

# *By George*

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A Memoir By  
Harris “Bud” George

Edited by Clarinda Harriss



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*Front cover photos (counterclockwise from top):*

James and Tassea George

Ted, Mary, and Beulah (Boo) George

Graduation from Officer Candidate School

*Back cover photo:*

Sisters, Mary and Boo, with me in the middle

*Book design by Carmen M. Walsh*

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*Dedicated to my parents, James and Tasseia George*

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*By George*

## Introduction

What started out many years ago as notes jotted down during my naval service has grown in time to be a glimpse into my life—from a childhood in the Greek community of Baltimore, through my Navy years, and finally to the challenges of practicing law. With brief detours to the streets of Athens, the harbors of Hong Kong and Manila, and the mountains of Kythera, I've tried to capture my fondest memories of a happy life punctuated by special people and amusing predicaments in which I found myself.

This compilation puts the stories and anecdotes I've told over the years into writing so that they aren't lost. (I've disguised some names and used poetic license a few times.) The experiences reflected in the following pages have such meaning to me that I long to share them with others.

### Letter to Dmitri\*

Dad read a second time the letter from his brother Peter.

*Dearest Dmitri,*

*The news from Kythera is good. With the monies you have provided from America, your sisters were given adequate dowries, and they have both now married. Your older sister Eleni married Panayiotis Diakos, a Kytherian who settled several years ago in Australia, where he owns his own restaurant. They left for Australia last month. Stavroula married Michael Vretos, who owns a farm in the valley, which he is planning to sell so that he can come to America. He has a brother who is a furrier in Youngstown, Ohio.*

*But your cousin Meropi, whose parents died and who I have been raising for seven years, has caused me great anguish. I had arranged that she should marry Gregory Stavros. He is a nice man who, with his brother, runs the general store in Karava. But Meropi has always been the rebellious one. She complained that Gregory Stavros was too old, and she ran off with George Mavrogioryis, barely a year older than she. They went to St. Theodore, where they were secretly married. Meropi and George will soon be leaving Kythera to join his brother who owns a flower shop in Alexandria, Egypt.*

*The past Sunday, all of Karava celebrated the birthday of Aunt Antonia, who, at one hundred seven, is the oldest person in the village. Vain woman, she insists that she is only one hundred five, and that the baptismal certificate at St. Charalampos is incorrect. Of course, no one is alive who can contradict her. Anyway, whether one hundred seven or one hundred five, she is a remarkable woman.*

*You have made us all so very proud by your accomplishments in America. Truly, God has blessed that*

\* This letter, written in Greek, has been translated into English.

*land. An orphan boy, you went to a country of foreigners. You learned their language. You became a citizen. You established your own business. Now, you even own a piece of land of America. Here, on Kythera, we talk a lot about the countries to which our families have immigrated. We talk about Africa, Australia and America.*

*We talk most about America. Some say that the country is so rich that the streets are paved with gold. I find this difficult to believe, but, with what you have been able to accomplish in so short a time, I don't know.*

*I do know, however, that Kythera is dying. The island is all rock, no soil for farms to produce food. The vast majority of our young people are leaving the island to find opportunity elsewhere. Who can blame them? If they stay, what can they become? One need look only at our own family—you (and soon your sister Starroula will) have settled in America. Cousin Merope will be settling in Egypt, and your sister Eleni has already left for Australia. I alone remain in Kythera.*

*But, let's talk about you. I believe that the time has come for you to think about getting married. You need someone by your side, to love you, work with you and give you a family.*

*The Souris family left Karava some years ago and have established themselves in a village called Springfield, somewhere in the province of Missouri. The father had been a seaman in the British merchant marine and had spent most of his time at sea. I was present once when his wife was talking to a visiting monk at St. Charalampos. He had asked her how many children she had, and she answered: "I have only two children." Then, sounding very embarrassed, she volunteered: "But my husband is a seaman and is not home very much."*

*One of the Souris children is named Anastasia. I understand that she is a lovely young lady, intelligent, hard working, and a devout Orthodox Christian. Additionally,*

