

The Four Years In-Between
U.S.S. Midway CVA-41
A Navy and Water Polo Mix – One If Now and One IF for the Future

I Meant It

When I told the Chief that I asked to switch my orders from the Oriskany to the Midway that he was hurting my chance to go to the Olympics, I meant it. The Midway's Alameda base was just 45 miles from my team's workout location at Stanford, while the Oriskany was 480 miles away.

My OCS class graduated on Friday, May 17th. I did not report to the Midway until June. Before reporting, I had already started working out with my team at Stanford. Alameda was so close that I could practice with my team nearly every day that we were in port.

Engineering

After I reported to the Midway in June, my first week on the ship was spent receiving a guided tour of the ship and all its departments. An aircraft carrier is a BIG ship. The Midway was over 1,000 feet long and 222 feet high, with more than 20 floors or decks. For someone newly on board, getting lost on a ship of that size was easy to do. So, each day a different sailor would meet me at my room and serve as that day's guide. My week-long tour took me to the five main departments on the ship at the rate of one each day: Navigation, Engineering, Operations, Supply, and Weapons/Deck.

OCS had sent me to the Midway. It was now up to the Midway to decide to which department I would be assigned. At each of the departments I visited, the officers and enlisted men there told me that my eventual assignment would be to Engineering. That's where the opening was for someone like me who had not had any additional training after OCS.

Engineering was definitely a place I did not want to go. The Engineering Department managed the twelve steam boilers that powered the ship. A very necessary department with hundreds of men and all kinds of officers. However, the people in Engineering never saw the light of day while on duty. In addition, officers at the Ensign level, like me, had no real authority over anyone. Their function was primarily to stand watches in the main engine room.

What I wanted was to be assigned to one of the three Deck Divisions. Deck was technically part of the Weapons Division, but most of the Deck Division enlisted men were simply ammunition handlers during battle stations, passing cannon shells to the men operating the four 5-inch 54 cannons the Midway had on its sides.

What the Deck Division sailors did, apart from being assigned to swabbing decks and cleaning heads, was to handle underway replenishments. Connecting the hoses passed to us from refueling ships to bring on more oil for our boilers or aviation fuel for our planes. Connecting our own hoses to our destroyer-escorts to keep them fueled. Handling the lines from cargo ships that passed food and other supplies from their decks to ours. Bringing on ammunition needed for ships at war or ready to go to war if ever called upon.

Each Deck Division had only one officer in charge, offering a chance at real responsibility for junior officers like me. Deck Division officers also saw the light of day every day at work. A Deck Division officer is what I wanted to be. But, according to everyone with whom I spoke, becoming an Engineering officer was to be my fate.

Engineering or Deck?

When my week of tours was over, I met with the ship's Executive Officer (XO) to receive my assignment. From a review of my record, the XO knew that I had been an age-group swimming coach. As it turned out, the XO's daughter was right then on an age-group swimming team.

As the XO and I were chatting about age-group swimming, we both were surprised to learn that his daughter's current coach was Gaston DeGara (Gus), the very coach for whom I had served as an assistant at the Elks Club. The XO's response to our age-group swimming connection was to ask me to which department I would like to be assigned. I said Deck and Deck is the department to which I was dispatched.

Second Division

LtCdr. Sapp, the officer in charge of the three Deck Divisions, assigned me to Second Division as that Division's Junior Officer. The Division's Senior Officer was Ltjg. Williams. As the Junior Division Officer, there really was not much for me to do. I spent most of my time in our gear-locker office doing paperwork with the Division's two yeomen – the Navy equivalent of office secretaries.

I occasionally made the rounds of our division with Ltjg. Williams. As we made the rounds, I was always impressed by how much he knew about all the machinery and related mechanical equipment our Division used. I envied his level of knowledge. Since I had no interest in knowing any of that stuff myself, I resigned myself to the fact that I would never be quite as good a Division Officer as I thought he was.

AAU Nationals in July

The AAU Men's Senior Outdoor Water Polo Championship was held at Foothill College in Los Altos Hills from Thursday through Sunday, July

25th through 28th. Los Altos Hills was an easy commute from Alameda and, coincidentally, half of my old Castilleja School's bus route. I was listed in the official program as a field player on the Olympic Club A team. However, I was actually the Olympic Club B team goalie.

