

The Return of *The Log*

By David Poyer '71

SO YOU'RE THIS TALL, THIN, VERY SHARP YOUNGSTER WITH A LULL IN HIS WORKLOAD, AND YOU'RE WONDERING WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR TIME. YOU'RE IN THE BARBER SHOP WAITING

AND THERE'S THE OCTOBER 2007 *SHIPMATE*. YOU KNOW THE MAGAZINE—YOUR DAD'S CLASS OF '79—AND YOU PICK IT UP AND HERE'S THIS PIECE ABOUT A COMIC PERIODICAL THE BRIGADE USED TO HAVE. *THE LIFE AND DEATH OF THE LOG: PART I*, IT'S TITLED.

“That first quote at the beginning of the article—where the mid says, ‘We used to have our own magazine? What happened?’—that was exactly my reaction,” said Midshipman Tim Whitney '10, leaning forward on the leather couch in Memorial Hall. “I asked my dad about it, and he didn't know it had been shut down.

“The history major in me took over. I found Part II on the *Shipmate* website.

It ended with: ‘After six years in the doghouse, and a clean slate in the minds of the Brigade, is it time to bring back *The Log*?’ My reaction was: ‘Yeah. It's time. And I'm going to do it.’”

A little background on the revived *Log*'s self-anointed editor-in-chief. He's from Pine Brook, NJ. His dad Scott Whiney '79, brought Tim to Annapolis for the first time at the age of 12. That

was his first exposure, “Except for watching the Army–Navy game every year.” Scott ran cross-country for Coach Al Cantello, who Tim runs for now.

Following the footnotes from *Shipmate*, Midshipman Whitney headed for Nimitz Library and read through the back issues in their creaky bindings. Searching the Internet, he found an issue for ’79’s Plebe Summer on their website. It revealed the identity of the previous year’s Salty Sam: one Jim Stavridis ’76. “I knew of Admiral Stavridis. My dad had bumped into him the year before. I thought that was cool.”

A month later, Tim was walking with Lieutenant Justin Mikolay ’01, USN, to his cross-country officer rep’s office. “I said, ‘I wish I had something to do with my spare time.’ He said, ‘That’s why I used to write for *The Log*.’ I stopped in my tracks. He was on the staff when it was cancelled in 2000. We parted, sort of half-jokingly saying, ‘We should bring it back.’”

They discussed it over the next few weeks. Should it be an official publication? A website? Midshipman Whitney did a two-page sample issue, and considered distributing it sub rosa, by night.

Then the Commandant ordered a bottom-up review. Lieutenant Mikolay is towheaded and rail-thin. He spent two years at Princeton’s Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs after graduation before serving on SAN JUAN (SSN-751). Now he teaches international relations and American government. “I’m a big Academy junkie,” Lieutenant Mikolay said. “I love it here. I draw energy from the mids.

“When I was a mid, my roommates and I wrote ‘Log recipes’— if you put three things at USNA together, what do

you get? I can’t draw, so I sent ideas to the cartoonists. The best come late at night, after studying and brainstorming with your roommates. . . I love what *The Log* stands for. Mids can connect to this central repository that reveals they’re not alone. . . that others see oddity and react to life here in the same way that he or she does. Naval Academy culture is like none other on earth. The magazine not only preserves that culture, it creates a common narrative for the whole Brigade.”

Lieutenant Mikolay said that *The Log*, though on hiatus for eight years, still had a residuum of recognition. “One of the things getting mids to know about it was the sponsor system. The sponsors would have copies lying around and mids read everything in front of them. So it persisted as oral history.

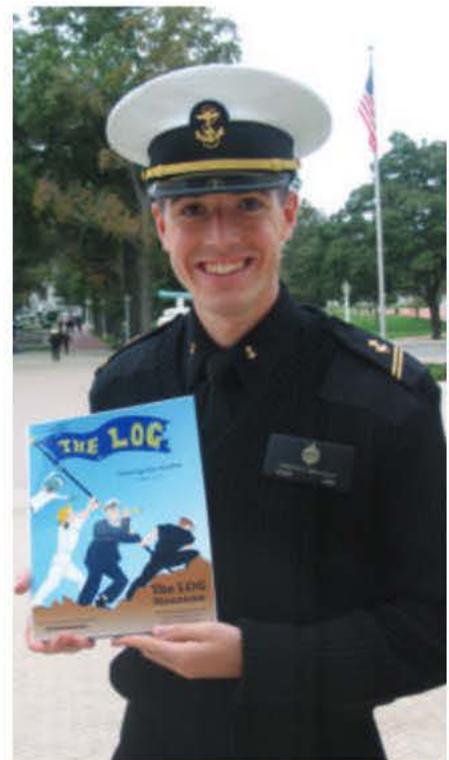
“I’m the O-rep, but Tim drove this whole process. His father raised him in all the traditions of the Naval Academy. I’m continually amazed by how much he knows.

