

CAPTAIN P. V. H. WIGGS

JOE BLACK BROWN

CAPTAIN P. V. H. WEEMS

An Abstract
Presented to
the Graduate Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Joe Mack Brown
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ABSTRACT

This is a biography of Captain Philip Van Horn Weems; outstanding athlete; twenty-six years service in the U. S. Navy; inventor, author, publisher, teacher, and retailer of equipment in marine and air navigation. Founder of the Weems System of Navigation, he is associated more closely than any other individual with the promotion of celestial navigation for aircraft.

Born on a farm in Montgomery County, Tennessee in 1889, orphaned at fourteen, he worked on the family farm and attended local schools with his four brothers. Upon graduation from Annapolis in 1912, he received the sword for excellence in athletics after earning letters in football, crew, and wrestling. A champion wrestler at the Academy and in amateur competition, he was a member of the 1920 U. S. Olympic Wrestling Team.

He was retired from the U. S. Navy in 1933 after twenty-one years of continuous service. Approximately seven years before being retired, he developed a system of navigation that did not require any mathematical calculations by the observer. This "Weems System of Navigation" thrust him into the navigational limelight of the world in the late twenties when he worked with Colonel C. A.

Lindbergh, Wiley Post, Harold Gatty, Ed Link and many other navigators and aviators. The techniques and equipment developed by his company became standard equipment for navigators and aviators in World War II.

Captain Weems was an extrovert and enjoyed helping his fellowman. He was a believer in Christian ethics and was active in civic and social events. He married Margaret Thackray in 1915, who became a business partner, a companion, and the mother of their three children, two sons and one daughter. Both sons were killed while on active duty, one during World War II and the surviving son in 1951 while assigned as a test pilot in the U. S. Navy.

Captain Weems received a number of awards, U. S., French, and British, mostly in the field of navigation. His work in all fields of the latter has earned him the title of "Grand Ole Man of Navigation."

CAPTAIN P. V. H. WEEMS

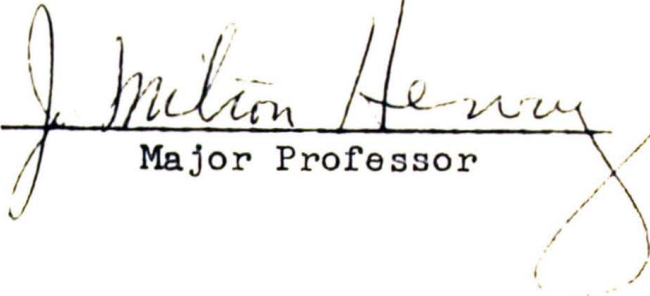
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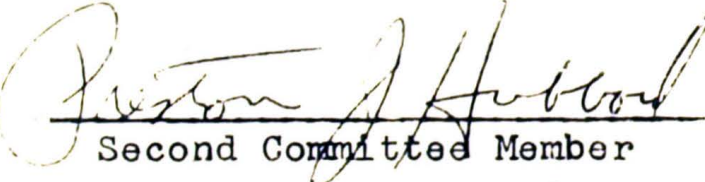
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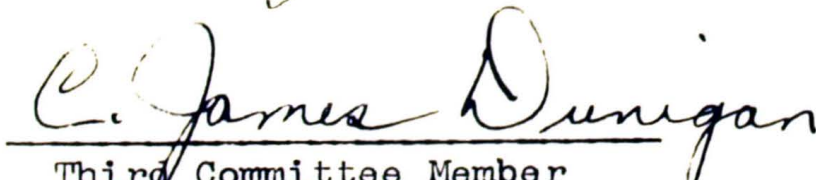
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Joe Mack Brown entitled "Captain P. V. H. Weems." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

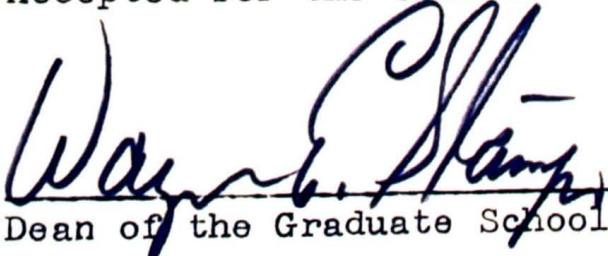

Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:


Second Committee Member


Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Council:


Dean of the Graduate School

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INTRODUCTION

This is a biography of Captain Philip Van Horn Weems, world famous in the field of navigation. Born on a farm in Montgomery County, Tennessee, in 1889, he was orphaned at the age of fourteen. Van and his four brothers worked on the family farm and attended a one-room country school named Walnut Grove. After an appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy by Senator Robert L. Taylor, Van prepared at Branham and Hughes Preparatory School at Spring Hill, Tennessee, and at the Werntz Preparatory School, Annapolis, Maryland.

Van first came into prominence when he distinguished himself as an athlete. At the Academy he won athletic letters in football, crew and wrestling. He made several All-American football teams, won the wrestling championship twice, and was given the sword for excellence in athletics. After graduation in 1912, tying Admiral Richard Byrd for class standing, he continued in athletics. In 1920 he was a member of the U. S. Olympic Wrestling team at Antwerp, Belgium. He won the South Atlantic Wrestling Championship in 1919, 1920 and in 1925.

Captain Weems' naval career spanned fifty years with twenty-six years of active duty service that included both

World Wars, and one year of service at the age of seventy-two. For the first twenty-one years, Van followed the general pattern of duties, serving in various grades on Navy ships and stations. During the latter part of this period, Van became interested in the navigation of ships and aircraft and developed a system of navigation that did not require any mathematical calculations by the observer. With the "Weems System of Navigation," the navigator in only seconds could accurately determine his position by applying his observations to printed curves of celestial positions of stars.