Jim Gaughran, our Olympic Club coach, told me that George Stransky, our A team goalie, and I were by far the best two goalies in the tournament. The reason why I never had any desire to take George's place on the A team was because he was the best goalie in the entire country. I felt honored to be praised alongside him by my coach.

CISM Games

The Navy's recruiting slogan at the time I joined was "Join the Navy, see the world!" That's just what I wanted to do. I could hardly wait for the Midway to take me somewhere I hadn't been. That would be easy since I was born and raised in California, and my only travel outside of the State before my journey to OCS had been a short trip to the Grand Canyon in Arizona with a stop in Las Vegas along the way.

I had arrived in June. Our first sea voyage was to be a trip to Hawaii, for which we would depart on Monday, August 26th. The Midway encountered some engine problems the week before, and the Hawaii trip was postponed. I was, to say the least, disappointed. However, on Tuesday, August 27th, I received orders to depart immediately for Berlin, Germany, to join a water polo team being assembled there to represent the U.S. Military in the CISM Games that would be held in Barcelona, Spain, from September 29th through October 10th. By Wednesday, August 28th, I was on a flight to Frankfurt, Germany.

Conseil International du Sport Militaire (CISM) Games are the Military Olympics. I had never heard of the CISM Games before, but I had never been in the military before, either. The players picked to join the team for training were selected by the same Governing Board for USA Water Polo that manages selection for the regular Olympics. The selection team had set an arbitrary cut-off line at the California Coast, so only qualified players in the military from California Eastward all the way to Europe were invited. My brother Jack was in Hawaii, so he was not sent to Berlin. I don't know what my status would have been if the Midway had actually been at sea heading to Hawaii when I received my orders.

West Berlin

Most of the team assembled in Frankfurt because there were no direct flights from the USA to West Berlin. At that point, Berlin was still divided into East and West. We took the train from Frankfurt to Berlin. Berlin was in East Germany, about three hundred and fifty miles from Frankfurt, which was about four and a half hours by train. When we

reached the border of East Germany, our train was carefully inspected inside and out by East German soldiers with machine guns. The soldiers who inspected the outside of our train also had dogs with them.

In West Berlin, a simple subway ride would produce more East German soldiers with machine guns standing guard in the Eastern section as the subway cars passed from West to East and back to West again on the subway routes. No subways made any stops at any of the stations in the Eastern section of the city.

Once we were in Berlin, we found the city to be as city-like as any other city in the West. As normal as could be. And as much fun to be in as we could have wished it to be.

Our Team

Our military team had ten members. We were a mix of officers and enlisted men from both the Army and the Navy. Nine of us were from California. As was true in my case, nearly all of us had secured military assignments that placed us close to our water polo teams. Most of us had also just finished competing in the July AAU Nationals. We pretty much knew or at least recognized each other. I am not sure how he ended up in our Army, but one member was from Hungary.

Although I had made the switch to playing goalie, I was sent to Berlin as a field player. Our team's goalie was the goalie for one of California's top four teams. I was much better suited to being a field player than he would have been. Charlie Bittick, who was also at the AAU Nationals, was our team's standout. He was a three-time All-American swimmer and water polo player, and he played on the USA Water Polo team at the Rome Olympics in 1960. Charlie was named first-team all-league in our senior year. I was named second-team all-league that same year. Charlie had been USC's leading scorer, and I had been Stanford's leading scorer. We gave our team a nice one-two scoring punch.

