heaved a mounted ceremonial bell into the midst of a tumult, a gesture which survives unrivalled to this day as the most inspired theatrical metaphor for maintaining control.

I also recall a famous morning-after in my apartment when Rita, having arisen early, discovered John Truran peacefully asleep on the living room floor while Bill Park and Pinky Turner dozed touchingly cuddled together on the couch.

Since 1995 was the 50th anniversary of WW2, I decided it would be appropriate to honour those among us who had served during the war. Mike Langman would have been ideal to preside over our function, but his ticket from England was beyond his or our financial reach.

I offered this position to Robbie Hughes, whose compendium of Naval Aviators, [along with John MacFarlane] continues to be everyone's primary source material detailing our myriad careers, but unfortunately he was obliged to decline. Stu Soward, himself a veteran of the last year of the war, [he did his Carrier Familiarisation in 1945 in HMS Ravager, thank you Robbie] agreed to take the helm for this commemorative event, and we were graced by the following Vets who came as our guests: Bill Atkinson, Dickie Bartlett, Jimmy Burns, Hep Hepton, Vince Murphy, Jim Rankin, Jack Stokes, Jim Treloar, Ted Trerise and Stan Wood.

What a privilege it is to remember them all as our friends.

1996 proved to be a watershed year for our dinner, for all the wrong reasons.

To begin with, a new administration took the reins of Discovery which had never heard of our event, and our request was initially denied.

When I pointed out that we had been gathering there for the last nine years, they grudgingly relented, but suddenly required that we find a sponsor. Moreover, our requested date was not available; the 29th of November was the best they could offer.

I admit this caught me entirely by surprise.

This development presented serious complications insofar as a large number of our attendees were airline pilots who bid their blocks early to keep the first Friday of Dec. free, and by the fact that admiral Tony Storrs had agreed to be our honoured guest for the planned date of the 6th of December and was not available for Nov. 29th.

In a panic I started a search for an alternate venue, but with nothing acceptable on the horizon, I reverted to my usual emergency mode and turned the whole sorry mess over to Benny.

I caught him at his John Wayne best.

Relax kid, he drawled, we're not goin' anywhere. You just keep your shirt on and let me deal with this.

Smartly, Ben succeeded in getting the sponsorship requirement dropped, but unfortunately was unable to prevail on the date change.

About this time word reached Jake Kennedy about this kafuffle. He took the time to vent his outrage with a forcefully worded letter to the Commodore of Naval Reserves, Commodore R. M. Bauginet. In it he condemned the blatant lack of consideration displayed by the present administration of Discovery to our group, and argued that Reserve Divisions should be proud to support such organisations, many of whose members contributed a lifetime of service to their country.

Having felt obliged to allow us to hold our event, Discovery next submitted a cost estimate; it vastly exceeded the price of previous dinners. Apparently we were expected to engage a larger number of personnel at a higher cost, all to make use of an existing venue, long ago paid for by the taxpayer. In addition, the price of the wines skyrocketed.

Due to the fact that the date change resulted in halving our attendance, I knew I'd be way over budget. Once again Ben came to the rescue, and offered to cover any shortfall.

In the interest of keeping the momentum going, I decided to hold the dinner regardless of the limited attendance, and eventually only 28 of us sat down to dine.

To accommodate our invitation to Admiral Storrs, Stu Soward found an ingenious solution. He promptly organised a second mess dinner, to be held at the Union Club in Victoria on the previously appointed day, where we feted this long time friend of Naval Aviation and were then treated to a speech, delivered entirely without notes, replete with both wit and wisdom, which none of us who had the privilege of hearing it will ever forget.

Shortly after this I sent a letter to the coordinator thanking her and her staff for their assistance, along with a cheque for the dinner. I also wrote to the CO, expressing our appreciation for being allowed to stage our event in the familiarity of Naval surroundings, and reiterated special thanks to the event coordinator for her cooperation. I also mentioned the tacit agreement we had established with previous administrations to celebrate our event on the first Friday of December, and requested his consideration to permit this arrangement to continue.

Rita and I then winged our way to Paris where we habitually spent Xmas holidays, returning sometime in January.

Awaiting me was the CO's reply which commenced with an exhaustive enumeration of his reasons for denying our request for a recurring date.

After promulgating the training schedule, he wrote, numerous lodger units held priority, and the first on his list were Sea Cadets!

Sea Cadets? In the wardroom?

Next came the Navy League, then those with "the closest association with the Naval Reserve... such as Naval Veterans, NOABC, etc." [I guess we didn't qualify under any of these, not even the etc.], and "after all these units and agencies have their requirements addressed, then other agencies such as the Naval Aviators can book the facilities."

After thus reducing our group to chopped liver, he addressed himself to me personally.

He advised me that the event coordinator was not pleased with the treatment she received from me, that she was subjected to rudeness and was continually bothered in her place of work, and that he would not tolerate such behaviour in the future.

I must admit to feeling slugged in the face; after regaining my composure, I penned a reply in which I first thanked him for "taking the time to outline the priorities which placed our mess dinner in its proper perspective," apologised to the apparent reincarnation of the band leader for the perceived offences, and closed the issue by stating my displeasure about the tone of rebuke which accompanied my conviction, handed down without the courtesy of hearing.

