

THINGS IN MOTION....

All things are in motion and nothing is at rest...you cannot go into the same (river) twice.

--Heraclitus (540?-480?) B.C.

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THE CAPTAIN QUEEG I KNEW

IN JUNE 1951, fresh from boot camp in San Diego, I reported for duty with Helicopter Training Unit One (HTU-1), a newly created squadron based at Ellyson Field, near Pensacola, Florida, a WWII base for Marines which was re-opened to house the Navy's only helicopter flight training facility. The squadron would not reach its full complement of men for another six months, yet its aggressive training schedule was providing badly needed pilots for the Korean War and no let-up was in sight. Most of the squadron's officers were reserves called back to active duty from their civilian pursuits and the majority of enlisted personnel were raw recruits with a few reserves and even fewer old salts to guide the newcomers. The commanding officer was expecting orders to sea and the executive officer was transferred a few months after I reported aboard—there was a constant ebb and flow of personnel and a degree of instability that would persist until I finished the enlisted men's course at the Naval School of Justice in Newport, RI in late November and returned to HTU-1 as a fully qualified legal yeoman, now conversant in all provisions of The Uniform Code of Military Justice, enacted by Congress in mid-1950 and still in effect for all branches of the military. The Legal Officer for HTU-1, my boss, was

Major John W. Lincoln, who was a Marine fighter pilot in WWII, a reserve officer called back to active duty from his last semester in law school, who had just spent a tour of duty in Korea where he earned his 7th Distinguished Flying Cross. We worked very well together and established the best legal office in the entire Naval Air Basic Training Command.



The administrative staff of HTU-1 July 1951

Just six months after the above photo was made, the Commanding Officer and the Executive Officer, third and fourth from the left in the front row, were ordered to sea, leaving HTU-1 with a new Executive Officer to assume temporary command until our new Commanding Officer reported aboard.

By the end of 1951, the squadron had reached its full complement and a new stability settled over the organization. A book by Herman Wouk entitled *THE CAINE MUTINY* was passed around the administrative building and it was a hit with almost everyone, myself included. Our new Executive Officer reported in and shortly afterward the Captain shipped out to take command of a carrier in the Pacific. Our new Exec assumed temporary command of the squadron and the "Commanding Officer" shingle was

hung above his door—he refused to move into the Captain’s old office. Among his first duties as Commanding Officer was the practice of walking around the entire complex looking for uniform violations and putting offenders “on report.” He looked for anyone wearing the wrong color socks, having the cuffs of his sleeves rolled up; wearing a hat on the back of his head; needing a haircut or shave or not having a shine on his shoes. In a matter of days, the entire squadron was calling him “Captain Queeg”, the infamous, paranoid character from *THE CAIN MUTINY*. Since he was no more lax with officers than with enlisted men, the officers soon lost respect for him also. During my prior time at HTU-1, we averaged bringing four or five people before Captain’s Mast each month—when “Captain Queeg” began his tenure as CO, the average number of accused who were brought to Captain’s Mast jumped to twenty-eight per month. This ceremony is the Navy’s non-judicial hearing by the commanding officer who reviews the charges against those who are “on report” and decides whether the accused is innocent or guilty—and administers punishment if warranted. Records of non-judicial punishment stay in personnel records for a year and may be considered when promotions, leaves of absence or other requests arise. This is a practice that has endured for many years among the world’s mariners. A similar procedure in army units is known as “Office Hours.”



My contact with the CO was usually limited to my attendance at Captain’s Mast, the records of which were my responsibility, and with the exception of a verbal insult from him on the “Squawk Box” (our intercom), now and then, I had no personal problem with “Captain Queeg” until **the incident of the coffee stains**.



The second floor of the Administrative Building had been used as the pilots’ ready room and included a coffee mess. When the ready room was moved to one of the hangars, the enlisted personnel obtained permission to use the coffee mess, which meant that twenty people would be going up and down the stairs every morning—carrying cups of coffee. In short order, coffee stains began to appear on the stairs and sometimes in the hallway—predictably, it was a disaster waiting to happen. I was stripped of my smug attitude when the bomb fell on me.

We mustered at 0630 hours during the summer, then began our workday, which usually included a trip upstairs to get the first cup of coffee. On the morning in question I went directly from muster to my office and was in the process of changing out of my dress jumper into my undress jumper when “Captain Queeg” appeared in the doorway and announced in his most sarcastic voice, “Singleton,

get a mop and clean up this coffee you spilled in the hallway—NOW!” I must have registered a look of idiocy, because he crooked his finger at me and said, *“Come on, I’ll show you.”* He led me to the intersection of the two hallways and pointed to three small drops of coffee on the polished floor. *“Look at that—you see how they point to your office, so don’t deny that you did it. I want it cleaned up right now!”* I had the good sense to nod and say, *“Yes sir!”* I grabbed a mop from the nearby closet and quickly cleaned the floor, then I hastened back to my office where my two strikers were bug-eyed and trying desperately not to grin at me. They knew that I had not yet gone for coffee and they also knew that my quick indignation could spell big trouble.



“Captain Queeg’s” office was only a few feet from the stairway, and anyone entering his door would see the coffee stains on the stairs and in the hallway—the janitors worked at night, so all spaces were tidy each morning. I arrived in the administrative building early the next morning when no one was around except the OD, who kept to his office. I went upstairs and brewed a pot of coffee, then filled my mug and proceeded to leave a visible trail of brown stains on

every step from top to bottom, then left a trail which led from the stairs directly to “Captain Queeg’s” office. I put my mug away and left the building for half an hour until time for muster. Immediately after muster, I joined six or eight others to get coffee from the upstairs mess. I noticed that the Captain was in his office and that *there were no coffee stains on the stairs or in the hallway!* All that day I listened for any complaint about having to mop up coffee stains, but not a word was said—it was hard to believe, but it appeared that the big man himself had stooped to swinging a mop. I let sleeping dogs lie and kept my mouth shut, knowing well that my puny stripes were no match for those of “Captain Queeg.” In a few weeks, command of HTU-1 was passed to our new CO, Captain Francis Drake, and the unrest caused by our own “Captain Queeg” faded into history.

Thirty years passed and my days at Ellyson Field rested undisturbed in memory; a time when being 19 meant that my most important accomplishment was to realize how ignorant I was. During those thirty years I had moved to Orlando, Florida and had undertaken a career with a wonderful company, was secure at the level of management that I most enjoyed, and was working toward my retirement. The Florida Region Director visited us one day with a young man in tow; the latest recruit for the company’s fast track program of management training. This recent college graduate with an enviable grade point average seemed destined for great achievement within our ranks, and in fact he was a Region Director within ten years—a remarkable record! I liked him very much and enjoyed teaching him in my area of expertise. Most of all, I felt a sort of kinship with him—he was the son of our “Captain Queeg” at Ellyson Field.