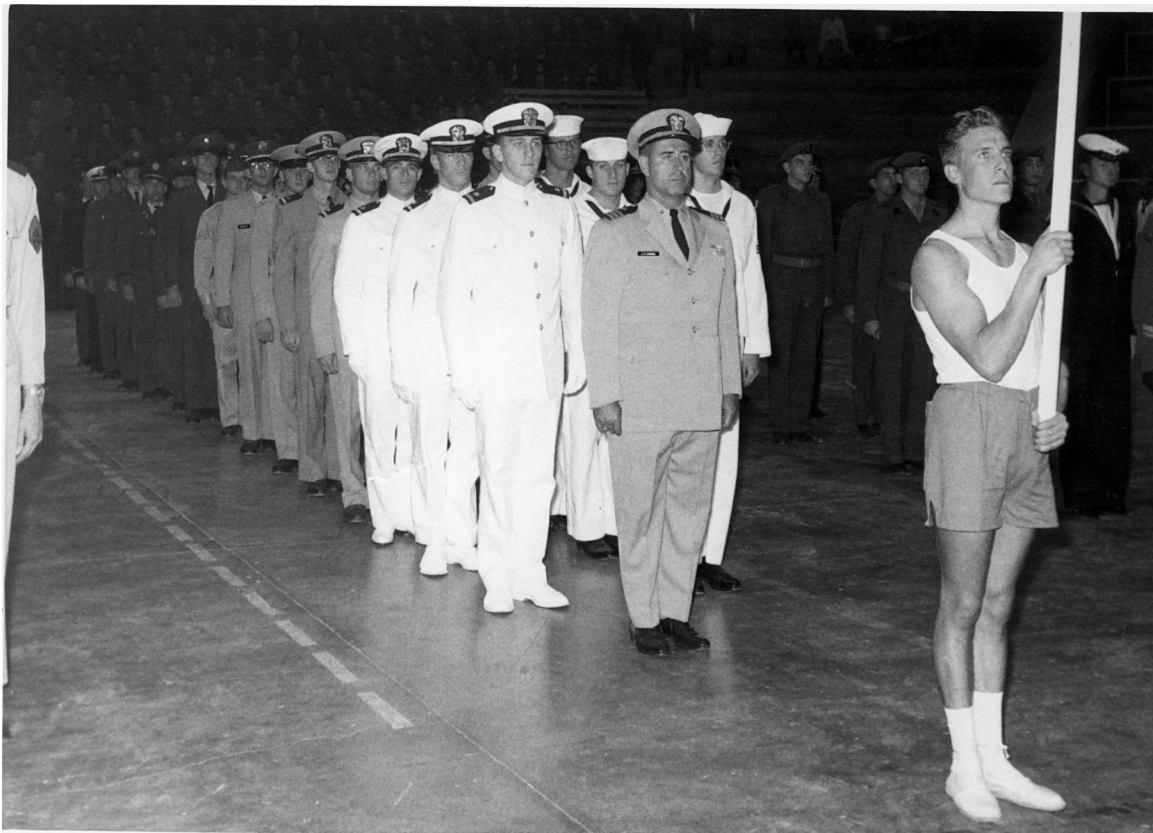
The coach the military hired for our team was from what was then Yugoslavia. His plan was to have us work out twice a day. He said that was what national teams in his country did the month before any big tournament. We collectively vetoed that plan. We settled for workouts two or three hours in length once a day, with the rest of the day off for all of us to simply enjoy being in Berlin.

There are seven players on a water polo team. Our ten-player squad could never have an actual full-game scrimmage, but fewer players on a side, did mean we had to do a lot more swimming in our practice games. Definitely good for our conditioning. The fact that we were a mix of officers and enlisted was meaningless to us as a group. We were just a

bunch of California water polo players working out at a military base in Berlin. The only time we wore our uniforms anywhere was at the CISM games opening ceremony.

The CISM Games in Barcelona

At the end of September, we boarded a military transport for the flight from Berlin to Barcelona, with an accidental two-day stop in Chateauroux, France. Accidental, because our flight landed in Chateauroux for refueling at the USA Air Force Base there, just as the French air traffic controllers went on strike. I am not sure why a military base was affected by a French strike. However, at least the strike was resolved soon enough for us to make it to the Games on time.



We were at the CISM Games to compete in water polo. As you can see in the photo of the USA contingent, water polo was not the only event. The officer in white at the head of the first column is Charlie Bittick. I am the officer standing right behind him.

Our team made it to the final eight. This group of eight was split into two sets of four teams. The top two teams in each set would become the final four. For our final game in our four-team bracket, our coach kept emphasizing at every opportunity that all we needed to advance was a

tie. My coach back home would have said instead, even if we're ahead, to play like we're behind. I had never before heard a coach say, Go for the tie. In the fourth quarter, we were one goal behind. My team member was fouled, which meant he could make a free pass to a teammate. I broke past the man guarding me, received the pass, and scored. The tying goal was disallowed, as I knew it would be even as I was shooting it.

In water polo, a player on offence cannot be within four meters of the goal unless he has the ball with him. The player who had passed the ball to me had been inside the four-meter area when he was fouled. His pass to me meant he no longer had the ball. On my California team, this is something we worked on constantly. If you are inside the four-meter line and pass the ball to someone outside, you must immediately take a stroke to show that you are heading out. What my teammate did when he passed me the ball was simply watch me take my shot.