My next correspondence, in mid February, was addressed to the coordinator in which I asked her why my cheque of Dec. 4th had not been cashed. There was no reply, so on the 29th of April, I wrote to the Executive officer asking her to look into the matter. Although again I received no reply, this time the cheque went through. I mention these annoyances as an

illustration of the myriad obstacles which frustrated normal conduct with this organization.

All of this, to be sure, created something of a quicksand for future cooperation, but we believed in our cause and, following Dorothy Fields's inspiring lyrics, it was time to "pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again."

The following year, 1997, our request for the first Friday was granted.

This, however, was accompanied by another incomprehensible escalation of costs, which compelled me for the first time since our inception to raise the fees to \$80 for imbibers and \$60 for the temperate from the previous \$70 and \$50.

Up till now, Joe Martin was free to keep the bar open pretty much to the last man standing, usually to 1:30 or so.

I was informed by the staff that any bar extension would this year require special permission from the CO.

Accordingly, I wrote a letter requesting to maintain the status quo. The tone of the reply was saturated with vindictiveness, summarily dismissing our request with the statement that "the bar will close at 1159."

This would prove to be our last event at Discovery. It was most ably presided by Larry O'Brien, and featured an address by Lance Olmstead who described his nine month stint as the Mogadishu Int. Airport Commander in '93 and '94, and the conditions of the self inflicted devastation wreaked on this failed state which have since only become worse.

I suppose that it shouldn't have surprised anyone that my request for the 1998 dinner was flatly denied. It arrived in my mailbox in September. You might be interested in the phrasing: "I regret to inform you that our training schedule and the *Wardroom social calendar* [italics mine] preclude the granting of your request."

Sorry guys, you're just not the stuff that can make it into a social calendar.

Now if only you'd been Sea Cadets.....!

Hackles were once again raised about the pusillanimity of this decision, and voluminous correspondence ensued between Ralph Fisher, who took up the cudgel, Stu Soward, Ben Oxholm and others with proposals to take this matter further.

All I ever wanted to do was run a mess dinner; this would have meant politicising the issue for which I had no appetite; we let the matter die on the vine.

We were out on the street, but Tom Byrne, who was very much au courant with this problem, had already approached me in the summer proposing to midwife CFB Comox as an alternate venue.

Immediately on receipt of Discovery's refusal, and following some consultation with our most senior members, we gratefully accepted the closest available date on offer which was the 20th of November.

In addition to Tom's initiative and his considerable contribution in clearing the way for our invasion, Ted Gibbon, whose social standing as the erstwhile Commander of the base was not

in dispute, arranged for accommodations in the barracks a short crawl from the bar at a cost of \$5 per night!

When Kenny read this, he tried to book in for six months, but he couldn't negotiate an airline rate.

The cost, including accommodations, was \$55 with wines, and \$40 without.

Compare this to the cost for the use of Discovery the previous year; included are wages for set up and clean up, bartenders, duty officer, admin. costs, service costs, chair rental and corkage, which amounted to \$982! Remember, that's before food, wines and gratuities.

For our first expatriate dinner we had 55 attendees.

Lance and Ted pitched in to offer transportation from Victoria and Nanaimo respectively, Larry Lott survived his presidency only slightly bruised, and we didn't need to grovel to keep the bar open past midnight since it already was, along with an all night beer machine in the games room. It also marked the beginning of Tim Kemp's commemorative collectors' item menu series, which have since added a unique and welcome tone of respectability to our proceedings.

[When Rod Bays saw the date of our dinner, he immediately reminded me that this was the 259th anniversary of the victory of Admiral Hawke over the French at Quiberon Bay. How could I have missed it?]

We gladly made use of these friendly facilities again in '99, now amicably re named HMCS Comox, but some of us felt like we were the road company of the Last Supper, desirous to return to more familiar surroundings.

Those of you who attended that night may remember the spirited discussion which followed the dinner. Stan Brygadyr masterfully anthologised the debate, which revealed a schism between those who expressed themselves in favour of remaining in Comox, opposed by a group led by Benny who opted for Naden.

Anticipating the spirit of Obama which always seeks to find a compromise, I proposed we all meet half way and set up in the Cowichan High School auditorium in Duncan, from where in fact I graduated, but my suggestions, like Barak's during his tenure, failed to gain traction.

The issue remained unresolved until sometime later in the year 2000, when I was told that the new Wardroom was completed in CFB Esquimalt.

I immediately made an appointment to inspect the premises since I needed to be persuaded that a move from the welcoming atmosphere of Comox was warranted.

In addition to the splendid setting, attractive accommodations and cooperative staff, as I later explained in my invitation letter, tipping the balance was my sense that what drew us together was our common naval experience which was here on such abundant display.

For the Venture graduates whose training establishment sprawled directly under the wardroom windows this would be like coming home, and even the inherent terror of the parade square finally neutralised by time.

From the moment we received permission, I knew this would be a seminal event requiring

special treatment, and nothing would top having Admiral Falls as our honoured guest.

His acceptance resulted in the largest attendance to date, and as Dave Oliphant's son Bruce piped us into the Wardroom, 76 of us, including Admiral Storrs, sat down to dine, and no one doubted that we had found our new home.

In addition to the heady success of this dinner, when I calculated the expenses, I discovered a healthy surplus of \$437, which I proudly forwarded in your name directly to Chuck Coffen at SAMF.

A month or more later, as I received no acknowledgement and the cheque remained uncashed, I called him in Dartmouth.

I sent you a letter, Chuck, how come you haven't responded? I asked.

We can't reply to every scribble we get, there'd be no end....

