

The Life and Death of *The Log* Part II

By Dave Foyer '71

By 1975 *The Log* was 50 cents, was 48 pages long, and the editor was struggling to come to terms with the impending arrival of female midshipmen including discussion of uniforms after taps and which companies women would be in. But overall the tone throughout *The Log* was that of acceptance.

“Navy is going co-ed, and rough, tattooed, cigar-smoking housemother, Mother Bancroft, is cleaning up her act in anticipation of the arrival of her daughters.”¹ Poetry was at a low ebb, but the cartoons were great.

The fall 1980 *Log* seemed typographically uneven, perhaps set by an early computer program, but subscriptions were apparently running well. It was still around 36 pages but production values had slipped (though they improved later in the year) and the advertisements for the tobacco, auto and defense industries were gone. Now, Navy Mutual had the back cover advertisements, and Peerless Clothing, NFCU and USAA covered inside pages. There was little poetry, no jokes and even the cartoons seemed cruder. The “Company Cuties” and “Salty Sam” were still featured but sports and professional coverage were down. Notable in 1980 was a piece by Jon Buttram '80 on the “Best of *The Log* Art”

For part I, see the October issue of *Shipmate* at www.usna.com.



Cover 1999, last issue in stacks

“I’ll publish, right or wrong/ Fools are my theme, let satire be my song.”

collection, which showcased the best cartoonists of the previous 67 years.

The September 1985 issue was published from within Bancroft. The issue contained a momentous announcement: the Administration had decided a Brigade magazine could not legally accept advertisements. Costs were absorbed by subscriptions and the rate rose to \$11.00 a year, or \$1.00 an issue. On the plus side, the masthead was integrated, and there were lots of female contributors. Features included “Log

Notes,” “Rock Review,” “Log Mail,” and company girlfriends (no longer called “Cuties”). Sam was there and poetry was back. The back cover now had no advertisements at all, but there were parody “ads” scattered here and there in the 32-page issue.

The earlier turbulence seemed to have smoothed out early in 1989. The March issue seemed like just another in the long line of parody issues, and not even the first to spoof *Playboy*; the April 1969 issue had done it with no discernible repercussion. The 1989 issue had been approved by the officer rep, but “Playmid,” with a centerfold of a female midshipman in a swimsuit, struck then Superintendent Rear Admiral Virgil Hill ‘61 as “not in keeping with Navy and Naval Academy policy regarding women in the Navy.” He ordered the issue confiscated and all 5,000 copies destroyed.² *The Washington Post* linked Admiral Hill’s action to Ortega’s and Castro’s muzzling of their presses on its editorial page stating: “Attempting to exercise that kind of control on university-age students is not only futile but counter to the objective of higher education to develop enquiring minds and critical judgment.”³ Admiral Hill defended himself in print saying his intent was to avoid “demeaning” women.⁴ Predictably, 420 copies disappeared from a locked room and are now collector’s items,⁵ and *Playboy* magazine itself took the brouhaha nationwide again by running portions of the offending issue in its September magazine.⁶

In September of 1990, interestingly enough, the advertisements reappeared including Koon’s Ford, Alexander’s Jewelry, Dockside Annie’s and other local businesses. Page count was back up to 48, and there were lots of women included on the masthead and throughout the magazine. Things look healthy, but the masthead flaunts an ominous quote from Lord Byron: “I’ll publish, right or wrong/Fools are my theme, let satire be my song.” Apparently hackles were still raised after the previous year’s event, for the introductory issue promises “no Cuties” and “more variety, and not be as much of a scandal rag.”



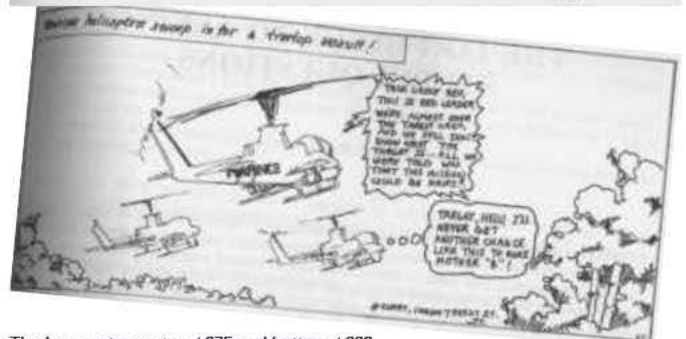
Top: Cartoon from *The Log*, 1990; bottom: Cartoon from *the Capital*, 1989

But as the 90s progressed, production values continued to slide, though professional development pages returned. Issues carried more photos and drawings and fewer articles. There were outrageous test questions and features on “how to write the perfect chit” and “twelve things to do with a dead roommate.” There was apparently a hiatus in early 1994 through 1995. The magazine was revived, but was now down to around 24 pages and appeared only in winter and spring issues. Advertisements were from the usual local jewelers—always *The Log’s* most dependable supporters—USAA, Pepper’s and Griffin’s. “Salty ★★★” now called for submissions to “The Brigade’s bathroom wall.” It’s not nearly up to the standard of earlier years, but the outrageousness lingers. Ominously, no one is identifiable on the masthead—just pseudonyms like “Martin the Martian.”

