

Not Your Average Joe

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Tuesday, March 13, 2012 marks the end of an era.

That day Joe Carr went on to his reward in heaven. I know heaven was expecting him although he may not have been expecting to arrive there.

I wanted to write a few words about the time I knew Joseph E. Carr

The Beach Crew Days

We met Joe Carr when a few of us, new arrivals from boot camp, were sent to the VP-44 Beaching crew. (*Informally known as the beach crew*)

There was no beach, just a concrete ramp, a Quonset hut and a few large, yellow tractors. The beach crew comprised of about six misfits and new arrivals that soon “*fit in*” with the misfits. The beach crew did not consider themselves to be misfits. They thought of themselves as a tight knit family. Nevertheless Joe Carr enjoyed being a misfit and practiced his role every day, everywhere he went, being loud, raucous and free-spirited.



Joe’s best friend, Carl Robertson, joined the Navy with Joe. Both were from Southern New Jersey, just outside of Philadelphia. Both were on the beach crew. They were an “*Abbott and Costello*” pair with Carl in the role of the wiser Bud Abbot.

Carl knew better than to compete with Joe so he egged Joe on, into more mischief.

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The job of the Beaching crew was to launch and retrieve the Martin P5-M



Seaplanes the squadron flew. They removed the wheels after lowering the plane into the water and they put the wheels back on when the planes returned home after a flight. They used the tractors, a small boat and the famous "Poopie Suit" The boat was used to affix the main wheels while the Poopie suit was used

for the tail wheel. The tail wheel was attached by a man standing in about four feet of water. The poopie suit was designed by someone who had very strong legs because us skinny recruits could hardly move in it.

Joe and Carl graduated in responsibility so they got to drive the boat, handling the main wheels. Someone taught them how to water ski using barrel staves. I don't know where they got those or how they attached them to their feet but I did hear about their prowess in skiing around Willoughby bay on the weekends when no one was looking.

Our experience on a ship

In the summer of 1960 we flew off in our seaplanes to join the USS Albemarle anchored in the mouth of the Rappahannock river. One afternoon we went aboard the ship to shower and to get something to eat. Joe and I went to the ships store and bought some ice cream in paper cups. We heard that the store was called "*The Geedunk*" by the sailors on board. What we didn't know was that every item you bought was also known as a geedunk. Yes, the ice cream cups had another name! As Joe and I stood on the ships rail admiring the shoreline a Chief Boatswain's mate came toward

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us shouting “No geedunks on the weather deck!” Joe replied “No, its downstairs”. That remark revealed that he was not an experienced sailor and the boatswain’s mate quickly escorted us to an upper deck cabin where the two of us met the executive officer of the ship. No harm done but a good story to tell. We were so proud of our experience.

Joe on a flight Crew

The next year the squadron switched to P2-V Neptunes with two reciprocating engines and two small jets. Joe changed roles and became an Ordnanceman, what else for a guy who admires a good “Blam” now and then.

Joe joined crew 3 as their Ordnanceman. He must have done well because he stayed with them for the remainder of his enlistment. I believe he really enjoyed the experience.

Joe Carr Stories, fact and fiction

Joe Carr was always well liked. That is why we made a serious effort to find him before the recent VP-44 reunions. Our get-togethers were always filled with “Joe Carr stories”, some of which were based on fact and some were, well... just legends.

I was a guest with crew 3 on one flight and I remember one crazy incident where the squadron C/O, Commander Bob Pierce was the command pilot. It was common, as we prepared for landing, to fire up the two J-34 jet engines, just in case we needed extra power to regain altitude. The pilot would start the jet engines and ask the ordance compartment if the jets had



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fired up. On this flight Pierce asked Joe to report successful firing. Joe mumbled “*affirmative*” Pierce apparently did not hear Joe or didn’t like his mumble. Pierce asked again to report. Joe again said “*Affirmative*”. Unfortunately, Pierce asked a third time and Joe showed his frustration by sticking the hand-held microphone out of the window and then keyed the mic. Pierce heard the roar of the jets the recips and the wind all at once. I thought I had better find another place to sit in case pierce came back in the plane, he did not.