Chuck! there's money in it, I interrupted.

.....I'll look into it right away, he said after a pause.

The following day he phoned back. After an expanding square search, the letter was located behind some furniture. I knew I shouldn't have identified myself as the sender.

One would have thought that our millennium dinner would be a tough act to follow.

I know one proud Papa who harboured no such reservations.

Tom Byrne's son Shawn had the distinction of having participated extensively in the Balkan war in numerous combat capacities including flying F-18's off USS Saratoga. When Tom proposed Shawn as our next guest speaker, I jumped at the opportunity.

We were well rewarded with this choice, as this impressive young Lieut. Colonel, with spirit and panache, delivered an address perfectly chosen to appeal to a gaggle of old carrier pilots.

I had every reason to feel quite satisfied with the event, especially since we set a new attendance record of 84, and for once I approached my least favourite duty of settling the accounts in an unusually cheerful mood.

It wasn't long before I discovered a curious correlation.

No matter how many times I reworked the sums, I returned to the same result: I was \$455 short, which happened to be practically the same amount which last year I confidently forwarded to SAMF.

The derisive cackle of chickens coming home to roost accompanied visions of my erstwhile math teacher's despair as he puzzled over the results of my calculations, never once catching on to the fact that my answers were intended to be taken ironically.

I wriggled out of this dilemma with the simple stratagem of hiking the next year's fees, and since all's well that ends well, this method of balancing the books has served me admirably to this day. In fact, the fee increase to accommodate the shortfall resulted in a hefty overkill from which SAMF profited to the tune of \$815!

For the 2003 mess dinner, we were treated to the recounting of a piece of history lived by our

own Dickie Bartlett. He took us through his participation, as a young subbie, in the suicidal attack on the Scharnhorst in Trondjeim Fjord on the 13th of June, 1940.

He was flying the hopelessly outclassed Skua, armed with a 500lb. armour piercing bomb. The flight was attacked by German fighters well short of the target; his aircraft sustained several hits times on the way in, and Dick himself was badly wounded in the lower left side. He pressed on with the attack, his boot filling with blood, and with the engine barely running, released his bomb. Attempting to escape over the town of Trondjeim, he ran into a wall of flak; as he scraped over a hillside the engine fell off, and what was left of the aircraft reared up and crashed tail first. His gunner dragged him away from the wreck, and shortly thereafter they were picked up by a patrol and Dick spent the rest of the war as a POW.

As such, he became a participant in the Great Escape; Dick was to have been partnered by a Norwegian, however in the last minute he agreed to surrender his place to a newly captured Norwegian as such a pairing was deemed to have a better chance of success. These two Norwegians were among the fifty out of seventy six escapees who were executed when they were caught. Three made it safely to Blighty.

Our mess dinner that year was overwhelmed by the gargantuan presence of Gord Edwards. We will always remember how he shepherded us into a line for a photo which he seamlessly stitched into a single wide angle image. He then produced a commemorative CD, backed up by music, which would be played at final mess dinner.

Not to be outdone, in September of that year, our Eastern brethren led by Mike McCall organised a mess dinner which was held in Wolfville.

Theirs was a refined co-ed affair, and Mike seized the opportunity to chide us mercilessly for sticking to a strictly stag format; without the calming influence of the female gender, he argued, there was nothing to prevent an undignified deterioration into a raucous and anarchic free for all.

That's precisely why we don't invite them, you Eastern ninnies!

I explained to Mike that presenting ladies at our function had been seriously considered, but the limitations of the wardroom galley prevented the chef from producing a spacious enough cake.

Nevertheless, as a gesture of good will, a plenipotentiary representing our event in the person of that year's President, Ted Gibbon, was dispatched to attend their affair.

He conveyed our best wishes, along with a tribute of \$30 with the hope that, in the spirit of that famous thaumaturgical occasion when water was turned into wine, they should turn our offering into port.

2003 was the dinner during which we anointed a third non Naval Aviator as an Honorary, Temporary, Probationary, Acting Sub Lieutenant, additional for disposal under training.

The first two, Gareth Gwilliam and Linc Alexander, had been inducted into the group back in the Billy Bishop days, partly due to their sufficiently sullied reputations, and partly to quench their irksome habit which strongly resembled Kenny's method of foreplay; hours of begging.

The gentleman on whom that evening we bestowed the set of appropriately crafted custom

wings was one Andre Lemieux, previously vetted by Bill Park for the defects of character required to qualify him for this distinction.

For the 2004 occasion, I proposed that we, as a group, take on the function of guest speakers assigned with the task of recounting an event from our Naval past, but the specific object of the exercise was to describe something which happened to someone else.

I wanted to encourage the venting of those long repressed dirty little secrets we've been harbouring about our buddies, squadron mates or superiors for all these years.

The vengeful group who volunteered were: Jim Burns, Ted Gibbon, Gord Edwards, Ben Oxholm, Deke Logan, Jake Kennedy, Lance Olmstead, Les East and Dave Benton.

Each paraded skeletons from their respective closets, some of whom were attendees at the dinner. Dave Benton's inspired version of the Karel Doorman pass set a new standard for hyperbole, while Deke Logan's immortal re-telling of Moe Robida's transmission to Bordeaux tower in English brought the house down.

For my offering, I chose to expand my continuing obligatory series of cheap shots at Washbrook, except this time I decided to rip off a whole salvo.