The trail grows faint with no issues printed from ’96. A note in the archives quoted a colonel as saying there may not be another issue: “Log discontinued.” But three issues came out in ’97, each at about 44 pages. In 1998 “Midshipizards,” *The Log’s* longest-running comic strip, created by Ray Trygstad ’77 and drawn with varying degrees of success by various pens, was finally terminated.

In 1999 *The Log* enjoyed a moment of renewed possibility when Officer Rep Commander M. J. Sweeney and editor Erik Kjellgren ’00 finally managed to walk what Sweeney called “the .5mm path of what would be reasonably funny to the Brigade, acceptably funny or perhaps obscure to the Administration, would not get us into the front page of the *Baltimore Sun*, would not cause me to be stoned by my fellow Batt-Os and company officers and would not cause my sudden departure from USNA for untoward reasons”.⁷ Their motto was “more fun than a barrel of monkeys . . . and almost as messy.” The “Company Cuties” were back in its 56 pages, neither more nor less revealing than in the 60s. The last ’99 issue has Gary Trudeau’s strip where Jeff is considering applying to the Naval Academy, service selection details, and comments on the service at the bookstore.

With help from the Alumni Association and former *Log* staffers, it was possible to reconstruct the final days of the magazine. Apparently, it began with the periodical losing its officer rep (Commander Sweeney’s replacement) in an unrelated incident having to do with the Eighth Wing Players. Without him, the March/April 2000 issue, a spoof of *Maxim* titled “Max’em,” went up the chop chain without any intermediate



The *Log* cartoons, top: 1975 and bottom: 1980

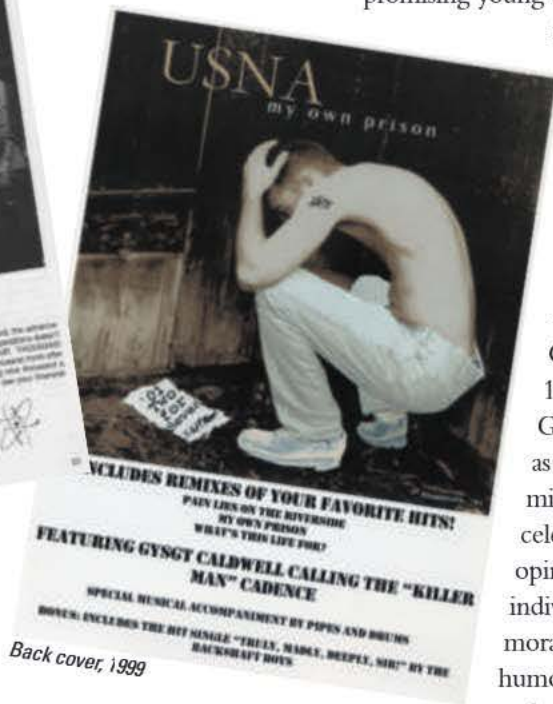
checking—the Deputy Commandant was out sick—until it hit a brand-new Commandant’s desk uncut and full strength.

A surviving e-copy of that never-printed last issue reads like a mixed bag. “Salty Sam” seems more focused on poking fun at various midshipmen than taking on the Administration, but there’s definitely baiting of the Commandant here and there, and a “JO fact sheet” calls a company officer unpleasant names. There’s a witty parody, “How the Grinch Stole Army Week,” but then a negative article about the state of Maryland. The only advertisement was an alcohol/drug awareness ad, included “in a quest to do the right thing in the eyes of the administration.”⁸

On receiving the advance proofs, then Commandant Samuel J. Locklear III ’77 called all the firstie staff into a closed meeting. He expressed serious doubts that they should be



Mock ad, 1985



Back cover, 1999

periodical ran strong through 2000, but the last issue (Vol 2, Issue 1) was dated 16 February 2001. It featured a review of a promising young bathroom stall artist, a parody of instructions for the Midshipman Access Phone System and a piece about sports posters.

And after that... nothing. The online magazine is now long gone, except for its archived version on the Wayback Machine.

Apparently the Administration intended to continue *The Log* as an officially-sanctioned Brigade activity even after the underground version started up.

COMDTMIDN Instruction 1720.1, dated 19 March 2002 and signed by Brigadier General John R. Allen '76, described *The Log* as "an online publication by midshipmen, for midshipmen and about midshipmen celebrating life in the Brigade through news, opinion, creativity and humor while respecting individual dignity... *The Log* will increase the morale of the Brigade through information and humor without cynicism." The issue of outside readers was addressed by limiting readership to

midshipmen, Alumni and their families. The Officer Rep was now the Legal Advisor to the Commandant, and the restrictions on content were explicit.

