

## **U.S.S. Midway CVA-41**

### **A Life Changing Experience - A Ten IF Summary**

#### **Second Division Officer**

Shortly after my return to the Midway after the Olympic Trials, Lt.Cdr. Sapp created a new administrative position in the Deck Department, put Ltjg. Williams in charge of it, and appointed me as Second Division's Officer in Charge. I was both surprised and pleased. I had not expected to be in charge of anything while I was still just an Ensign. My Navy life was now about to take me in directions I never could have imagined.

As the Junior Division Officer, my role had been primarily administrative. The only meaningful contact I had with the men in my division was with the two yeomen in our gear locker office. The process of learning I now began was quietly embarrassing for me, because it showed me just how ignorant and ill-informed I had been about my own division.

I had admired Ltjg. Williams. I thought I could never equal him as a division officer. What I admired about him was his technical knowledge. There was no way I could emulate his understanding of what our men did. What I found, though, was that Second Division was actually a generally low-morale, segregated (yes, racially segregated) group of men just putting in their time. How could I have been so clueless?

Now that I was paying attention, I knew I could do something that Ltjg. Williams had not even tried to do. I could change behavior. Changing how children felt about themselves was the reason I wanted to be an age-group swimming coach and an elementary school teacher. Behavior in adults was something that could be changed, as well.

#### **The Men In My Division**

The men in my division were the ones who had passed the test to get into the Navy and failed every test after that. Sailors in other divisions were assigned there because they had demonstrated the skills needed in that division. The skills needed for the Deck division were minimal. In terms of special talents, Deck was regarded as the bottom of the talent pool.

The average education level of the men in my division was tenth-grade. I only had one high school graduate. The average education level of the petty officers in my division was eighth-grade. Compared to other divisions, Deck Divisions also had higher percentages of Black sailors.

At that time, when military service was required, it was not uncommon for judges in cases with youthful offenders to offer an offender a choice - jail or the Navy. This was my first experience getting to know some Hells Angels personally.

## **Segregation**

In 1948, President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981 to end discrimination in the military. That's what I learned in school, but it was not what I was now seeing in my division.

We had two berthing compartments. One was "Whites-only". If four men were assigned to physically hold the line containing the communication wire between our ship and a ship we were either refueling or that was in the process of supplying us, the four line-holders were either all Black or all White. Some workstations were manned by a mix of races, but the better jobs were Whites-only. None of this was right.

## **Desegregation**

The military is not a Democracy. In my division, I was in charge, plain and simple. I did not have to ask anyone's permission for any change I wanted to make. Once I was no longer ignorant about what had been going on in my division, I went immediately to LtCdr. Sapp and asked him to assign at least two Black petty officers to my division. He found them for me relatively quickly. I then took over the responsibility of assigning every single man's workstation, including everything down to who holds the line between ships in any underway replenishment. I didn't need to formally change the Whites-only berthing compartment policy. I simply assigned my two new petty officers to that berthing space.

I wanted to add a Black yeoman to the gear-locker office staff. The office had always had only two yeomen. Just like LtCdr. Sapp created a new position for Ltjg. William, I created a third yeomen position and let the two yeomen already there pick the man to join them.

I did not provide any explanation for all the changes I was making. The two men who knew why I was doing what I was doing were my two yeomen. The third yeoman that I added to my office staff also knew. They all knew because it was obvious to them why there was now a Black yeoman working alongside the two White yeomen who had just picked him as their co-worker. My current head petty officer was upset that I had taken his responsibility of delegating work assignments from him. But, like I said, the military is not Democracy.

## **I Can't Work for Him**

Once I had my two Black petty officers in place, one of the men in my division came to me and said he could not work for a Black (not the word he used back then) man. I said, you haven't even given him a chance to show you what he can do. Give him a month, and if after that time you still want me to change where you work, I'll do it. Before the month was

over, the “I can’t work for him” guy was back to tell me he was now fine with it.