“Tim was inspired to action by that *Shipmate* article. He saw it as a call to arms, a personal challenge. He has a personal relationship with history. He went right to the library and read through all the old *Logs*. Once he did that, he said, ‘I want to bring this back.’

“Then he mentioned it to me. As soon as he mentioned it I said, ‘Yes, we’re doing it.’

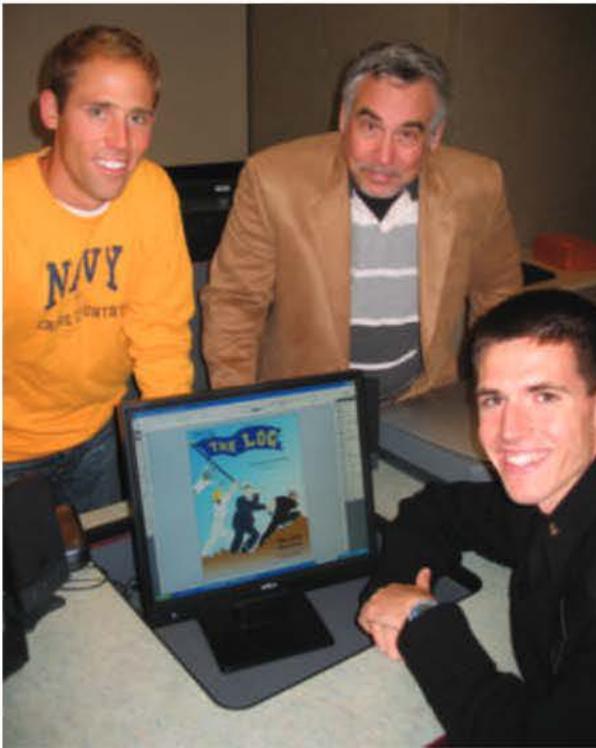
“Around this time Captain Klein (then-Commandant Margaret D. Klein ’81) sent out an email that there would be a baseline extracurricular activity review. When I got that I flashed back to the conversation Tim and I’d had.”

“As soon as I got his email about the ECA review, I went to his office,” Tim recounts.



“My goal is to inspire a little more thought. I don’t want a cheap laugh, but to make people think about what they’re doing...”

—Midshipman Whitney



Author David Poyer '71 with The Log staff

“Tim’s very good with paperwork,” said Lieutenant Mikolay. “He went to Lieutenant Lautar (Lieutenant Jason Lautar ’01, USN) at the Ops Office and got the old by-laws and instruction and reworked them. I reminded Lieutenant Lautar of the interest in the Brigade in bringing it back. He and everyone else would always get this big smile. ‘Oh, you’re bringing back *The Log*?’ That really helped when it got to the new Commandant’s desk.”

Midshipman Whitney said, “I walked around with a clipboard to get the required 20 signatures for an ECA. I got over 70. I turned them in along with a mission statement. Then I had 48 hours to do a constitution and by-laws.

“Once we got advance word we’d been approved . . . we sent out an email for an organizational meeting. I didn’t

know if we’d get 10 or a thousand.”

Sixty people showed up at 1250 Monday, between noon meal and sixth period, in Mitscher Auditorium.

Both Lieutenant Mikolay and Midshipman Whitney wanted to get the first issue out fast. Still, they took the time to work through channels, sitting down with the Commandant and the Superintendent. Meanwhile, Midshipman Whitney put out another Brigade-wide email. “I said, ‘go back to your room and in the next week write an article, draw a comic, do a piece

about your sports team and send it to saltysam@usna.edu.’ I got 15 articles, and 30 news items and cartoons.”

The first issue, slated for mid-November, is ambitious but uneven, as one might expect. It opens with an updating of the prefatory editorial from Volume I in 1913. There’s a reprint of the *Life and Death of The Log* article to orient everyone, and an inspiring letter from Admiral James Stavridis ’76, USN.

Then, to the fun. *Four Easy Steps to Drawing Tecumseh*; a piece on *Nimitz (Hall) dates*; interviews with the Brigade Commander and with Mel the Barber (Mel wins); and a comics page. So far, Salty Sam’s pointed in the right direction. *Midshipman Life* consists of several short essays, of which *The Animal Grading Scale* is most ludicrous. *10,000 Words* is funny, but *Point of No Return* reads more like a

novel opening than a comic essay. *USNA Household Faces* belongs in *Trident* and *Yard Dog* is squirrely.