Despite what seemed to be provisions for a continuing electronic existence, and even a mention in the 2003 Reef Points, *The "official" Log* no longer exists. The last entry in its Brigade Activities file in Bancroft is a memo from the editor of the *Lucky Bag* asking for *The Log's* space in the Rotunda catacombs, which is "...empty with the exception of a desk and one computer leftover from the days of publishing *The Log*."¹¹

What vanished with *The Log*? Professor Michael Parker, a longtime *Log*-watcher from the English Department, has a theory. "*The Log* was the valve," he said, "the chimney. The heat could escape, and you kept it under control. You could identify a problem and address it very quickly."¹² Jon Buttram commented along much the same lines in 1980 when he noted that before *The Log*, rumor ruled Bancroft; after it, "Salty Sam" acted as a focusing mechanism.

The second positive aspect was mentioned in an *Evening Capital* editorial during the 1970 events. It read, "*The Log* is, in

commissioned, and ordered all existing galleys and copies of the issue destroyed. He said he wouldn't publish a magazine that condoned fraternization, drug use and racism. He sentenced the staff to what he called "character remediation"—writing an essay of self-criticism. The *Max'em* issue was never published, *The Log* spaces were padlocked, and the staff was dismantled.⁹

One former staff member, Steve Padhi '00 said, "This wasn't something we were publishing on our own. We were submitting it for approval via official channels, as we'd always done, following the precedents that had been set in terms of content and procedure by the previous commandant... I tried to learn from it, but I felt that we were being made an example of."

The next academic year, the remaining staff revived it as a monthly online magazine, but without Academy sanction. This "underground *Log*" or "*Log Online*" had its hosting covertly routed through California while the Administration tried to ferret out its editors and sources.¹⁰ The first issue was dated 10 May 2000 and was an interesting recasting of many of the magazine's traditions into electronic form. The online

essence, the only forum for midshipmen to share their opinions with each other—an activity that should be encouraged, not stifled. If an officer learns as a midshipman that he must not voice opinions—even in humor—that run counter to the accepted Navy ‘line,’ does it not follow that in a position of command he might fear to express his convictions for fear of retaliation from the upper brass?”

Consider the implications of what Commander Sweeney wrote about “the .5mm path.” Pulling off the balancing act of *The Log* was deep training in negotiation and accommodation. It trained not only the midshipmen, but also its officer reps and even Academy leadership. Every so often, over the decades, they made mistakes. But did that mean the participants didn’t learn from the experience? Freedom is a sharp blade; one must learn not just its pleasures, but its dangers. Creativity must be tempered with self-discipline but this tempering can only come through experience.

Might *The Log* rise once again? Perhaps, but only by becoming once more the general interest magazine it began as in 1913. Every mid worries about service selection; a renewed Professional Development column written by recent grads on the job in Iraq, Afghanistan or the Fleet should catch their attention. Brigade sports were a mainstay from Issue 1 on; reports from within the teams would be avidly read. It could include Salty Sam’s take on internal Brigade news. Cartoons, manga, music reviews, topical humor, personal fitness, all could interest today’s mids. A revived *Log*—provided clear guidance, assisted by a grizzled MCC(SW), and perhaps by former editors and staffers from the ranks of the alums—would help midshipmen improve their writing and editing skills. Monthly deadlines hone many of the same abilities needed to precommission a submarine, craft a White Paper for JCS, or inspire a group of young Sailors or Marines to succeed.

It’s impossible to contemplate the millions of hours a shelf of issues dating from 1913 to 1999

represents, to weigh the talent plowed into it, and not feel one is in the presence of the Brigade itself as it lived and changed over a century.

After six years in the doghouse, and a clean slate in the minds of the Brigade, is it time to bring back *The Log*? a



- ¹ *The Log*, December 17, 1975
- ² “Superintendent scuttles mids’ swimsuit issue’, *Annapolis Capital*, April 12, 1989
- ³ “...And for Midshipmen,” *The Washington Post*, April 15, 1989
- ⁴ *The Capital*, July 30, 1989
- ⁵ “Academy ends probe of magazine theft,” *Evening Capital*, June 9, 1989
- ⁶ “Playmid is still making waves,” *Annapolis Capital*, July 24, 1989
- ⁷ *The Log*, September 1999
- ⁸ Personal reading of issue by author.
- ⁹ Assembled from independent accounts by three staffers present at the meeting.
- ¹⁰ “Underground Paper deifies academy decorum,” *The Sun*, October 27, 2000
- ¹¹ Memorandum dated August 28, 2001; approved by “1st LT, B.H.”
- ¹² Personal remarks to author.



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Salty Sam throughout the years