This system of navigation allowed Van to build a profitable business in the field of navigation that included inventing, writing, publishing, teaching, and selling. As a pioneer in celestial navigation, he taught Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh, Mr. Lincoln Ellsworth, and many other early long distance aviators. He worked with pioneer navigators, Mr. Harold Gatty and Mr. Ed Link, and others to develop navigational equipment.

Captain Weems was an extrovert who enjoyed meeting and helping people. His interest in life varied from chess as a child to skin diving at the age of seventy. Also, he was interested in genealogy, especially helping to trace his family to the first Weems to arrive in America in 1715. Van married Margaret Thackray in 1915. She became a

business partner, a companion, and the mother of their three children, two sons and one daughter. Both sons were killed while on active duty, one during World War II and the surviving son in 1951 while assigned the duty of test pilot by the U. S. Navy.

Captain Weems has received a large number of awards, most of which were related to navigation. He worked in all four fields of navigation--sea, air, space and inner space. Inner space is the term used for underwater exploration. Thus Captain P. V. H. Weems, known as "Mammy" Weems by his Annapolis classmates, has earned the title of "Grand Ole Man of Navigation."



CHILDHOOD IN TURBINE, TENNESSEE

On May 6, 1903,¹ a young man named Philip Van Horn Weems struggled unsuccessfully to fight back the flow of tears. At fourteen he looked and acted like a grown man. As he stood on the porch looking down toward Barton's Creek, the tears obscured his vision as he started to think of how life would be without his Mother's guiding hand. He tried to control his weeping with self assurance that even grown men cry when their Mother is taken away and they are left to face the world as an orphan.

Philip Van Horn, or just Van to close friends, was not completely alone, for living with Van in the Weems country home were four brothers and one sister. "Sister Violetta"² was the oldest at twenty. She had completed her education at Cloverdale Seminary and had started accepting callers and no longer wanted to rough house with her younger brothers. Her five brothers were born two years apart. Her oldest brother, Tom Nat,³ was eighteen and

¹All dates and ages computed from dates taken from biographical data in the P. V. H. Weems file, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

²Mrs. Violetta Chapman Weems Slayden, Waverly, Tennessee, B. December 21, 1883.

³Thomas Nathaniel Weems, farmer, B. October 19, 1885, D. February 13, 1970.

quieter than the younger boys. For the past seven years, since Dad,⁴ Joseph Burch Weems, had passed away, presumably from pneumonia caused by inhaling dust from bailing hay, it was Tom who had been the man of the house. Mother had made the major decisions, but Tom had to insure that the boys completed their tasks in the fields and their assigned chores around the house.

Joe B.⁵ was two years behind Tom Nat at sixteen. He enjoyed playing with Van, who was only fourteen but much larger and stronger than most boys at the age of fourteen. George Hatton, Hatton,⁶ was next and John,⁷ the baby, at ten years of age.

Late in the afternoon on May 6, 1903, as the immediate members of the family started to gather to pay their respects, the five brothers and Sister Violetta met quietly and agreed to stay together on the farm if possible. Some of the relatives had already inquired about "taking in" the children. They did not know what would happen, but they had faith in each other and in Grandfather Rye,⁸ father

⁴Joseph Burch Weems, Civil War Veteran, B. August 3, 1845, D. December 2, 1896.

⁵Joseph Burch Weems, Jr., lawyer, later judge in Dickson County, Tennessee, B. July 2, 1887, D. April 29, 1950.

⁶Brigadier General George Hatton Weems, U. S. Army, B. September 27, 1891, D. February 25, 1957.

⁷John Calvin Weems, farmer, B. April 18, 1893.

⁸Dr. Thomas Hartwell Rye, B. August 3, 1830, D. May 24, 1903.

of "Bessie," their Mother, May Elizabeth Rye Weems. Before the month would end their seventy-three year old Grandparent would also pass away. He would barely have time to name Cousin Loch⁹ as guardian. Cousin Loch, the son of Elizabeth Weems Cook, had recently established himself as a lawyer in Charlotte, Tennessee. He had received financial assistance and parental guidance from Van's father while attending law school, after his one-armed Civil War veteran father had died. Until Cousin Loch assumed the duties as guardian, he had been unable to repay this debt of gratitude.

Van had difficulty in getting to sleep the night after his Mother's death. He could still hear her whispering on her death bed, "I love my boys." Van prayed as his mother had taught him to pray. These four words, respect for God, and love for his sister and brothers would remain with Van the rest of his life. Of these four treasures, his Mother's message, "I love my boys" would be recalled time and again in difficult and trying times.¹⁰

Van could not understand why something could not have been done to save his Mother's life. She appeared healthy but could not breathe. Grandfather Rye said she had a

⁹William Loch Cook, 9th District Judge 1908, appointed Justice of Supreme Court by Governor Austin Peay April 12, 1923, reelected 1926, 1934.

¹⁰P. V. H. Weems, 1911 Diary, Tennessee State Library, Ibid.

goiter in her throat and nothing could be done. She and Van also had the "slow fever."¹¹ Van had lost about thirty pounds but had stopped having chills and fever.¹² Within a few years Van learned that removal of a throat goiter was a simple operation and that "slow fever" could have been malaria caused by the mosquitos that swarmed over the fish pond near the house. The pond had been dug to provide the family with a year-round supply of fresh fish. Some of the talkative neighbor women claimed that Bessie had "wore herself out" trying to raise those six children the last seven years by herself.