The stories which Larry had spawned are legion, and Charlie Poirier and I are privileged to have witnessed, and are occasionally guilty of having provoked, some of those immortal episodes.

They are invariably hilarious, and though some may be a tad abrasive, they are never recounted maliciously or intended to belittle or denigrate his character, and Larry himself readily participated in their perpetuation.

The particular event I chose to relate occurred on a Saturday night in Stadacona. In the early sixties, we were still permitted to sign out a cabin in the Wardroom which was intended to serve as a sobering up station before continuing on to Shearwater after a rest, or next morning after a night's sleep.

Larry somehow managed to corrupt this procedure, using it instead as a staging ground to further fortify himself on the way to Halifax.

I dropped in on Larry in his rented room on the night in question, and found him hosting some like minded gentlemen surrounded by an obscenity of liquor.

I was just ready to take my leave when I heard him mention that he was planning to drive to his girl friend's place when he was sufficiently primed.

Judging him to have passed that stage half a dozen drinks earlier, I paused to consider the situation. Larry was at that time driving an Edsel. He had already endeared himself to the Ford Motor Co. back in the training command by his habit of writing off, then re-purchasing their products. The Edsel, not to mention Larry, was clearly in danger.

Already gone was a Mercury station wagon which met an unfortunate end on a curved bridge in Alabama on the way home from an all night bar.

It started, Charlie recalls, with the ominous phrase, "Let's see what this baby will do."

Well, what this baby didn't do was to take kindly to the speed with which it was urged to

negotiate the curve, which resulted in the car swapping ends and impaling itself on the guard rail which skewered the vehicle axially from the back, emerging through the windshield between the passenger and driver. Unscathed in the crash, Larry responded to a fire which broke out in the engine compartment by ripping off the hood and applying himself to extinguishing the flames with his bare hands. Meanwhile Charlie, likewise unhurt but eager to offer assistance, leaped out of the wreck without noticing that it was partly hanging out over the bayou, where he presently found himself swimming for his life among startled alligators, having first cut his nose and bruised his ribs from contact with some creosote smeared pilings on the way down.

This action also proved severely detrimental to the debut of his olive green suit recently arrived from Gieves, while Larry's hands swelled so much from the burns that his rings needed to be cut from his fingers.

Larry's next acquisition was a red and white Lincoln which could be seen from a fair distance in the dark, a feature which proved very useful one night when Larry nodded off in the most inconvenient place on the way from Corpus Christie to Kingsville where the Farm to Market road took a 90 degree turn.

When Bill Nash approached this place some time later, he was confronted by a gap in the hedge through which, at the end of two tire ruts impressed into the ploughed field, he could see a red and white shape.

On closer inspection, he discovered Larry blissfully asleep behind the wheel.

The Lincoln was towed out the next day with no visible damage; meanwhile Bill delivered a well rested Larry to the base.

One afternoon a month or two later, Larry drove into the parking lot of the BOQ, and since he was only planning a short stay, in order to keep the interior cool in the stifling heat, he left the engine running with the air conditioning on.

A party was being held in someone's room which distracted Larry from his purpose.

The muffled explosion which caught our attention appeared to originate from the parking lot.

From the window we could see a cloud of brown steam jetting out from under the hood of Larry's Lincoln.

It wasn't long before Larry became the proud owner of the impressive Edsel sedan which became the cause of my present concern.

Larry's condition precluded any discussion, so I surreptitiously pocketed his car keys and proceeded to my destination.

The following morning I timed my return to Stad to coincide with the opening of the bar.

Sunday was a solemn time in the wardroom where respectably attired Fish Heads accompanied by their fashionably coiffed spouses congregated after church for a quiet pre luncheon sherry.

With a beer in hand, I drifted to the back of the room.

A disturbance outside caused everyone's attention to turn to main door.

Framed in the entrance, wheezing dangerously, steadying himself with outstretched arms

grasping the doorjambs, like a deranged Samson materialised the imposingly full measure of Larry Washbrook.

His bloodshot eyes worked independently like a chameleon's as they pierced the premises.

He stiffened as he spotted me in the distance.

Locking on, he drew in a loud breath and the next thing the distinguished gathering heard was a blood curdling bellow:

PLAWSKI YOU C- - T!

A horrified silence riveted the room.

Dimly aware that he'd just perpetrated an outrage, Larry's hand flew to his mouth, and it was obvious he was desperately composing some kind of amendment; what blurted out was the mother of all retractions:

OOPS! - he corrected himself betraying a sheepish grin, - I meant you WOMB!

As it turned out, I only extended the Edsel's life by a month. In a pre amble to the final destruction, Larry managed to score a bulls eye on the solitary tree which graced the centre of the vast concrete expanse of the Halifax dockyard.

The final moment of destiny arrived on a snowy night a week later when the car wilfully departed from its assigned track and climbed up a guy wire holding up a telephone pole; when the wire broke, the car thus released slammed into the pole toppling it and bending the frame beyond repair.

For our 2005 event, I attempted to invite a gentleman whose name was Franz Stigler, a Luftwaffe fighter ace. When I had met him a few years earlier, he was still in great form, but by now he was no longer able to accept the invitation.

Stigler was credited with 28 victories, though he claimed the actual number was over 50, all on the western front. During the war, he'd been shot down 16 times, which included one ditching, ten crash landings and six bailouts.