In our whole month of practicing in Berlin, our coach had never once gone over this take-a-stroke procedure. Because we did not tie the game, we were one of the three teams in our bracket with identical won-loss records. The two teams that advanced to the final four had beaten the fourth team in our bracket by more points than we had. Coincidentally, that team against which we had not scored as many points as the other two was the first team we had competed against when we began the tournament. That was the very first time we had a chance to play as a team of seven.

The two teams that advanced to the final four from our bracket ended up with the gold and silver medals. Regardless of the outcome, the experiences in both Berlin and Barcelona were incredible. We even stayed a few extra days in Barcelona to play exhibition matches against local clubs. Our goalie had to return to his base in Holland, so I switched back to being a goalie for our club-team matches.

Back To the Midway

When I returned to the Midway in mid-October, the Midway was off the coast of San Diego, engaged in training exercises for Navy pilots. I had assumed I would wait at the Alameda Naval Air Station until the Midway returned to port, but the Navy had a different plan. I was flown to the Naval Air Station in San Diego. From there, I boarded the Midway's daily mail delivery plane for a flight to the Midway at sea.

I had never imagined that I would experience landing on an aircraft carrier at any point during my Naval career. When I first saw the Midway out the plane's window, it looked no bigger than a postage stamp. Despite the Midway's tiny size, it was easy to spot. The four propellers driven by the twelve steam boilers on board to get the Midway

up to its launch and landing speed generated a long, wide wake. That little postage stamp had a bubbly white tail at least two miles long.

Back To Work

Once back on board, I resumed my old work routine. My time in the Division was spent doing paperwork in our gear-locker office with the Division's two yeomen as my primary workmates. The paperwork filling my time was preparation for an administration (admin) inspection. The Navy assigned divisions like ours all kinds of training activities we were supposed to complete. Each training exercise had to be recorded. The admin inspection was simply to review all our training records. Actual training was not part of the inspection.

We didn't really do any of the training. So much of it was required that it would have taken way too much time. We were already busy enough without having to do all that extra stuff. Since the paperwork I was doing was recording training that had not happened, my work at that time did not involve very much contact with the men in my Division.

First Deployment November 8, 1963, to May 26, 1964

Less than a month after my return from the CISM Games, the Midway set out for its first deployment during my time on board. I was finally going to Hawaii. I was looking forward both to my first time there and to visiting my brother Jack.

Our stop in Hawaii was to be our last training exercise before joining our task force group in the Western Pacific, or in Navy talk, WestPac. We arrived at Pearl Harbor on November 13th and then alternated between two days at sea, two days in port, three days at sea, and then two days in port before finally setting out for the Philippines on November 25th.

Kennedy Assassination

On Friday, November 22nd, at a little past 7:00 AM Hawaii time, as we were heading back to Pearl Harbor from our last training exercise, John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Apart from the general sadness at the death of the President, we in the military had the initial concern of the potential of a war starting because of an assassination. The outbreak that became the First World War began with the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand in June 1914.

WestPac

On Monday, November 25th, the Midway set off for its WestPac deployment. There was not much for me to do in the Division. I was not actively involved in its day-to-day operations. I stood four-hour watches on the bridge each day while undergoing standard Officer of the Deck training. I filled the rest of my time reading books. I had purchased six

books to read during my downtime. A book a month for a six-month cruise was my uninformed estimate. I finished all six in about a month. I then looked for bookstores in every port we visited to fill the book void I now faced. For my next deployment, I brought fifty books with me.

Our time at sea was broken up by eleven different times in port. Most of our port stops were spent visiting Japanese cities, with one seven-day stay in Hong Kong. I was now actually getting to see the world as the Navy had promised.

Division Party

Traditionally, individual Divisions get together for a party sometime during their deployment. The Second Division had its Division Party in Yokosuka, Japan. A hall was rented for the evening, and local party girls were hired to intermingle with the men. The party girls were there just for conversation and social dancing. Any after-party arrangements that may be made were up to each party girl and sailor.

At one point during the party, every single Black man in the Division except one left the party. The remaining sailor said to Ltjg. Williams and me, "My people were wrong." Neither Ltjg. Williams nor I had any idea why the men had left. This is an accurate assessment of how little I knew about my division and the men in it. My ignorance would be erased once I returned to the Midway after the Olympic Trials.