### **Give Me All the Names and A Week**

About two months after I began implementing my desegregation changes, my Black yeoman came to me and said there was a problem brewing. A Black man in our division had seen a poem in the locker of the White guy next to him that was filled with the N word (the yeoman’s description to me was a bit more specific). It looked like a fight between some Blacks and Whites in our division was imminent.

I first did some investigating on my own, with the help of my two White yeomen. I then called every single Black man in my division who was NOT a petty officer to a meeting in our gear locker office. Our office was large enough to hold the entire division at once, since sitting on anything and everything, including the floor, was acceptable.

I started the meeting by saying that I had heard about the poem in question and had looked into its origin. I said that while it was stupid for (name of person) to have had it in his locker, he didn’t write it. It was written by (and I named the poem’s Black author).

I then said, “The poem is not the reason I called you all here. I called you here to talk about one of the things I found wrong when I took over this division, and what I have set about doing about it”. I then listed all the desegregation actions I had taken. Once that was done, I said, “What I want you to do now is give me the name of everyone in our division who you think is prejudiced against Blacks.”

Collectively, my men gave me four names. I said, “Give me a week to go around and talk to each of these four men privately. If, after a week, any of these four still does anything that you think shows prejudice towards any of you, come and see me”. Then, to my surprise, my Black yeoman called the meeting over, saying simply, “We’ve all heard enough now”. I say “surprise” because the yeoman had judged that my message had had its desired impact, and any more talking would be counterproductive. In essence, my yeoman knew how wordy I was and was politely telling me it was time for me to stop talking.

Over the next week, I met with the four men whose names were on my list. I did not call them into my office. I went where they were working and took them aside for “a casual conversation”. I told each man the list he was on and said to each in turn, “Get your name off that list!” None of the four men were ever brought to my attention by any Black sailor in my division for any of the behaviors that had placed them on that list.

## **Helmsman**

There were a variety of things to fix in my division besides it being segregated. One of the problems I quickly became aware of was that of our helmsmen. Second Division was responsible for sending qualified helmsmen to the ship's bridge every other day whenever we were at sea. Only Second and Third Divisions sent helmsmen to the bridge on alternate days. First Division's men had some other responsibility. The helmsman's job is literally to stand at the helm and steer the ship. Steering directions come from the officer in charge on the bridge. The actual steering is the helmsman's responsibility.

The helmsman's position is divided into six four-hour shifts, with six different helmsmen taking that day's six shifts. However, when I took over as Division Officer, I learned that my division only had two qualified helmsmen. Those two men were having to meet the twenty-four-hour helming responsibility by themselves. While they had been training other men in the Division to qualify, none of the trainees wanted to become helmsman number three and spend eight hours every other day standing at the helm.

I met with my division's two helmsmen and had them provide me with the names of every man in our division who they felt was qualified to be a helmsman. They gave me six names. I then had all six of them and the two helmsmen come to our gear locker. I had the two helmsmen go over the questions and the answers for the helmsman's written exam with the six men. Once the six were ready, I had the person from the Navigation Department who was in charge of the helmsman test come to our gear locker and administer the test. All six men passed the test. Second Division now had eight qualified helmsmen.

Before the test-giver arrived, I said to the six men, "You are all going to pass the test. And, as long as I am Division Officer, I will never let the number of qualified helmsmen in our division drop below seven." The number seven was important, because only six helmsmen are needed each day. Seven (or in this case, eight) gives helmsmen a day off in the rotation. The extra helmsmen would also keep the daily rotation of six in effect if someone were sick.

## **Seamen and Seamen Apprentice**

In addition to being segregated when I took over Second Division, the work assignments were, in my view, haphazard. There was no particular reason that I could see for how work assignments were doled out. So, I decided to create a reason. Sailors are Seamen Apprentices when they leave boot camp. After serving for nine months, they can move up to the rank of Seamen. Moving up is not automatic. It takes studying for and passing an exam.

As I said earlier, the men in my division were ones who had passed the test to get into the Navy and then failed every test after that one. More correctly, they failed nearly every test. There were men in the Division who had passed the test that moved them up to the rank of Seaman. However, my division was comprised mostly of Seaman Apprentices.