The exploit for which he became famous was a remarkable act of chivalry; he intercepted a flying wreck of a B17 straggling for home, but clearly on a course which would take it over the North Sea. Unable to bring himself to finish it off, he pulled out in front, waggled his wings and established a course for England. He then formatted along side, saluted and broke off. [This is how he described the event to me, the Goggle version differs slightly]. The bomber made it to shore, but this humanitarian act was classified secret by the Allies; neither of course could Franz mention it back home.

The facts emerged in the 90's when the two pilots finally met.

[Goggle Franz Stigler for the whole story].

With Stigler unavailable, I decided to return to the formula which served us so well the previous year and asked for volunteers to present stories unmasking formerly concealed crimes, unexposed breaches of conduct or, better still, acts of unrevealed heroism or daring. Once again some inspired orators stepped up to the breach, with Deke Logan reciting hilarious stories

about Wardrop and Etchells in the Med, Fred Hawrysh describing Stegan's write off of a Turkey, and Kenny providing one of his immortal poems. Wayne Dannhauer's tale of a bulldog harassing his pet rabbit in Barkerville where he grew up was particularly appropriate since the dog belonged to Raymond Collishaw, the very person whose name was to appear on the cover of that year's President Al Snowie's upcoming book, which was the subject of his closing address.

You might remember that this was the dinner during which Stu Soward suffered a stroke.

My guest Ron Thomas, Air Attack Officer from California, was ready to administer first aid, but the Paramedics arrived in a flash, and who can forget Stu's regal wave as he was carried out on a stretcher.

Stu recovered later that evening but was not able to return to the dinner.

For 2006, we decided to raise our sights and invite Marc Garneau to be our honoured guest. Gord Edwards proposed this to Marc on our behalf in Ottawa, but as he was otherwise engaged, I decided to continue with our successful oral history series, and once again requested that we all mine our memories for anecdotes whose verifiability would remain unchallenged by mutual consent.

The run up to this event was for some reason marred by a series of imponderables which sorely challenged my always shaky organisational skills.

To begin with, the day before the dinner Steve Quayle, Dave and Doug Oliphant and John Turner all announced their desire to attend. This of course scrambled the plans for Megan Ilott, our hard pressed and highly capable wardroom coordinator; she eventually succeeded to arrange the extra meals for which I suggested the offenders should reward her with a bouquet of flowers.

They delivered in roses, and in a regal ceremony worthy of an investiture, on bended knee Steve presented a magnificent arrangement which amply and stylishly atoned for her travails.

That afternoon Murray Calwell breezed in from Chicago; a welcome arrival indeed, but a serious surprise as his name did not appear on any of my lists. However, this handily coincided with Brian Moorhouse's withdrawal, and as I hadn't yet cancelled his room, Murray's credible imitation of Brian earned him his accommodations, and carried neatly over to the table where his convincing impersonation only disintegrated when his dinner companions remembered that Brian never wore a moustache.

The balance was once more restored when Gerald McCaughey's unexpected arrival matched Mike Martin's nonappearance, so when Douglas Oliphant triumphantly piped us into the dining room, I was relieved that everything seemed to have fallen into place.

I should have taken into account the possibly unpredictable direction in which our President Jake Kennedy might lead us, but having ensured that no ornamental mounted bells lay within his reach, I felt I had at least eliminated one potential cause of injury.

Jake jump started the evening by calling on the Padre, Bill Howie, to recite the Mariner's Prayer. Evidently unhinged by this unexpected request, Bill struggled awkwardly with the lines, to which Jake, like a lawyer who never asks a question to which he doesn't know the answer, expertly

supplied the text.

Soon thereafter, Jake started requesting various diners to provide a speech. According to the Customs and Traditions, these should follow the loyal toast. Nevertheless, Jake's flamboyant authority over rode any concerns with protocol, and we had no choice but to swing with our leader's sure handed, but hardly mess dinner like, improvisation.

One drawback of his approach was that, when calling for speeches, Jake was chiefly drawing on the list of volunteers with which I supplied him before the dinner.

The result was that he practically exhausted the inventory of after dinner speakers.

He then requested an address from Vice President McCulloch, who supplied some witty Churchillian quotations which were part of his carefully crafted composition subsumed to the toast of the day.

We were now irredeemably discombobulated since that toast ought to have followed The Queen.

I remember a prolonged kaffuffle leading up to the passing of the port, and when Vice President Stephens was finally untethered to give the Loyal Toast, the effect was limply anti climatic.

This dinner, though admittedly chaotic, nevertheless holds its place as one of the most unforgettable, because Jake directed it from start to finish with his inimitably characteristic panache.

Perhaps at a future date, Jake might consider compressing the conventions which govern the conduct of these occasions by toasting the Queen immediately following Grace.

2007 marked our twenty first anniversary.

As I wrote in my covering letter at the time, I was highly cognisant that this coming of age constituted a significant milestone whose cachet embraced historical precedent, the establishment of tradition and an expectation of continuity.

The twenty one years of precedent established the tradition, and I undertook to satisfy the expectation if you provided the continuity; well, Gentlemen, you came through in hearts.

For this landmark occasion, I decided to consider Brian Moorhouse's offer of inviting Peter C Newman, Brian's personal friend, as our guest speaker. I became convinced this was the right move when I read Peter's provocative and engaging autobiography, "Here be Dragons," where he professed a passion for the Navy and disclosed he was a Captain in the Naval Reserve.

Brian facilitated the contact, and Peter accepted.

This was also the 50th anniversary of the launching of the Bonaventure.

Naturally, the right person to address the subject was Al Snowie.