Life was difficult for the boys on the farm until Cousin Loch hired Mrs. Nannie Woodward as housekeeper. Mrs. Nannie's husband had died and left her with a young daughter to raise. Cousin Loch paid her a salary and allowed her to raise turkeys and keep the "egg money" as extra. The boys loved her and years after her death Dickson County Judge Joe B. Weems wrote:

There is one member of our "family" of whom, I fear, the second generation knew too little. She is your "God Sent" Grandmother, Mrs. Nannie Woodward. When Mrs. Nannie came to live with us she brought with her a little stuttering daughter, Etta "Ed" to us, who very shortly became a fine sister, with plenty

¹¹Unknown disease, probably typhoid or malaria.

¹²Taped interview of Captain P. V. H. Weems on March 25, 1969, by Mr. John T. Mason, Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland.

of fight back, and who has remained a fine sister to this day. Mrs. Nannie became a Mother in every sense, except the natural one. Her administration with us was through those years while we were in our teens; that period of sowing wild oats; that part of our lives when mischief was our chief thought. We were bad enough and wild enough to cause a lady of Mrs. Nannie's age much exasperation and loss of temper, but she kept hers.

She lived with us and shared with us our pleasures, woes, and hardships until we began to marry off, and until Etta was married to one of our good friends and neighbors, Grigsby Tally, when she moved with them to their home.

Her coming to us at that time was a God-send to us. During all the years she was with us, there was never a cross or discourteous word between us. Our mean tricks were never with Mrs. Nannie.

Whatever we did, or whatever might have been reported to her of our guilt, she had only one answer: "They are mighty good boys" and that ended it.¹³

Mrs. Nannie allowed the boys a free life. Surprisingly they picked up very few bad habits. Only Hatton chewed tobacco and smoked. The boys were allowed to spend nights away from home, to hunt and fish, and to rough house with each other as long as they did not hurt one another.

A typical fight among the brothers resulted from riding the oxen. They were playing around the stock barn when they decided to take turns riding the oxen that were in the barn. Van was riding around when one of the brothers blew in the ox's ear, and it took off for Barton's Creek,

¹³Letter from Joe B. Weems printed in Weemsana, family newspaper, dated April, 1944, Vol. II, Number 2, p. 1.

throwing Van off in the creek, bruising his nose and eye. This started a rough tumble fight among the brothers.¹⁴

Another typical boyhood fight occurred between Van and his Cousin Sam Weems, son of William Lock Weems or Uncle Buck. Sam and Van were returning from school one afternoon in the early fall. At the footbridge where Van turned off to walk home was a grove of walnut trees. Van and Sam had been fussing all the way home from school. When Van was on the bank leading to the bridge he said, "Sam, I dare you to hit me."

"You do?" asked Sam.

"Yea," Van replied.

Sam, who could really throw, picked up a large green walnut and hit Van right between the eyes, knocking him flat on the ground. Sam became alarmed that he might have injured Van and rushed up to where Van was lying and said, "I told you not to dare me to do anything." The green walnut did not hurt Van, but it did leave an orange walnut stain on his face that took days to wear off. Everything was fun to Van and his brothers.¹⁵

Mrs. Nannie was a good cook. With five teenage boys, she and her wood stove worked overtime to keep enough food

¹⁴Taped interview with Chap Weems, son of Uncle Buck, March 31, 1973, Clarksville, Tennessee, 73 years old, with a clear memory.

¹⁵Ibid.

on the table. She would prepare biscuits, eggs, and bacon every morning for breakfast. There was always honey from the family beehives and sorghum syrup on the table for sweets. Turnips and sweet potatoes from the garden were "banked" in straw and dirt for the winter months. Hogs were killed each fall, and the meat was cured with smoke from smoldering hickory wood chips in the family smokehouse. Cousin Loch authorized a beef to be killed on special occasions. The beef that could not be used immediately was shared with aunts and uncles or dried in small strips for future use. Hunting small game provided a variety of meats for the family table. Each fall the Cunningham cousins from Clarksville and the two Gennett boys from Nashville joined Van and his brothers for a week of quail shooting.¹⁶

Most of the flour and corn meal used on the farm was processed by Mr. Johnny Batson at his mill on Barton's Creek. The wheat and corn was grown on the farm and taken to the mill on horseback with a sack on each side of the animal for balance, with one of the younger brothers leading the horse to the mill. Mr. Batson took part of the meal or flour as payment for grinding. The boys saw very little cash money while they were on the farm, but they did not

¹⁶Taped interview with Mrs. Violetta Slayden, age 90, on December 13, 1972, Waverly, Tennessee; she has a keen mind and clear memory.

consider themselves as being poor or downtrodden. They lived a near-subsistence life, similar to all other families in the community. The only planted cash crop was tobacco.

At the mill a large turbine was turned by a water wheel to grind the grain. Located in the mill house was a small post office, Turbine, Tennessee, named for the turbine used in the mill. Van's home of record was listed as Turbine, Tennessee, years after the post office had been moved to Southside, Tennessee.¹⁷

There have been disagreements as to the county of Van's birth. Van tells the story, "Our farm was on the border of all three counties, Montgomery, Cheatham, and Dickson, with the corner post in one of our fields we called the "Gennett bottom." The country home where Van was born is still occupied by his brother John. The house is north of Barton's Creek in Montgomery County and part of his father's inheritance of eight hundred acres of land, six hundred dollars cash, and a feather bed.¹⁸

The boys always welcomed visits from their uncles and aunts. When Aunt Agnes, Mrs. Agnes Rye Baxter, stopped by, she usually would bring a cake or a pie and tell her

¹⁷Who's Who in America, Marquis Publishing Company, Chicago, Illinois, Vol. 33 (1964-1965), p. 218.