Periodically, we had full-division meetings in our gear locker. On one occasion, I called a full meeting to explain the Division's about-to-be-implemented policy on work assignments. Second Division had two areas of responsibility. First, the cleaning of the public heads (bathrooms) and decks in our third of the ship. Second, preparing and maintaining the equipment housed on the sponson deck and related areas assigned to us for underway replenishments.

A sponson deck is a deck that extends from the side of a ship to act as a securing point for equipment. It is easier to see it than to define it.



The picture on the left shows Second Division men on our section of the sponson deck just above the water's edge, waiting for one of our escort destroyers to come alongside for refueling. The picture on the right shows the refueling hose in the process of reaching the destroyer. That's me in the white helmet and red life jacket in the lower right corner.

Working on the sponson deck and related areas, preparing and maintaining equipment was the preferred job. That job would now only be assigned to sailors who had achieved the rank of Seaman. Cleaning heads and decks would be the work of Seamen Apprentices. No one in the Division would be required to earn the rank of Seaman. However,

there was now a reward for earning it. One might wonder what I would have done if everyone in the Division earned the rank of Seaman. No problem. This was the era of mandatory military service. The required time for enlisted men to serve was two years. A sailor had to serve as a Seaman Apprentice for at least nine months before taking the test for Seaman. And there would always be a steady stream of sailors joining our division and sailors leaving.

The number of sailors at each rank would fluctuate, but neither job required a fixed number of workers. Low numbers of Seaman Apprentices just meant fewer sailors to clean the heads and decks. The cleaning would still get done, just a little slower.

Individual work assignments were now not arbitrary or subject to the whims of the Division's petty officer. They were something each man in the Division had control over. My head petty officer was once again upset that I had taken his responsibility of delegating work assignments from him. But, like I said before, the military is not Democracy.

### **Captain's Mast**

Captain's Mast is a way of punishing sailors for offences that are not severe enough to warrant a court martial. On a visit to Hawaii, one of the men in my division was arrested by the Shore Patrol for getting drunk, putting on a pair of women's panties he picked off a clothesline, and running around the woman's yard. This, to me, was a simple Captain's Mast case. I made a written recommendation that the sailor be required to write a letter of apology to the woman and send her a box of candy. What the Captain did instead was kick the sailor out of the Navy.

To say that I felt the punishment was a stupidly colossal overreaction would be an understatement. When talking with my sailor after this absurd decision was announced, I gave him a story to tell his family and friends for why he was so abruptly returning to civilian life.

Right after high school graduation, several of my friends had enlisted in the military in a special program that had them serve on active duty for just six months instead of the usual two years. They then had to serve on what was called the ready reserve for seven years. One of my friends in that group was sent home from that program after only a month. The reason he gave was that the doctors had found a spot on his lung, so he had to be discharged. The spot was no longer there, so he was now fine. I, of course, assumed my friend was telling the truth. I told my sailor to use this story as the reason he had been sent home early. He could then go to his family doctor and explain the actual situation to him in confidence. Then he could later say the spot was now gone.

## **New Rules**

The panty story is one of several stories that made me not at all pleased with what would happen to my men at Captain's Mast. My own feeling was that the punishments didn't match the crimes. For me, the biggest example of this mismatch was the punishment for returning to the ship late. When we were in port, each division would take muster at a set time in the morning. Muster is basically just seeing who is here and who isn't. The muster list would then be submitted. Anyone not present would be put on report and could then expect a Captain's Mast visit.

What was absurd about this to me was that being a half an hour late or an hour late or a full day late, all warranted a Captain's Mast visit and most likely the same punishment. So, if I am a sailor returning to the ship from where I have been the night before and I am stuck in traffic, I am already going to be put on report. Why not just take the whole day off? The punishment is the same for an hour as it is for a day.

At a gear-locker meeting with my Division, I explained my new rule for missing muster. We would have to report you missing, of course. However, when you finally arrived, we would file an amended muster, stating that you had been here the whole time. We had marked you absent in error. Rather than have your absence punished by the Captain, we would punish you within the Division. Your punishment would be working three times the number of minutes you were late, plus one hour, before you could go on liberty that day.