I was very excited by the prospect of such an excellent program, and evidently so were 69 of you who decided to attend.

Having learned from his book that Peter was an avid jazz drummer, I purchased in Paris a small but competently crafted toy drum, and to imbue it with an unmistakably Naval Air

personality, I painted a set of wings on the leather surface.

I called Peter to brief him on our modus operandi and requested that he arrive at least an hour early to give him a chance to meet with our distinguished band of brother officers. We also agreed that he would waive his customary appearance fee in return for air fare.

The agreed upon hour passed and no sign of Peter. With half an hour to go, he was still an absentee. At ten to seven I grabbed Brian, we ran up to his cabin to get Peter's cell number and dialled.

Where are you? Brian asked when he answered.

Just driving up to the wardroom, he replied, apparently the chauffeur lost his way.

He entered with five minutes to spare. We delayed sitting to dinner so he could be hurriedly introduced to the President Malcolm McCulloch, Vices Chris Dalley and Eric Nielsen, and finally we all trooped in to dine.

Al Snowie opened the postprandial speeches with an informative talk about the history of the Bonnie, after which I made my usual verbose report; Brian then performed the introduction, our guest rose to accept our applause, and we sat back to enjoy Mr. Canada's eagerly awaited presentation

Peter then produced a sheaf of notes and proceeded to read them.

His delivery was unexpectedly colourless and muted, but we all leaned in, poised to absorb the anticipated wit of the celebrated chronicler of our past and the conscience of our nation, replete with his renowned and enviable skills of taking facts and making them dance.

As he started his reading, those of us familiar with his autobiography – [I'd made it obligatory reading before the dinner] – began to recognise that we were being presented with an unedited reproduction of chapter 9 from his book which he called "My double life in the Canadian Navy".

This chapter contains some genuinely amusing anecdotes, appropriate as asides but hardly the cynosure of a keynote address. Moreover, Peter's sonorous regurgitation sucked out all the humour.

This was a distinct disappointment; we'd been expecting something fresh, something special, something tailored to this audience.

Presently I became aware of a catatonic stupor spreading over the aggregation.

I was horrified that our guest would be rightly offended if he noticed, but Peter's eyes seemingly never left the page.

Like a Master at Arms at church parade, I began to take names.

Nodding away were some of our most esteemed members. I wouldn't wish to bring disrepute on anyone, even at this remote distance in time, so I'll only use initials, but the culprits will know who they are. Prominent among them were JT, [NOT John Truran], IM, SF, HB, TG and GL, and not unexpectedly LW, but BO challenged all decency by slumping in a comatose torpor, while DH unashamedly slept right at the head table.

When Peter laid down his script, a smattering of polite applause revived the slumberers, and

only then were we finally treated to some interesting off the cuff observations about his speciality Conrad Black, along with some thought provoking revelations about the Iranian nuclear program apparently obtained from Mossad.

In those last ten minutes Mr. Newman showed his charm and erudition, but it wasn't enough to make up for a basic lack of preparation by resorting to a lazy way out.

Nevertheless he graciously accepted the toy drum, and shortly thereafter departed the premises leaving us regrettably to conclude that his conduct showed little respect for his audience.

The standing ovation which I had hoped would be meant for our guest was instead directed to the chef Darcy Johnston, whose culinary improvements became immediately evident after taking over the galley the previous year, and to the staff, drilled by CPO Molloy to perform the service as a coordinated team, who were a pleasure to watch.

This was also the year when Herry Allix brought an assortment of his writings for us to keep, which revealed him to be a gifted poet and an accomplished illustrator of children's books.

It is always such a pleasure to discover unknown talents, and it wasn't till Herry offered up his work that we became aware of this aspect of his life.

Included was a novel, an autobiography, [he'd been a test pilot on Corsairs in the RN during the last part of WW2] and three books of charming poetry dedicated to one of his passions, sailing.

The run up to our 2008 event was tarnished by a slanderous whispering campaign alleging that I had asked Mr. McCulloch to preside over last year's mess dinner having completely forgotten that I had previously offered this position to Mr. Park.

It is time to set the record straight.

There was a deep seated reason behind what at first glance might appear as an egregious gaffe, but which in fact was rooted in the well known habits of last year's honoured guest.

It is common knowledge that Mr. Newman's speciality, for which he singles out confidants and acquaintances, is character assassination.

I had a strong sense that Mr. Park was highly vulnerable to this treatment on several counts.

Prominent among these is that he is a Canadian who owns properties, including a sizable farm and a fleet of aircraft, in the United States, while operating a vessel of considerable heft and girth in Canadian waters.

Moreover it is well known that he owns a large shredder.

There was also a danger that Mr. Newman's venerated sleuthing skills could lead him to police records from Northern California in the summer of 1968 etc., etc....

Mr. McCulloch, on the other hand, was able to present himself as a simple rug merchant, which served to defuse our guest's proclivities to such an extent that Mal's character, at least from that source, remains unblemished to this day.

I rest my case, except to say that it will be very revealing to read Mr. Newman's upcoming biography of Brian Moorhouse.

Reliable sources have already leaked the title: Viniferous Deception, or how buying cheap wine succeeds in deflecting the government's attention from your true worth.

To select the program for our next dinner, I gladly accepted a proposition from my most constant adviser, Stan Brygadyr.

Stan's input through the years has been invaluable to me, and I welcomed his constructive counsel both before and after each event.