¹⁸Ed Huddleston, Nashville Banner, December 11, 1965.

favorite story of how Bessie's boys tricked her. When the boys were small tots, she and Aunt Harriet, Mrs. Harriet Rye Harper, were visiting their sister Bessie. Aunt Agnes glanced out the kitchen window toward the smokehouse and noticed that the boys had gathered five large barrels full of black walnuts. She started bragging on how smart Bessie's boys were to gather the black walnuts for the approaching winter. The three sisters became excited at the boys' work and walked out to the smokehouse for a closer view. Upon close inspection they found that the boys had turned five empty flour and sugar barrels up-side-down and placed a few walnuts on the top of the barrels to make them appear full. The boys had gathered less than a bucket full of nuts. The boys were rolling on the ground behind the smokehouse laughing at the trick they had pulled on Aunt Agnes.¹⁹

Aunt Violetta, Mrs. Violetta Weems Gennett, had met her husband, a wholesale grocer in Nashville,²⁰ while spending the summer at the Bon Aqua Springs Hotel and resort in Hickman County. The hotel was managed by her father, William Loch Weems IV, after he had "lost" his plantation because of debts accumulated during the Civil War. Each

¹⁹Taped interview with Mrs. Violetta Slayden, Ibid.

²⁰William Waller, Nashville in the 1890's, Vanderbilt Press, 1970, p. 180.

summer she would bring her two sons, Andrew and Nat, to Barton's Creek for a summer vacation and allow them to "help out" on the farm.

Van and his brothers would make Aunt Violetta relate every detail of her trip starting with riding the mule drawn streetcar to the wharf. She would describe the white steamboats with fancy grillwork, how the boat backed out into the river and upstream for about half a mile before charging down river, blowing steam puffs alternately from the twin stacks. The forty mile trip from Nashville to Hagerwood Landing was stretched into a twelve hour ride because of frequent stops to load and unload passengers and freight. The first stop out of Nashville would be Harpeth Shoals, the second and the most important would be Ashland City, Tennessee.

Aunt Violetta and her sons would retire after supper to one of the staterooms with instructions to the steward to awaken them at three in the morning when they arrived at Hagerwood Landing. When they disembarked they would go to the only house in sight, Mr. Eliazer's home, and eat breakfast and wait for a rider to notify the Weems boys to bring over the common springless two horse farm wagon. Mr. Eliazer made the Gennetts welcome regardless of the time of night they arrived because in Nashville he had used their home as a hospital when his daughter Dora had an

operation to "uncross" her eyes. All operations were performed in the home, and the eye specialist would not travel down river to Hagewood Landing.²¹

After the trip had been described for the boys, they would ask questions about the boats and especially about their favorite riverboat Captain, James W. Lovell.²² Then Aunt Violetta would open her bags and give the boys strange and unusual tasting food items for them to taste and eat. Mr. Gennett had imported the first grapefruit from Florida to Tennessee. None of the boys could ever remember tasting anything so bitter. They were not surprised to hear Aunt Violetta say that grapefruit sales were not good. Aunt Violetta would stay three or four days with the boys before returning by boat to Nashville.

Van's favorite story teller was William Loch Weems V, Uncle Buck, his father's youngest brother, who lived on the adjoining farm. Uncle Buck would tell about Van's namesake, Uncle Philip Van Horn Weems and Van's father's adventures during the Civil War. Uncle Van had volunteered at the beginning of the war, joining the 11th Tennessee Regiment. Within a short time he was commander of Company H

²¹Unpublished autobiography of Andrew Gennett, Duke University Library, Microfilm Division, pp. 26-28.

²²Byrd Douglas, Steamboatin' On the Cumberland, published by Tennessee Book Company, Nashville, Tennessee, in 1961, p. 189.

and participated in many battles, Murfreesboro, Perryville, Chickamauga, and finally Atlanta, where he was killed on July 24, 1864.

In later years Van spent countless hours writing letters and researching the details of his uncle's death. He obtained his commission in the Confederacy signed by Isham G. Harris, Governor of Tennessee, on June 6, 1861. There were also his will and several letters.²³ One letter described the economic problems of the day: ". . . since I wrote you last I had to pay two hundred fifty dollars for a pair of boots . . . to buy a couple of horses I would have to pay four thousand dollars."²⁴ In 1925 Van would meet several ex-Confederates who described how Major P. V. H. Weems was shot seven times while urging members of his regiment to dislodge a deceptively large Federal force in a ravine.

Van's father, Joseph Burch, had run away from home at the age of fifteen after being mistreated by a group of drunken soldiers. He joined Lt. General Nathan Bedford Forrest as a member of his company of "Harvey's" scouts. He was surrendered by Lt. Gen. Richard Taylor, CSA, to Major

²³Copy of Will, Commission, and letters in P. V. H. Weems Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

²⁴Letter dated June 23, 1864, camp near Marietta, Ga. P. V. H. Weems Collection, loc. cit.

General E. R. S. Canby, USA, May 4, 1865, and paroled at Grenada, Mississippi, on May 19, 1865, at the age of nineteen.²⁵

Uncle Buck was twelve years old when his brother Joe returned to their plantation home of five hundred acres on the Duck River, Tennessee. Joe's Mother answered the door and did not recognize the tall bearded stranger. Fearing that it was someone trying to take what possessions they had left, she wanted to know who the stranger was and what he wanted. When the stranger told her that he was her son Joe, she fainted.²⁶ She could not believe that this grown bearded man was her smooth faced boy who had run away four years earlier to join the Confederacy.

This story would lead Uncle Buck into telling how his father was forced to make a decision between twenty-five hundred acres of wild timberland he had purchased on Barton's Creek and the beautiful home place of five hundred acres on Duck River. At the end of the Civil War, Grandfather's plantation was devastated. He did not have a labor force to grow cotton, or a market to sell it. All of his "blood" mares and his magnificent roan stallion,

²⁵Speech given by P. V. H. Weems on October 25, 1961, "General Forrest CSA, and His Scout Company," at Baltimore, Maryland, during the 64th Annual Convention of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

²⁶Taped interview, Violetta Weems Slayden, Op. Cit.