The advantage of this was twofold. First, it gave the person showing up late a reason to get back to the ship sooner rather than later. Second, Captain's Mast visits are recorded on your service record. Now, being late occasionally would not show up on anyone's record. My view was that we shouldn't just order men to behave differently, we should give them reasons to want to behave differently.

## **Sleeping During General Quarters**

"General quarters, general quarters, all hands man your battle stations." This command broadcast over the ship's intercom sends everyone on board scurrying to their designated battle stations. My station was a two-man radar tracking device right next to the flight deck. A sailor and I sat in this device and tracked on its little radar screen targets for a 5-inch 54 cannon to blast out of the sky.

Several men in my division were stationed in and below that cannon's steel housing as ammunition handlers. When the cannon was being fired, my men would be the ones passing the cannon shells to the sailors doing the loading and firing. During one general quarters drill, a Master-



at-Arms (Navy on-board police) making the rounds wrote my men up for being asleep during the drill. This was another of the things I regarded as absurd, but this time I was able to do something about it.

I wrote a letter to the Captain in advance of my men's scheduled Captain's Mast, in which I pointed out that the sleeping during general quarters was not the fault of the men sleeping. Rather, it was the fault of the Weapons Department for having given my men nothing to do during that drill. My men would have performed any task they were assigned. I argued that sleeping is only a crime when one chooses to sleep rather than perform the task at hand. Because my men were given absolutely nothing to do, their sleeping was simply one form of passing the time and, in this case, no different than simply staring blankly at a wall.

The Captain accepted my rationale, and the charges were dismissed. Notice that I said it was the fault of the Weapons Department. The Deck Department is part of the Weapons Department. The Captain let my men off. The head of the Weapons Department received all the blame instead.

The Weapons Department Commander called me into his office a few days later. He told me he had delayed calling me in until he had calmed down enough to not start our meeting by yelling at me. He was obviously not happy that the Captain had chewed him out. However, he said he understood I was only sticking up for my men, which is what an officer was supposed to do. He also said he could guarantee that for the next general quarters drill, my men would have things to do.

### **One on One**

Running the Division involved more than Division meetings in our gear locker. I was never good at learning how all our equipment worked. However, I was good at paying attention to what was going on in my men's lives and choosing when to interfere. My three yeomen were very good at letting me know the things that were happening in my division that I would not have known otherwise.

As an example, one of my men spent his whole pay each payday repaying loans he had taken from others in the Division. Then, as soon as he had repaid his debts, he began the whole borrowing process all over again. What I did was tell everyone in the Division to stop lending him money. That left him completely broke one payday. He was single and living on the ship, so he wouldn't go hungry and wouldn't be homeless. Once his cycle was broken, he lived from payday to payday like the rest of us, but on his own salary without the endless borrowing.

Another of my men managed to contract a venereal disease every time we were in port in either the Philippines or Japan during our March through



November Vietnam deployment. I restricted him to the ship for our final visit to the Philippines before we began our two-week voyage back to Alameda. The most common form of VD contracted by my men had an incubation period of about two weeks. That meant he would be symptomatic about the time we reached our home port. This man was married. I was not judging his marital ethics. I simply did not want him to show up with a case of VD when he was about to reconnect with his wife. He understood and accepted my restriction.

Still another of my men had caused a near riot in a cattle car. The cattle cars were used in the Philippines to transport sailors from our ship to the main gate of the Subic Bay Naval Base. For his near riot, he was sentenced to a sixty-day restriction to the ship. He came to me with a request. We had just finished a forty-five-day deployment and were to spend two weeks in Yokosuka before heading out for another forty-five days at sea. If he was not allowed to go ashore during our time in Yokosuka, his restriction would turn out to be for one hundred four days and not just sixty. What he asked me to do was let him spend a few days off the ship while we were in Yokosuka. The fact that I was a rule-bender was not exactly a secret.