*I understand that there is a lot of snow in Missouri. The Souris family is unhappy there and is planning to move to a warmer climate.*

*I have it taken upon myself to write to Mr. Souris, suggesting that you would visit the family in Missouri in order to meet his daughter and, further, that your intention is marriage. I of course wrote him what you have accomplished in your village of Towson. Recently, I received a letter from Mr. Souris, expressing approval of your forthcoming visit. He says Tassea is ready for marriage. Incidentally, you may remember Angelo Souris, who worked as a young man in the Stavros general store in Karava. Angelo is Tassea's uncle and now has his own general store in the country of Rhodesia in Africa.*

*I pray that this letter finds you healthy and happy. Each Sunday and Feast Day, I light a special candle for you in St. Charalampos, where our family's patriarchal chair awaits your visit.*

*God bless, keep and love you!*

Peter

*By George ~ 67*

Harold David Durkin \*

Durkin, Harold David

3716104, Seaman, U.S.N.

Age: 22

Home - New York city

Unmarried

Religion - Protestant

Reported to the U.S.S. *Midway*, 23 November, 1954

Attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute

Civilian Employer - General Electric

On this date, 19 January, 1955, died on board of a heart attack.

\* From the *Midway*'s log.



In Officer Candidate School (1954)



Commissioned (1954)



Legal officer aboard the U.S.S. *Forrestal*. (Official photograph U.S. Navy)



U.S.S. *Midway* (CVA-41) steaming off the coast of Cuba, 3 Nov. 1954.  
(Official photograph U.S. Navy)



U.S.S. *Forrestal* (CVA-59). (Official photograph U.S. Navy)

## Legal Eagle

Being legal officer aboard the largest warship in the U.S. Navy was, without doubt, one of the poshest jobs in the fleet. Keep in mind that whoever serves as captain of a large aircraft carrier in the Navy is, following his tour of duty as captain, almost assured of being promoted to rear admiral—*unless* he screws up by

1. his ship running aground.
2. his ship colliding with another ship.
3. his incurring the disfavor of some higher authority—an admiral, Congress, the court of military appeals, etc.

Any newly-appointed captain of an aircraft carrier quickly summoned his legal officer (whom he invariably called his “legal eagle”) and made the same speech: “George, you are the *Forrestal*’s ‘legal eagle.’ If you keep me out of trouble, you will enjoy the best duty in the Navy. If you screw up, you’ll be the sorriest LTJG in the Navy.”

In 1955, the captain of any navy ship received a multitude of letters addressed to “commanding officer”. Most were routine, but one caused any captain instant anxiety—a thick batch of papers, stapled together, including endorsements from CINCLANT (commander-in-chief, Atlantic fleet), Congress and the bureau of naval personnel. Examination of the documents revealed that the first letter was usually from a Norfolk merchant (for example, ABC Cleaners) to his congressman, complaining that Frank Flanigan, seaman apprentice attached to the *Forrestal*, owed ABC Cleaners a bill of six dollars, which Flanigan had failed or refused to pay. The congressman, wishing to show positive response to the concerns of his constituent, promptly sent a letter asking for immediate attention to ABC’s request to the Navy liaison officer to Congress, attaching ABC’s letter.

The Navy liaison officer, after adding his own endorsement, forwarded ABC’s letter and the congressman’s letter to the chief of naval personnel, asking that ABC’s correspondence be forwarded to seaman Flanigan’s current duty station. The chief of naval personnel, after adding his own endorsement, forwarded all four documents to commander in chief, Atlantic fleet, which, after appending CINCLANT’s endorsement, sent all five papers to the admiral under whose command seaman Flanigan’s ship had been assigned. That admiral, after adding his own cover endorsement, forwarded all six documents to commanding officer, U.S.S. *Forrestal*.

This intimidatingly huge accumulation of endorsements atop ABC's letter would ultimately be delivered to commanding officer, U.S.S. *Forrestal*, who would flip a few pages; see endorsements from Congress, chief of naval personnel and several Admirals; and then scribble his inevitable comment—George, make this go away!