One of the legends about Joe’s antics was the dropping of the honey bucket bag (*latrine*) as we passed over Ocean view amusement park’s roller coaster. There was said to be a brown stain on the white wooden supports. That was not the only Joe story about ocean view. Joe was credited (no proof) with mixing dye marker and Bubble bath and pouring it into the tunnel of love ride. The result was said to be pink bubbles filling the ride.

Painting the apartment for Caldwell

Carl Robinson tells of the day Joe and friends were to help a shipmate named Caldwell by painting his apartment in exchange for a few beers. Joe volunteered to obtain the paint, which turned out to be very similar to “*Navy Barracks Green*”. The apartment walls were the intended surface to be painted but after a few beers the floor ended up with it’s share of green paint.

The “F” word

One old friend asked me to insert a few sentences about Joe’s liberal use of the “F” word. According to some of his friends, Joe would find ways to interject the F word twice in one sentence and ten times in a brief conversation. I will chalk that up to his Camden area upbringing. I believe he cleaned up his language before he left the navy.

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Joe gets a good conduct medal

I did not learn this until forty years afterward. I must say I was amazed, and jealous. Joe received a good conduct medal while in VP-44. I don't know who put in for it but I for one was flabbergasted that Joe snuck that one by me. Joe Carr and good conduct just don't go together.

Last year, Joe and some other friends counterfeited the good conduct document and gave a copy to me. It looks just like the real one, so my jealousy is reduced.

The Jersey Boys

During our U.S. Navy experience we were stationed in NAS Norfolk Virginia and (after eight months in Sicily) NATC Patuxent River Maryland. Both stations within driving distance of Philly, Camden and New York. Many of us would pack ourselves in a car, pay the driver ten bucks and ride north to somewhere near home. The group remained friends on base and after the Navy. That group consisted of Carl Robertson, Fred Busler, Ralph Bernard, Frank Romeo, Joe Carr, Dan Swaney, Steve Gardner and me. Others drifted in and out but this was the foundation group. Sometimes I would take a greyhound from Philly to NY. As I look back, that was crazy. We all stayed friends until enlistment was up. Some lasted long afterward some didn't but we never forgot one another.

Reunions and the internet

After forty five years apart the VP-44 friends started to re-gather in 2001. The miracle of the computer and the internet made it easy to find people. I think it was in 2007, Frank Ralph Bernard and I had regained contact as did Fred and Dan, Steve plus many others. The question was asked, "*has anyone heard from Joe Carr*"? They had not.

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I was looking in the electronic white pages for a Joseph E. Carr when I came upon the name, with a maple shade address. I called the number but only heard an answering machine. I left a detailed message saying that I was looking for a Joseph Carr who was in The US Navy, VP-44, in 1959-63. I waited a few days not thinking I had hit it right. Then one night my phone rang and lo-and behold the voice says "Ralph, its Joe" "My son said you called him".

Right away I was elated, even the abbreviated "*Ralph its Joe*" was typical of the formality and manners that Joe never exhibited. He expected that I would know his voice, that I would know who "*Joe*" was! Funny, I did know.

Marriage, careers, Grandkids and memories

We finally met again, at Frank Romeo's home in Maryland. Joe introduced "*Dottie*" and talked about Kids and grandkids, we were all back on equal footing now. We had all chosen well and, unlike the national average, our marriages were all solid, long term unions. How fortunate we all are. Dottie is amazing. Why do I say that? Because Joe had not mellowed much over forty five years and she had put up with him all that time. I suspect they were alike enough that they complimented one another.

Joe and Dottie had retired to Florida. They have a nice home in Ridge Manor Central Florida, with a swimming pool and easy access to shopping. Since that initial reunion, we have gathered a few more times at Franks, at Pensacola and at Chattanooga TN. Carl and Joe, the original Abbot and Costello pair have gotten to spent more time together, as it should be.

Time is catching up

The reunion group just got smaller. Joe Carr has gone ahead to reserve a place where, one by one we may all gather again, flying on very different

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wings. Unfortunately we can't embellish the stories then, it will all have to be truth.

Truth is, Joe was a friend whom we will all treasure. We will miss him until we are all flying in formation together.