On this occasion, Stan proposed Admiral Ken Summers to be our next guest speaker, to which I readily agreed. Adm. Summers' career included an impressive series of appointments from commanding ships and destroyer squadrons to becoming Chief of Staff of the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic. Bill Park could now confidently preside over this dinner without reservations, and this honoured guest would not require a thousand dollars for his expenses.

All went smoothly with the exception of Ben Oxholm's room which I neglected to book, neatly solved by Gareth Gwilliam's concurrent release of his reservation, and the agreeable smell of roses accompanied me for the rest of the day.

Ken Summers offered us an intimate perspective of Canadian Forces' participation in the first Gulf war, 90-91, of which he was Officer in Charge. This was an endeavour which required very special organisational skills, which under his leadership proved to be a great success.

I had hoped to invite Ken to the following dinner to apprise us of his frequent and recent visits to Afghanistan, but of course our schedule changed.

Over the years, I had always welcomed it when you invited your sons.

Pinky Turner started it off by inviting his son Richard, after which Dave Oliphant continued the trend by introducing us to Doug and Bruce, complete in Highland attire, who revived the tradition of piping us into the wardroom.

Not to be out done, John Kyle invited his son David, who also happened to be the CO of CFB Esquimalt, and of course who can forget the Byrne brothers Larry and Scott, and particularly Shawn, our valedictorian in 01.

The idea of dedicating a dinner specifically to your male progeny had been simmering in my imagination for some time, so when you responded so favourably to my e mailed query, I leaped at the opportunity.

As I wrote in my original letter, "we have always felt that our unique background groomed us to think of ourselves as family. Introducing us to your very special kin whose importance in your lives rightly holds pride of place cannot help but cement this feeling further."

As a result we were honoured to host 18 of your scions and genuinely marvelled in the variety of their accomplishments as each was introduced and then in turn addressed the gathering. I wished I could have included mine in this hallowed group, but none of the bastards would own up to the heritage.

The sons in attendance were as follows:

Bryan Arnold, Jeff Arnold, John Arnold, Peter Bayne, Colin Duncan, James Gibbon, David

Gwilliam, Matthew Hallaran, Nick Hallaran, Kent Laforme, Craig Olmstead, Michael McGee, Colin Park, Craig Stephens, Retford Sterling, Shawn Sterling, Jordan Strom and Michael Todd.

Ken Stephens, our member youngest in spirit, proved the ideal President, and his performance was memorably exemplary.

For 2010, Dave Tate agreed to be our guest speaker, but a medical problem scuttled this plan which meant another plunge into that treasure trove of reminiscences the sharing of which constitutes one of the pivotal reasons for these meetings.

That was the year when Al Snowie finally unveiled his long awaited book, Collishaw and Company.

We all had hoped that he'd mark the occasion by arriving in his Fokker, and accompanied by his wingman Al Jasper, make a sharp carrier break over the wardroom and alight smartly on the Venture parade square to tumultuous acclaim.

Instead the author treated us by appearing in an authentic WW1 lieutenant's uniform which sported a badge signifying the wearer was a Squad Leader, and boasted wings on each arm; which begs the question: why did they reduce the number of wings to one?

This not only served to destabilise a sympathetic symmetry; it created for us the inelegant necessity to perpetually lead with the left sleeve, whereas in our forebears' time, you could spot a pilot from any direction.

The 2010 dinner was characterised by a precipitous drop in attendance, as only 38 of us sat to dine.

I felt that this was the beginning of an inevitable trend. I penned a letter shortly after our last event concluding that, after much agonising, I determined that 2011 would be the last under my "command".

"I'd given much thought to this decision", I wrote, "and wanted to assure you it does not arise from laziness or a sudden lack of interest; in fact I do so with considerable regret since your continuing support had given me an immense amount of personal satisfaction.

Knowing when to quit is an enormously difficult decision. The trick is to anticipate when things are on the verge of atrophy

Driving this judgement is the abiding distaste I'm sure we all share of the prospect of watching something shrink, diminish and peter out."

Fortunately, sometimes a confluence of reasons offers itself up to fortify a decision.

In this case, in addition to the satisfaction of finishing on a silver anniversary, we can also take advantage of the opportunity of quitting at our peak.

"Indeed, having had the privilege to observe you most of my adult life, I feel uniquely qualified to judge that you are at your apogee," I reasoned, " which dictates that this is the right time to stage our grand farewell."

With the groundwork laid, I began to apply myself to the task of staging the last Hurrah. I dove into the archives and extruded statistics which included lists of officers and guest speakers, attendance records [which revealed that Joe Sosnkowski, Ken Stephens and I never missed an event], and sadly discovered that 50 of those who sat with us at this dinner had joined the list of Absent Friends.

This information, along with a recently discovered write up of a 1963 Shearwater Mess Dinner, complete with damning photographic evidence, formed one of the first of many missives released over the year.

This was followed by the self exculpatory Karel Doorman Episode, the shamelessly self aggrandising content of this History, and a myriad other loud and aggressive mnemonic devices designed to draw focus to the upcoming function.

Clearly it worked, as 93 Naval Aviators and 32 guests chose to gather from all over the North American continent on the evening of the 2nd of December, 2011.

On entering the anteroom we were met by an enormous screen, trucked in from Portland by Bill Park, displaying a continuous slide show.

This was painstakingly compiled from the VS880 line book, along with material from Gord Edwards, Fred Harvey, Larry O'Brien, Hank Bannister and myself, by the photographer and visual aids volunteer Alisa Denduyf.