"Rob Roy," had been taken by the Federal or Confederate forces. The stallion was a Copper Bottom breed and had been taken by a Confederate detachment commander in a "trade." For making the forced "trade" with the detachment, he was thrown into jail by the Federal authorities on a charge of "aiding and abetting" the enemy. "He was tried by court martial and sentenced to pay a fine of five hundred dollars gold. After about ten days in jail without bedding, he was able to borrow the money to pay his fine."²⁷

By the end of the war he was heavily in debt, and in 1870 had to sell the home that he had built in 1859. He believed that it would be better to divide the unimproved timberland on Barton's Creek among his children rather than selling "the wild timberland" at a low price to pay off the home place and then divide it into small uneconomical farms. About the time the farm was sold to Mr. W. E. McEwen, a bill was introduced in the House of Representatives for thirty-five hundred dollars to reimburse Van's Grandfather for about thirty-five head of horses and mules taken by the Federal forces. The bill was rejected when he refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States.²⁸

²⁷Unpublished autobiography of Andrew Gennett, Duke University Library, Microfilm Division, p. 495.

²⁸Letter from Andrew Gennett to P. V. H. Weems, dated March 19, 1934, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

A couple of years earlier Grandfather had sent his two young sons to the "Barton Creek wild land."

Joe and Buck drove over from Hickman County to take over the operation of the new land and establish a home for the family. They were just boys--Buck being only 12 years of age, blue eyed and fair, and Joe somewhat older with brown eyes, dark hair and a stocky build. The brothers were very close then and continued so throughout the remainder of their lives. Joe was an extrovert with a dynamic personality who could converse with ease, Buck was the quiet thinker type with a keen perception and sometimes a quick temper. They had the job of clearing the land which was practically all wooded at the time except for the creek bottoms, and getting the place under cultivation.²⁹

The new home was a drastic change from the stately mansion in Hickman County. It consisted of a cabin with a kitchen about twenty yards away with a "dog trot" connecting the two buildings. The boys did not mind moving into such primitive living conditions. Within a few years the dog trot was closed in, an upstairs and a wing was added, and the entire structure weather boarded.³⁰

²⁹Weemsana, Vol. XII, No. 1, June, 1966, p. 1.

³⁰Taped interview with Mrs. Violetta Weems Slayden, Op. Cit.

CHURCH AND SCHOOL

Religious training for Van and his brothers was not overlooked by his Mother and later Mrs. Nannie. They would dress the boys in their "store bought" clothes each Sunday and take them to Ryes Chapel. This was the small community church that was founded in 1876 by Van's father, his Grandfather, Dr. Tom H. Rye, and Mr. T. B. Watkins.

In 1876 Van's father was thirty-one years old, a bachelor, living with his Mother on the farm. Seven years after founding the church with Dr. Rye, he married Bessie, Dr. Rye's daughter, in the church they helped to establish.

The first pastor of the church was Rev. A. T. Goodlo. Services were conducted for seventeen years in the "vertical board and batten" Walnut Grove one-room school. By 1893 the congregation had outgrown the one-room school, and Dr. Tom H. Rye and Mr. A. A. Baxter donated a plot of land for the church. A larger building was erected by the end of the year.

When the congregation moved into the new building, the name of the church was changed from Walnut Grove to Ryes Chapel Methodist Church in honor of Dr. Tom H. Rye. The new pastor was Rev. W. T. S. Cook. By 1897 the church was clear of all indebtedness and dedicated as property of the

Southern Methodist Church. On September 5, 1902, George Talley, Uncle George, and wife Lida donated land for a church cemetery.¹

Within a month after Van's Mother's funeral at Rye's Chapel, life on the farm had returned to a routine. Violetta had gone by riverboat to Nashville to live with Aunt Violetta. Tom Nat had returned to work on the farm. Van, Joe B., and John had started back to Walnut Grove School. Years later Van wrote an article about his first visit to the school.

My earliest recollection of Walnut Grove School is that of a small one room, vertical board and batten, school house. It was operated by Mr. Jimmy Wyatt, father of Mr. Billy Wyatt, who taught there several years. My first appearance at the school was when I was taken there by my brother, Tom Nat, for a visit in about 1893, when I was four years old.

About 1898, a new building was erected near the site of the old one. The community was in the horse and buggy days. Our home was little different from our pioneer forebears. The "Anderson Girls" still reared sheep, carded and spun wool from which my mother made the trousers I wore. They also raised "goober peas" and had molds to make their clay pipes, and to mold bullets for the long deer rifle that hung over their front door, on which its original owner's name, John Anderson, was engraved.

The farmers raised corn, wheat, oats, clover, tobacco, along with orchard fruit, vegetables, and live stock. There was an impressive spirit of community cooperation, exemplified by the "barn raisings" and quilting parties, wheat threshings, and other semi-social events.²

¹Mrs. Allen C. Harvey, "Joseph Burch Weems was one of Founders of Ryes Chapel Congregation in 1876," Weemsana, Vol. XIV, No. 1, July, 1968, p. 9.

²Capt. P. V. H. Weems, "Weems Recalls Early Days at Walnut Grove School," Clarksville Leaf-Chronicle, January 29, 1967, p. 3-A.