I decided that his request was both legally unacceptable and, at least to me, completely reasonable. So, we worked out a set of rules. No drinking. No staying ashore overnight. Only seven days ashore spread out over our fourteen-day stay. He knew the risk we were both taking because we would both be in serious trouble if he messed up. But I trusted him, so we did it.

One last example of many. I had attended a Captain's Mast with a man in my Division named Young. At Young's session, the Captain told him that the next time he saw Young at a Captain's Mast, he would boot Young right out of the Navy. After the Mast, Young told me he might as well get in trouble again right away and get it over with. I told Young that getting a bad conduct discharge would be on his record forever. I also told him I would protect him. If he helped me help him, I would keep him from any more Captain's Masts.

Young's Captain's Mast happened just a week before the beginning of our Vietnam deployment. On the day we were to leave port, Young was not at muster. My thought was, "I guess he has decided it's not worth it to try." But half an hour after muster, Young showed up. We corrected our muster list to add Young as present. Young finished out his enlistment without facing any more Captain's Masts. The Captain had given up on Young. Young had given up on Young. However, in my Division, Young was my responsibility, and I was not going to give up on him or anyone else in my Division.

### **The Division Party Revisited**

During our Vietnam deployment, Second Division once again had a division party in Yokosuka, rented party girls and all. At one point, I watched Seaman Young go over to a party girl and ask her to dance. She said, "No." In my earlier story about Young, I didn't mention he was Black. There was no need to mention his race because his race made no difference to me. Now, however, the fact that he was Black was very important to me. It didn't take a genius to figure out what had just happened. The party girl had turned him down simply because he was Black. And in that instant, I understood why all but one of the Black men in Second Division had walked out of our division party on that earlier cruise.

I called Young over, and before I said anything to him, he said it's really okay. I told him to wait there. I walked over to the woman in charge of all the party girls and said, "One of my men just asked one of your girls to dance, and she turned him down. If that happens again to ANY of my men, none of your girls will be paid". I watched as she scurried around spreading the word. When she finished making her rounds, I told Young to ask the party girl again. This time her answer was "Yes".

What I had not seen on that earlier cruise was just so obvious to me now. Neither Ltjg. Williams, nor I had any clue about what the problem was back then. By this cruise, I not only recognized the problem, I also knew how to fix it. Ltjg. Williams didn't even know his division was segregated, so how could he have figured out why all except one of the Black men in our division walked out of that party? I'll give him the benefit of assuming he didn't know as opposed to knowing and not caring, because he seemed as surprised as I at all the Black sailors leaving. What I do not understand is why he didn't ask anybody, "Why?"

### **The Last Rule Change**

When the Midway finished its Vietnam deployment and returned to Alameda, the ship's crew would be given a thirty-day leave period. During this period, half the crew could go on leave for the first fifteen days, and the other half could go on leave for the second fifteen days.

The reason for only half the ship's crew being gone at any one time was in case there was an emergency, and the ship needed to deploy. The half remaining would be enough to get the ship underway. Obviously, the most desired time to be gone would be that first fifteen days, so the sailors with more seniority would get that time slot.

I decided to do things differently. At a division meeting in our gear locker, I explained my leave policy to my men. Anyone wishing to take leave as soon as our ship docks could be gone for ten days, not fifteen. If you waited ten days before taking your leave, you could take leave for twenty days, not fifteen. Seniority will not matter. I will guarantee that you can have whatever choice you make.

The fact that I was guaranteeing everyone their choice meant that it was very likely that more than half of my men would pick one or the other leave period. If I had simply said, "You can get whatever choice you make" when the leave periods were both fifteen days, then everyone would have picked the first fifteen days. By making the favorite "as soon as we dock" time just ten days and the "you have to wait" time twenty days, both time slots now had their own appeal.

Was I allowed to do something like this? Obviously not. But, as long as there was no firing squad waiting for me, I could live with any other punishment that might come my way. I wanted every man in my division, regardless of his rank or supposed seniority, to feel his choice mattered. I did add that anyone choosing the first ten days couldn't claim some medical or family emergency as an excuse to take more time.