All in all, it’s a creditable first effort (32 pages worth); eclectic, madcap but not belly-laughingly so—pretty much square on target. The group size could be smaller, and no doubt will be with practice. Bravo Zulu, all hands!

Obviously, with only one issue out, Tim can’t crystal-ball who his long-term staff will eventually be. “All the positions are up for grabs,” he said. “Some promise and never deliver; others are quiet but always come through. We definitely have the right initial makeup: a tremendous number of second class stepping up and taking leadership; youngsters who’re getting into the creative process; and some plebes who are curious and not afraid of getting emails from a second class.”

However, he does mention names he expects to figure on the masthead in the coming year. Among them are Midshipman J.C. Hernandez ’10 as art director—“He’s unbelievable.” Midshipman Harry Davies ’10, business director, who set up the printers and financials; Midshipman Jeff Kang ’10, assistant editor-in-chief, who was Tim’s right hand putting together the first issue on a compressed time frame. And Salty Sam, of course, who is by tradition anonymous until the final issue of the year.

Also worth mention are Midshipman Bowe Barger ’11—“she’s a terrific artist;” Midshipman Jonathan Rizor ’10, Internet editor; Midshipman Amy Watson ’10, writer; Midshipman Kaitlin Baker ’10, writer—“Her sponsor is Captain M. J. Sweeney who used to be the officer rep back in ’99;” Midshipman Kayla Sax ’10, writer—“and a lot more. As I said, we’ll see who delivers. Those are

the names you'll see on the masthead come spring."

Both Lieutenant Mikolay and Midshipman Whitney have pondered where the magazine will go from here.

Lieutenant Mikolay saw the old *Log* die. He's sensitive to the line it crossed, and discussed the magazine's philosophy with the Commandant. "The new Commandant is Captain Matthew Klunder '82. He's very well liked, and that's an understatement. He connects with people on a personal level.

"He wants us to approach these first issues conservatively—have a QA process—so we ensure *The Log* continues for the long term. You've got to get it out there and let it grow into itself. I want to let it continue to chronicle Naval Academy life in a way no other publication ever has."

Midshipman Whitney said he'd like to get the magazine to where the midshipmen are looking forward to the day it comes out. "To brighten their day, like the Alums say it used to."

For a 20-year-old, Midshipman Whitney seems impressively farsighted. "We do feel restricted, and there's so much pressure. When *The Log* closed down, mids went to different outlets," he says. "Such as 'head gouge,' a wall newspaper you put up in the head. But the main outlet was to go on liberty. I think that's why our Brigade culture withered; our only release was to get away from here.

"In the *Shipmate* article, Professor Parker called *The Log* a 'safety valve.' I hope it can help us all feel not so trapped here. *The Log* can help rebuild the shared Brigade culture I remember my dad talking about."

Lieutenant Mikolay envisions a typical print run of five thousand. Over

the next year, he aims to grow the subscriber base. "I'm hopeful the mids will love it, but in terms of funding, the magazine also needs to appeal to grads. So please visit our website and subscribe, and if you have an input to your company's advertising, send some our way."

Will the new *Log* go electronic or stay hard copy? For now, Tim and Justin remain committed to paper. Lieutenant Mikolay said, "There's something special about paging through a fresh issue. When you come back from class and see *The Log* on your desk it's a thrill."

Tim sees the revived magazine occupying a different niche from *The*

"My goal is the same as the original editorial says in 1913—'... to keep the Brigade informed of the various happenings in our little world, and occasionally to make a smile creep across the face of the saddest among us.' We'll provide the humor when you can't see anything to really laugh at."

Whitney gets serious as he winds up. "When I read the original *Shipmate* article, I didn't see how doing a magazine could contribute to the mission of the Naval Academy. But now I do. It's a huge leadership challenge. Choosing a staff, making decisions—I can imagine what it would take to set up a staff at

"When I read the original *Shipmate* article, I didn't see how doing a magazine could contribute to the mission of the Naval Academy. But now I do."

—Midshipman Whitney

Labyrinth, *Trident* or *Lucky Bag*. "The *Labyrinth* comes out once a year, is heavy on poetry, and tends to be very serious. We'll be monthly, more focused on the daily grind of being a mid. *Trident's* a base newspaper for Naval Station Annapolis, with daily events and sports scores. We should do some of that, but offer not just the facts but what things look like through the eyes of an individual midshipman. *The Log* will get inside our little Bancroft bubble.

The United States Africa Command, for example.

"My goal is to inspire a little more thought. I don't want a cheap laugh, but to make people think about what they're doing. I want to build to last, not be biting for a year and get cancelled again. As Admiral Stavridis said, 'The *Log* should be free-spirited, without being mean-spirited.'"

After eight years in the doghouse, is it time to bring back *The Log*?

It seems it is. ♣