One of the teachers that made a big impression on Van was Mr. Emile Roth from Mount Pleasant, Tennessee. He had returned from his tour of duty in the Philippines during the American occupation following the Spanish-American War after the schools of importance had selected their teachers for the coming year. Walnut Grove, 16th District, Montgomery County, Tennessee, needed a teacher, but the salary was only eighty dollars a month. Van's Mother valued a good teacher for her boys. She had earned her "license" to teach before she married Van's father. With all her five boys attending Walnut Grove School, she felt that it would be to her advantage to pay Mr. Roth extra to teach at the one-room school. She offered to pay him twenty dollars more each month and allow him to board at the Weems home if he would take the teaching position. This arrangement worked out very satisfactory to all parties. Mrs. J. B. Weems obtained a qualified teacher for her boys. Mr. Roth obtained a salary equal to that paid in the better schools in the community, and he was able to save most of his salary by boarding at the Weems home. The added advantage was that the boys were supervised at home and at school by a qualified instructor.³

Mr. Roth had already picked Van out as one of the outstanding students in the one-room frame school, but he could

³Weemsana, Vol. X, No. 1, June, 1964, p. 3.

not understand how Van was able to continue to stand at the head of his class without studying at home or at school. Van wanted to play and tussle with his brothers and buddies all the time. As soon as the recess bell rang, Van would be the first one out the door to play and run. Mr. Roth decided to watch Van for several days and determine how he was learning his lessons.

Van was unaware that he was being observed and continued his normal routine. While playing, he tried his best to win at the rough and tumble games by using his height and weight to off-set his awkwardness. When recess was over, Van was the first one to line up for a drink of water out of the school's one water bucket and single gourd dipper. He then rushed to his seat and put his hands over his ears to concentrate on his assignment. Mr. Roth realized that in addition to Van being intelligent, he had the ability to concentrate on what he was studying very intently for a few minutes, and that was enough to stand him at the front of his class in the one-room school.⁴

Van's desire to attend school came from his Mother. She was mentally alert and tried to encourage all of her children to obtain an education. She encouraged her nephews,

⁴Interview with Mrs. Violetta Slayden, December 13, 1972, Waverly, Tennessee, age 90, with a clear, sharp memory.

the Cunninghams from Clarksville, and the Gennetts from Nashville, to visit the farm and associate with her sons. Frequently, the nephews would bring some of their old books to the farm for the Weems family. The eagerness with which they read one set of books, Beadle's Nickel Library, impressed Andrew Gennett, and he made a special effort to send all of his old books to the "backwards community that had little educational or literary facilities."⁵

When Van was eight or nine years of age, the family was gathered around the fireplace one cold winter night talking to Grandfather Rye. His mother placed her hand on Van's head and said, "I'm going to send this boy to West Point." Van remembers the remark clearly, but he could not explain in later years why she made the remark. He thinks that she chose West Point because it was well known in the community. General Grant and General Robert E. Lee had attended West Point, and their background was well known in the community.

A year or so later a classmate at Walnut Grove School was getting ready to leave the community and "go away to school." This was the normal pattern for those in the community who wanted to continue their education. When the family had gathered for Sunday dinner, the topic of

⁵Unpublished autobiography of Andrew Gennett, Op. Cit.

conversation turned to this young man and opinions were expressed at the table of his promise and possible future. As the family bragged about the student, suddenly Van tuned up and cried out, "Dog gone it, Granddaddy Rye, if other boys can go off to school and do things, I can too, I know I can." After the family assured Van that he would receive his opportunity when the time arrived, he "cleared" up, and members of the family paid a little more attention to his education.⁶

In Van's last year at Walnut Grove School, 1905-1906 school year, his Uncle George Tally had been bitten by a mad dog. Uncle George was almost "touched off" with worry about getting rabies because treatment was not immediately available in the community. Uncle George asked Van to come live with him and help him with his crop. Van dropped out of school a few weeks early and moved into the home of his Mother's youngest sister, Uncle George's wife, on Grandfather Rye's old farm. Van had already finished his eighth grade McGuffey's reader and was willing "to make a crop" for Uncle George.

As Van followed the mule in the field day after day, breaking the land and planting the seed, he had time to think about his future. Early in the summer Van was

⁶Interview with Mrs. Violetta Slayden, Op. Cit.

instructed to "cut" the spring oats. He took the cradle and went to the field. Van had watched older men use the cradle, but he had never been allowed to handle it because it was a fragile farm implement made of light wood and a cutting blade.

Van had worked several hours when he caught the blade on a root or something and broke the blade causing the wooden cradle to collapse. Van was mad at himself because he knew that quick tempered Uncle George would bawl him out for his inexperience. When he returned to the house Uncle George saw that Van was upset and let the awkward situation pass. He repaired the cradle and sent Van back to the field to finish the job.

Toward the end of the summer Van began to realize that he would never "finish" the crop and have time to go away to school. By the time he would have the tobacco, hay, and corn in the barns, it would be time to plant the tobacco seed bed for the next year. He made the decision that he wanted to go away to school and rode his mule over to "Cabin Row" and hired a young man for twelve dollars a month to finish the crop. When he told Uncle George what he had done, it was satisfactory to everyone. About six months later Van received a twenty dollar gold piece from Uncle George for the work he had done on the farm.

Van asked Cousin Loch to obtain an appointment to West Point for him. Cousin Loch had supported Fiddlin' Bob Taylor for Governor and more recently for U. S. Senator. Knowing that Senator Bob liked a good story he wrote, "a young man rode up to my office today on a mule and asked me to get him appointed to West Point. The boy was dressed in overalls and a straw hat." Cousin Loch had laid it on thick, but that pleased Senator Taylor and he wrote back immediately that he did not have an appointment to West Point but he did have an appointment to Annapolis.⁷

Cousin Loch made arrangements for Van to enter Branham and Hughes School in Springfield, Tennessee, a prep school for Vanderbilt University. When Van arrived at the school Mr. Branham asked Van his name. Van told him, "Van." Mr. Branham said, "No, I mean your full name. Van said, "Van Horn." Then Mr. Branham said, "your complete name." Van had only needed his first name in the country but then realized that Mr. Branham wanted all of his name and said, "Philip Van Horn Weems of Turbine, Tennessee." This brought a smile to Mr. Branham who then asked how much Latin, Greek, world history and algebra Van had taken. When Van answered

⁷Interview with Captain P. V. H. Weems by Mr. John Mason, Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland, March 25, 1969. Captain Weems was eighty with a fair memory.

none, he was placed in the beginning class. These youngsters came to Van's waist. After about three weeks he was advanced to the freshman class.