She also created the cover for the SAM DVD, and plans to edit, with Bill Park's invaluable input, the photo and video footage from the dinner.

The history of our final gathering could not be entrusted to more competent hands.

At 1900 hrs. we were piped into the wardroom by Dave Oliphant's son Bruce.

Musical accompaniment was provided by the Naden Navy Band.

Not everything went quite as planned, of course, and the chief fault can be attributed to the hopelessly overambitious program proposed by the organiser.

Clearly affected by this realisation, your President then fumbled the introduction of our guest Gordon Longmuir, who might well be advised finally to consider assuming the monicker "Longhurst" with which he seems to be continually rechristened.

What I had intended to include in my introduction of Gordon was that among his achievements as a career External Affairs Officer was his service as Canada's Ambassador to Cambodia, but most importantly, by his own admission, is his position as the Registrar of the Venture Association and Editor of the Signal, and it is for this contribution that we were honoured to invite him as our guest.

I subsequently conveyed my apologies to Gordon for this inexcusable gaffe.

The original program called for the customary introduction of guests which was to be followed by an address by 24 Commanding Officers of Squadrons, Ships or Shore Establishments. When the guests were done, a rough calculation revealed that we would need to remain in our seats until breakfast to accomplish this aim.

Regretfully I was obliged to call a halt to this ludicrous plan, stranding weeks of meticulous preparation by the CO's whose efforts appeared to be doomed to be born to blush unheard, but not, thanks to Al Snowie's brilliant suggestion, unseen.

Al's renowned respect for the creative muse prompted him to propose that those "gems of purest ray serene" be not allowed to waste their sweetness on the dockyard air, but should instead be expanded beyond their original limited intent and forwarded to Al, hopefully to serve as the genesis of a future anecdotal history of Canadian Naval Aviation.

One of the undisputed highlights of the dinner was Colin Curleigh's recitation of Mike McCall's laureate poem, "Remembering", using the final verse as an inspired introduction to the toast to Naval Aviation.

The other was the address by our Honoured Guest, Dave Tate.

Dave was undeniably the perfect choice as our final valedictorian.

His naval career from 1950 to 1981 overlapped the time of service of the rest of us at both ends, during which all who worked with him or for him were inspired by his competence, his ready friendship and unrivalled dedication.

For his address, Dave found just the right mix of the nostalgic and the anecdotal, and we are most grateful to him for bringing this tradition to such an elegant conclusion.

For my closing remarks, I felt the need once more to reiterate my thanks to all those who contributed to such an enormous extent to make this event possible:

to my erstwhile widow Rita for her patience during my periodic intervals of internal exile;

to Bob McNish for his years of invaluable assistance;

to Stan Brygadyr for his continued personal involvement, and for his always wise and welcome advocacy;

to Tim Kemp for the series of inventive commemorative menus;

to the wardroom coordinator Michelle Smith, to chef Darcy Johnston and their staff for their superb preparations;

to Christine Dunphy at SAM for creating the VS 880 line book copy especially for this event;

to Alisa Denduyf for her continuing dedication to create an archival memoir of this occasion;

to Bill Park, Joe Sosnkowski, Ted Gibbon, Ben Oxholm, John Truran, Ken Stephens and a

dizzying Academy Award list of all who contributed in so many ways;
and finally to all 330 of you for all your years of patronage which made the effort so
unconditionally worthwhile.

Although your unwavering support would have served amply as my reward, I was utterly
overwhelmed by the presentation of a replica ammunition box which contained a pair of chrome
plated arrester hooks donated by Stan Brygadyr, all constructed and exquisitely mounted by
none other than the volunteer immortaliser of our final event, Alisa Denduyf.

These will hold pride of place in my abode for the remainder of my forever.

I am also eternally indebted to Bill Park for having personally enshrined my name on the
Shearwater Museum Wall of Honour with a plaque reading:

Lt. George Plawski, who kept the memory alive with twenty five years of mess dinners.
BZ from all, 1986-2011.

How can I even start to express my appreciation?

In summary, this dinner shattered the previous attendance record by 41

Such an assembly of squadron mates is unlikely ever to be eclipsed.

The surplus of \$2484 we generated has been forwarded on your behalf to SAMF.

46 of the 50 VS 880 line book DVD's made available at the dinner, which were facilitated by our
indomitable Kay Collacutt and Christine Hines and created by Christine Dunphy, were eagerly
snapped up.

As a token of our appreciation for his continuing contribution to keeping our fragile Naval Air
community together, we took advantage of this occasion to express our collective thanks to Ted
Cruddas, who was unable to accept our invitation to attend as our guest, with a gift of Jack
Ford's dynamic painting "Winding up on the cat", with a dedication from all attendees of the
mess dinner

I believe we can conclude that our event accomplished its primary purpose:

to honour each other and the memory of what brought us together.

This was the sentiment so appropriately captured by Colin Curleigh when he raised the toast to
Naval Aviation by quoting the final stanza of Mike McCall's poem, and it is with the eloquence of
these words that I wish to bring down the curtain on our grand adventure:

.....SO STAND AND RAISE YOUR GLASSES HIGH,

LOOK EACH OTHER IN THE EYE,

THEN THANK YOUR MATES FOR BEING THERE,

IN THOSE SWEET, SWEET DAYS OF NAVAL AIR.

George Plawski.