As the *Forrestal*'s legal eagle, I interviewed seaman apprentice Flanigan, who usually complained that ABC had ruined his dress white uniform, and he had therefore refused to pay ABC's bill. Thereafter, my duty as a U.S. Navy legal eagle was clear. Following written directives of the bureau of naval personnel, I wrote the following letter to ABC Cleaners:

*Your letter concerning the alleged bill owed by seaman apprentice Flanigan has been forwarded to me for action.  
Seaman apprentice Flanigan, when interviewed, denied liability for your bill.*

*In accordance with bureau of naval personnel directives, you are hereby advised that your remedy, if any, lies in the civil courts.*

*Harris George, LTJG  
Legal Officer  
U.S.S. Forrestal (CVA-59)  
By Direction of Commanding Officer*

This letter from the *Forrestal*'s legal officer was never sent directly to ABC Cleaners; instead, it was required to revisit every stop along the chain of command which had conveyed the letter in the first instance (each again adding its return endorsement)—namely;

1. from commanding officer, *Forrestal* to the admiral, Norfolk squadron;
2. from admiral, Norfolk squadron to CINCLANT;
3. from CINCLANT to chief, bureau of naval personnel;
4. from chief, bureau naval personnel to Navy liaison to Congress;
5. from Navy liaison to congressman; and, finally;
6. from congressman to ABC Cleaners.

By the time ABC Cleaners received its response—that its remedy, if any, was to sue seaman apprentice Flanigan—ABC's initial letter had expanded into a thirteen-

page conglomeration of Navy protocol. The *Forrestal*'s captain, however, was pleased because, miraculously, his legal eagle had indeed made that jumble of worrisome correspondence from higher Naval authorities and Congress go away.

So long as he kept his captain out of trouble, the legal officer of a large aircraft carrier enjoyed life more than any other LTJG aboard ship. Some in the ship's enlisted complement (in anticipation for any possible future misadventure on their part) tried to build up good will with the legal officer by reporting to him anything that might be of special interest. For example, in keeping with the captain's promise that (so long as I did not screw up) I would enjoy the best duty in the Navy, I was the only line officer aboard the *Forrestal* who did not stand deck watch—I was not on the *Forrestal*'s watch bill. This enormously irritated LT. Bigelow, senior watch officer, a Naval Academy graduate. From the executive officer's chief yeoman, Carter, my leading petty officer, learned that Bigelow was trying to get the executive officer to make me stand deck watches in addition to my duties as legal officer. I quickly drafted an order (by direction, commanding officer, *Forrestal*), appointing Bigelow a summary court-martial officer. Thenceforth, Bigelow could not even go on leave without my approval, since I might be assigning him summary court-martials to hear during his hoped-for leave. An unspoken pact was forged—so long as he stopped pushing for me to stand deck watches, I never assigned him any summary court-martials.

The legal officer also enjoyed special shipboard privileges. Enlisted personnel, seeking to curry future favor, would, for example, endow the legal officer with benefits—the *Forrestal*'s bake shop periodically delighted the legal office by delivering freshly-baked chocolate donuts. The officers' barber offered me a standing appointment for a trim every other Friday at 12:00 noon. One Friday noon, I went for my standing appointment, but the regular officers' barber was not in the shop; instead, a young sailor stood in his place. While shaving the back of my neck, he cut me. I felt the cut, and soon I sensed a little trickle of blood. The barber quickly dabbed it with alcohol and held a hot towel to it. Soon it stopped bleeding. About five minutes later, he nicked my neck on the other side. Half jokingly, I asked, "Did you graduate from Navy barber school?"

"The Navy doesn't have a barber school, sir."

"What barbering training have you had?"

"None, sir."

"Oh come now, the Navy must have sent you to some sort of school."

"Oh, the Navy did. They sent me to pipefitter's school, but I flunked out. That's why they made me a barber."

## Retired Lawyers' Malady

Every retired lawyer of my acquaintance has developed the same serious malady—his wife's putting on her overcoat invariably precipitates an involuntary conditioned reflex, which causes the lawyer to ask three questions of his wife:

1. Where are you going?
2. When will you be back? and
3. What am I going to do until you get back?

So I wrote this book.