### **From I Can't to We All Do**

This is a picture of my Second Division at work. The eight men you can see are just the tip of the iceberg. Basket after basket of supplies are being dropped on a lowered flight deck elevator by our crane operators on the deck above. Our package handlers quickly move each new basket's contents onto conveyor belts inside the hanger bay.



A team working smoothly together under the leadership of my second in command, the Black petty officer, standing on the elevator with my men. An integrated Division with respect for all - Black, White, and Brown - and high moral. Just the way Divisions are supposed to be.

### **Something I Did Not Think About Earlier**

As I said earlier, I was always impressed by how much Ltjg. Williams knew about all our Division's machinery and related mechanical equipment. I always assumed that LtCdr. Sapp admired Ltjg. Williams, too. When the XO sent me to the Deck Department, there was not really an opening there for me. And, when LtCdr. Sapp assigned me to Second Division, there wasn't really opening for me there, either. Ltjg. Williams wasn't going anywhere soon.

I assumed that LtCdr. Sapp knew I was one of the two OCS students who had been written up in the Navy Times as eventually going to be working out for the Olympics during my time in service. The fact that I was sent off to the Military Olympics in August after only having arrived at the Midway in June would have let him know if he didn't already. However, once the Olympic Trials were over, and I was going to be around with no more water polo breaks, LtCdr. Sapp simply made up a job for Ltjg. Williams, and handed Second Division over to me while I was still just an Ensign. I thought Ltjg. Williams was moved up because he was so capable. In retrospect, I can now see that was not the case at all.

What I found when I was put in charge was that Second Division was in terrible shape. What occurred to me now and not back then is that LtCdr. Sapp also knew Second Division was in terrible shape. That means LtCdr. Sapp did not have the same high regard for Ltjg. Williams that I did. He made up that job for Ltjg. Williams to get him away from the Division, not to reward him for his superior work.

Why was LtCdr. Sapp waiting for me? As I said before, people in charge in the Navy pay attention to the information available to them. The XO knew I was an age-group swimming coach before we met. He knew a lot more about me than that. Both he and LtCdr. Sapp knew I was fourth in my class at OCS. Academic achievement alone doesn't get you to fourth. You would need that one-third of your score military grade to get there.

At OCS, I had thought that our military score would be based on rank. What I learned was that rank was not a factor. It was based on demonstrated leadership. People holding high ranks could show leadership ability, but it was the leadership being judged, not the rank. LtCdr. Sapp knew what my being fourth in my class meant. He may not have known what form my leadership had taken, but he definitely wanted to see what my leadership might do for Second Division.

There was evidence of this at that time that I paid no attention to. When I asked for some Black petty officers for my Division, LtCdr. Sapp found them right away without even asking me the reason for my request. Every time my division reported a muster in error, it had to go through LtCdr. Sapp's office. He never once asked me for an explanation for my division's high rate of getting muster wrong. He could see the increase in the men in my division taking the Seaman exam. That test-taking also extended to many of my men taking the Petty Officer Third-Class exam, which none had ever tried before. LtCdr. Sapp also knew what I had done to increase the number of qualified helmsmen in my division.

What was going on in my division was not exactly a secret. A Division of seventy men bragging to their shipmates about what our division was doing that theirs were not, meant that pretty much everybody in the Deck Department knew what was going on. This would even have included my ten-day, twenty-day leave policy at the end of our Vietnam deployment and just about everything else we were doing, as well. My brother Jack was sharing what I was doing with the other Deck Division officers. They told him that doing what I was doing would only get them in trouble, so they wouldn't even try. However, LtCdr. Sapp was just as aware as they were, and he never once told me to stop.

### **My 1966 Self**

In [Chapter 1 - How Mary and Bob Ended Up as Teachers](#), I said that by 1966, I was not my 1961 self. In 1961, I still expected to be a lawyer. By 1962, my plan had changed to wanting to become an age-group swimming coach, with a teaching career as my side job. From 1963 through 1966, my attitude towards how I would approach any job had undergone a radical change. If I had become an age-group swimming coach, my change in attitude would have had no reason to show itself. I had abandoned the coaching methods my head coach had used and come up with different ways of coaching. My ways were never challenged, because the measure of me as a coach was the achievements of my swimmers. If they were successful, then, so long as I was not harming any child, my methods were not questioned.