Board and room at Branham and Hughes cost Van seven dollars a month. Six dollars for board and one dollar a month for room. The houses did not have indoor plumbing nor running water. By the end of the school year Van had advanced to "part junior." After returning the next year Cousin Loch wrote Van a letter dated September 27, 1907, and informed him that his appointment to Annapolis was firm. Also, Congressman Padgett had offered to appoint him to West Point. "If you have finally determined on Annapolis inform Mr. Padgett immediately after receiving this, my letter of your determination, so as not to delay him making another appointment."⁸ Cousin Loch also included a draft of a letter for Van to send to Mr. L. P. Padgett, Columbia, Tennessee.

Van wrote Mr. Padgett that he had made the decision to attend Annapolis. Cousin Loch then made arrangements for Van to attend a Naval Academy prep school, Bobby Werntz, at Annapolis. When Van arrived there he realized that he was at a disadvantage. Some of his classmates had already

⁸Letter from Judge W. L. Cook to P. V. H. Weems, dated September 27, 1907, P. V. H. Weems Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

attended college and were well trained to take the entrance examinations. He wrote Cousin Loch of his possible failure. A letter of encouragement was returned:

I hope you will pass your examinations, and I believe you will. But if you fail to do so I want to get Senator Taylor to reappoint you if by further preparation you can pass within the next twelve months. Do not fear that you will fall down, and you won't. If you do fall down, don't get rattled, but keep at work, and we will try it again.⁹

Van passed the entrance examinations to the United States Naval Academy. The day after the names had been posted he met a classmate, Jack Amis, on the streets of Annapolis. Van congratulated Jack on passing the examination. Jack said, "Weems I don't believe I am going into the Naval Academy." Van asked, "Why Jack?" He answered, "I don't believe I can go into the Academy and lead a Christian life, when you go aboard ship the young officers will force you to drink liquor." This conversation made an impression on Van, and he credits it for helping him to "keep away from liquor."¹⁰

Van entered Annapolis in 1908 and began a life that was completely new and different from the life he had known in Tennessee. He was almost a year older and much more mature than most of his 1912 classmates. He determined

⁹Letter dated May 21, 1908, Loc. Cit.

¹⁰Interview with Captain P. V. H. Weems, Ibid.

that this was a "golden opportunity" compared to working on the farm. Van did not forget about his family in Turbine. When he began to compose poetry he wrote:

SIX PALS

While six of us were together at home,
 Happy, carefree, with no desire to roam,
 We had no chance to meet "Mr. R. E. Morse,"
 And we hung together as a matter of course.
 In those pleasant days of youth,
 We scarcely took time to view the truth,
 Of how dear old Turbine would be missed,
 When for each on a separate course, stern fate would
 insist.

Perhaps we would argue and make a noisy scene,
 Or sister would tease Tom about his latest Queen,
 Quite often Tom would give Joe's head a souse,
 Just for the sake of a healthy rough-house.
 When for a ring tailed goat it was Van's turn,
 Tom would say Van's "if" is not worth a darn.
 Old Satan was a nickname that Hatton could not endure,
 And John would give five hundred dollars for the
 tobacco habit cure.

Now presents, kind letters, and sincere interest
 from Sister we receive,
 For financial and practical help in Tom we believe,
 Joe is a staunch friend through thick and thin.
 Van is a question mark but hopes for more than
 "has been."
 Hatton is the bud who is beginning his career,
 That he will fail to make good, we have no fear.
 Contrary to any age rule John half runs the place at
 home,
 And will be one of the first to have a home of his
 own.

Now with new conditions we take a saner view,
 And see that we love our pals as before we never
 knew.

We can see plainly in each of our six lives,
A developed and full-size interest in each of the
other five,
And where ever in our motives we strike rock bottom,
We shall find there a great depth of devotion.
If we always stick together we can do more than save,¹¹
The good name "Weems" that our Scottish Fathers gave.

¹¹Captain P. V. H. Weems, "1911 Diary," Tennessee
State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

ANNAPOLIS

Van's first few weeks as a plebe at the United States Naval Academy were not as difficult as he had expected. The stories that were told in the Bobby Werntz Preparatory School led him to believe that the upper classmen would harass him to death. Van's greatest problem had been his friendliness. He wanted to give everyone a big smile and a neighborly "howdy." The upper classmen thought that breaking in the new plebes was serious business, and the smile and friendly greeting cost Van extra attention that he could have done without.

One of the first things that Van noticed was that he was larger, stronger, and better developed physically than most of his classmates. Initially he had not considered this an asset. He merely attributed his natural athletic ability and coordination to working on the farm with his arms and shoulders. Stooping on the farm, planting tobacco plants by hand and lifting green oak cross-ties developed his back-lifting muscles. The lifts that he made as a plebe would be as good as he would ever do while at the Academy.¹

¹Interview with Captain P. V. H. Weems on March 25, 1969, conducted by Mr. John Mason, Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland.

His roommate, Ingram Cecil Sowell, was about the same size as Van. He had bright red hair, and his nickname, "Red," was a natural carry over from civilian life. It was fashionable to give everyone a nickname. Before the school year was out, Van was tagged with the nickname of "Mammy." There are two versions of how Van acquired this nickname. One version is that he loved people and tended to "mother" the younger classmates and the dependent kids around the Academy.² The other version is that it was an extension of Van's Tennessee accent on the words "Yes Ma'am" with a long drawn out Ma'am.³ The nickname stuck and close friends and classmates addressed him as Mammy Weems.