Trying Out for The Olympics

The Navy Times article written about my brother Jack and me while we were at OCS said that during our time in the Navy, Jack and I would be rejoining our water polo team so that we could participate in the 1964 Olympic Trials. At the very end of our WestPac deployment, I received orders reassigning me to the Treasure Island Naval Base in San Francisco. Treasure Island was the closest Naval Base to my Stanford-based water polo team.

When we pulled into our Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippines for our last visit before heading home, I exercised my option to fly home immediately, rather than wait for the Midway's return to Alameda. I reached home on May 10th. The Midway did not reach Alameda until May 26th. My brother Jack had already arrived home from Hawaii.

Olympic Trials

Our A team was now just the Olympic Club without the "A". Our B team was now called Stanford Hills. Brothers Bill and Jack were on the Olympic Club team. I was the Stanford Hills goalie. The Olympic Trials were held in New York from August 25th through September 7th.

There were sixteen teams competing at the trials. The New York Athletic Club entered A and B teams. Brooklyn, Saint Louis, and Chicago each had teams entered. The other eleven teams were all from California. The top four teams were Inland-NuPike, the Olympic Club, City of Commerce, and El Segundo. Each of these four top seeds was in a separate four-team bracket. The winner of each of these brackets would then form a final four-team bracket, the winner of which would be the USA's representative in the Tokyo Olympics.

Inland-NuPike was Charlie Bittick's Team. Our goalie for the CISM Games was El Segundo's goalie. All four of the top teams advanced to the final four. In my opinion, Inland-NuPike was the best, with the Olympic Club a close second, followed by City of Commerce, with El Segundo a distant fourth. While others might disagree with my rankings for the top three, El Segundo in fourth place would not have been disputed by anyone who was not an El Segundo fan.

What happened was a shock to all. The top three teams, paying too little attention to El Segundo, knocked each other off, leaving El Segundo as the bracket's winner and USA's representative to the Tokyo Olympics.

Disaster Not To Be Repeated

At the Olympics, the El Segundo team didn't even make it out of the first round. I am not sure if the team even won a single game. The team was coached by Urdo Saari. The very best player on the team and the team's only real star was Urdo's son, Roy Saari. Roy was an excellent water polo player, but he was an even better swimmer.

After his water polo team qualified for the Olympics, Roy quit the team to focus on swimming. Roy earned both gold and silver medals in the swimming competition in Tokyo. Thanks to Roy, his younger brother Robert earned at least a trip to Tokyo to watch Roy swim, since Robert was still on El Segundo's water polo team.

The disaster that El Segundo represented caused the selection procedure then in use to be discarded. The process of having already existing teams compete to determine which team would represent the USA was abandoned. In its place, a process was set up to have individual players compete to be on a national team comprised entirely of the best players in the country.

The B Team Lives On

I went to the Olympic Trials knowing I never had a chance of making it to the Olympics. My Stanford Hills team was not going to make it out of its first bracket. All the Olympic Club players were, like my brothers Bill and Jack, out of college, just giving water polo one last shot before

getting on with their lives. The Olympic Trials marked the end of their water polo careers. The Stanford Hills players were still in school. Their water polo playing days were not even close to being over. My playing days were not over either. I was their goalie.

Continuing my water polo career as the Stanford Hills team's goalie, instead of retiring like Bill and Jack, would lead to a third IF that would be life-changing for both Mary and me. That IF was described in [The First In-between Year - A New Direction](#). section in [Chapter 2 – Twenty-Seven IFs in Life on My Path to Becoming a Teacher](#).

This is a picture of my Stanford Hills team at the Olympic Trials. I am the person in the water, the farthest away from the camera, wearing my red and white goalie hat.



Water polo had already been the source of two main IFs in my life. The first IF was my decision to delay my graduation so I could play water polo on the Stanford Varsity with my two brothers. That is what led to my being a teacher instead of a lawyer.

The second IF, water polo, is the reason I ended up as a Deck Division officer on the Midway instead of a Communications Division officer on the Oriskany. The full effect of that IF on my life as a teacher will be shown in [Chapter 5, The Twenty-Two IFs of The Interns' Years](#).

Return To the Midway

When the Trials were over, I returned to the Midway. Jack asked the Navy to allow him to join me. Permission granted.

One Midway IF and One IF for the Future

IF the XO's daughter had not been an age-group swimmer who was being coached by the very same coach for whom I had served as an assistant, then I would have been assigned to the Engineering Department and not to Deck's Second Division. The effect on my life of being a Deck Division Officer and not one in Engineering will be made clear in the next section of this Chapter.