When I became a teacher, a different set of circumstances presented itself. The starting point now was, "What is being taught now is not working, so try something different." The 1961 version of me would have assumed that while I could start from scratch, the methods I came up with would eventually have to meet with the approval of higher-ups, like my supervisors, or more experienced teachers, or my school principal. The 1966 version of me didn't care one bit about the approval of anyone above me. My responsibility was not to them. It was to the children in my class.

When I decided to run my Second Division the way I wanted to, even when this meant flat-out ignoring many of the Navy's rules, I had asked myself, what was the worst the Navy could do to me, if I were to be punished for going off on my own? Fine me? Restrict me to the ship? The Navy was not going to shoot me, and I could live with anything else. I cared not one bit what anyone above me thought. My responsibility was not to them. The men in my division were my responsibility, period.

My Navy experience ended up having given me complete permission to reject all the teaching materials already in use if they were not helping my students learn. The fact that materials might be what the people in authority wanted me to use made no difference to me. Whatever I did, the focus would be on what was best for my students, period.

If my principal or anyone else in power suggested a material, a method, or anything else I should use or do in my class, and the suggestion seems reasonable, I would give it a try. If it did not meet the needs of all my students, I would not use it or do it, no matter what anyone above me said. The people over me could fire me, but they could not make me do anything I didn't believe was right for my students.

### **The Men in My Division's Effect on Me**

The Intern Program started with the easily provable premise that what is being taught now is not working. The program's focus was inner-city schools with a preponderance of Black students. The men in my Second Division provided me with a different focus. As will be made clear in [Curriculum Chapter 11 - A K-6 Math Curriculum Leaving No Child Behind - Holding No Child Back](#), the inspiration for the math curriculum I created was my friend Keith Bush. While it is not spelled out in that chapter, Keith actually represents the men in my Second Division.

As I mentioned earlier, the men in my division averaged a tenth-grade education level, and the petty officers averaged an eighth-grade education level. While in the Navy, I gave no particular thought to this fact. However, as an Intern Teacher, I was presented with the notion that it was the way people were taught that failed them. If that were true and I could find ways that really did leave no child behind, then my methods would have helped the men in my division when they had been in school, as well. The low education level of my men was not their fault, it was the fault of the methods used to teach them.

My focus on Keith was also my focus on every man in my Second Division. Yes, I was supposed to find ways to let every inner-city child learn. But failure at school was not confined to the inner-city. Keith Bush was not a student in an inner-city school, and he had failed year

after year. The men in my division came from all over the country. Inner-city, yes, but “yes” also applied to just about any region in the country I might name.

Since failure was everywhere, then any curriculum I might create had to be for everywhere, as well. My curriculum was meant for Keith and for every sailor in my Second Division. That is why my 1966 self would say, “You want me to find new ways? Bring it on. I’m ready for this!”

### **The Ten IFs That Lead to A Life-Changing Experience**

IF I had not decided to get zero gigs.

IF I had not been the Coach of my company’s swimming team.

IF I had not been fourth in my class.

IF I had not still been playing water polo after graduating from college.

IF the Navy Times had not written that article.

IF my roommate had not received Midway orders.

IF my Oriskany orders had not been switched.

IF the XO’s daughter was not being coached by my old boss.

IF LtCdr. Sapp had not had me replace Ltjg Williams and then given me free rein.

IF Second Division had not been such a mess.

The effect of these IFs was apparent when I was in the Navy. They changed how I thought about the Navy and how the Navy thought about me. An old Navy saying: If you go by the book, you can make Captain, but you will never make Admiral. LtCdr. Sapp let me abandon the book and go my own way with my division. He made the Navy a perfect place for me to learn of what I was capable. He let me learn to be an old rule-breaker and a new rule-maker. For that, I am forever grateful.