The nickname Mammy was so out of place that it could be accepted only by Mammy himself. It was fitting because of his athletic prowess and his strength of character. Van was aggressive, a fighter and was not afraid of the devil himself. Van accepted his nickname because he knew that he was not a mamby-pamby and everyone else knew it too.⁴

Van and his roommate, Red, worked hard on their academic studies. Both were invited to try out for the football team. This was the first time Van had played organized

²Interview with Col. William Slayden, lawyer and nephew of Captain P. V. H. Weems, on December 13, 1972, Waverly, Tennessee, age 61.

³Interview with Mrs. P. V. H. Weems, April 17, 1973, Annapolis, Maryland, age 82, alert, good recall.

⁴Letter from Captain R. A. Lavender, Classmate of Captain Weems, dated April 4, 1973.

sports, and he really thought it was great fun. He had not seen a football until he arrived at Annapolis and did not know the rules of the game. Van had rowed a boat on the Cumberland River, but he had not seen a racing hull. Wrestling was the only sport in which Van felt comfortable from the beginning. He and his brothers had wrestled all the time.

Van entered Annapolis during the transition from sailing ships to steam, and his class would take the last cruise on the sailing ship Hartford in 1909. One class that Van excelled in for several months as a plebe was seamanship. The instructor, Commander Geln, required the midshipmen to recite sailing problems. Van quickly realized that his Walnut Grove School mental arithmetic problems gave him an edge. He spoke up with the answers quickly and made a good initial impression.

Van's first academic stumbling block was mechanical drawing. He had never used a drawing set. He had problems with its use and understanding how to draw the models and items like a standard screw thread that was required. He received a failing mark and had visions of bilging out, failing, until his instructor, Commander Bartlet, suggested that he take some of the models to his room and practice.

About this same time Van contacted a severe case of ringworms from some athletic clothing that he had been issued.

He was restricted by the Academy doctor to his room for several weeks. He practiced drawing the models and everything else in his room. By the time the quarantine was lifted and he returned to class, he could draw well enough that he was exempt from taking the final examination.⁵

While in quarantine, he received numerous get-well cards and letters from friends and his family. One letter that he treasured was from the senator who had appointed him, Senator Taylor, who wrote, "I trust your sickness is slight and that you may soon be restored to your work. I should like to live to see my first cadet become an admiral."⁶

After the first of the year Van and his classmates were allowed to leave the Academy on afternoon passes into "crabtown."⁷ This was the first time Van noticed a creek named "Weems Creek." In his English classes his attention was focused on the name Weems again. This time it was Mason Loch "Parson" Weems, the biographer of George Washington. Van became interested in family genealogy and started reading up on the family and writing letters home in an attempt

⁵Interview with Captain P. V. H. Weems by Mr. John Mason, Ibid.

⁶Letter from Senator Robert L. Taylor to Captain P. V. H. Weems, dated December 24, 1908, Tennessee State Archives, Ibid.

⁷Midshipmen nickname for the town of Annapolis, Maryland.

to trace the family history back to Maryland. He had heard stories that his grandfather at the age of seven in 1825 had come to Tennessee with his parents from "Billingsley" near Upper Marlboro, Prince George County, Maryland. This information was verbal for no one in Tennessee had written records.

When Van learned he was an eighth cousin to Parson Weems, he searched the Academy library and read all of the books written by the parson. Van thought it was rather odd, that in spite of all the fine books written by Parson Weems, he would be remembered as the man who originated the story about George Washington cutting down his father's cherry tree.

Van learned that the first Weems that came to America was Dr. James Weems. He arrived in Maryland in 1715. In 1720 he sent for his Mother, Elizabeth Loch Weems, and a brother, David Weems. David Weems was the father of Parson Weems. Dr. James Weems married, and his son was Nathaniel Chapman Weems I. Nathaniel married Violetta, the youngest daughter of Philip Van Horn of New Jersey. Their son, William Loch Weems III, married Elizabeth Taylor Burch, a cousin to General Zachary Taylor. William and Elizabeth, along with their sons, Joseph Burch Weems, who was born in 1820, and Nathaniel Chapman Weems, Van's Grandfather, moved to Lick Creek in Hickman County, Tennessee, in 1825. In

1826 they moved to the old W. A. Mays place at Vernon, and then in 1827 moved to the farm on Duck River, Tennessee, where Van's father was born in 1845.⁸

The original spelling of the family name was Wemyss. Van was never able to determine why the spelling of the family name was changed when Elizabeth Loch Weems and her sons immigrated to America from Scotland. In Scotland the name is still spelled Wemyss.

The biggest thrill in 1909 was going to Turbine, Tennessee, in September after the summer cruise aboard the Hartford. Van had been home but a day or so when he received word that Audrey Batson was going to throw a "house party." Van planned a big evening, but some of his plans did not materialize. A neighbor, Grigsby Tally, came by to pick up Etta Woodward. Van, Grigsby, and Etta then drove the buggy up the hollow to Uncle Buck's to pick up Minna and her sister, Annie Weems. Uncle Buck would not let his daughters go because they would be "late in the night returning from Audrey Batson's." Since Minna and Annie could not go, they had to take Etta back home. Grigsby and Van drove over to the party alone. They were late and the "house party" had already started. Delma

⁸ Stanley L. Folmsbee, Robert E. Corlew, and Enoch L. Mitchell, History of Tennessee, (Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1960) Volume IV, p. 866.

Batson, Euvie Shirte, Inez Dickson, Nannie Swift, Mabel Neblett were some of the girls Van recognized from Walnut Grove School days. Van became the life of the party when he started telling about the marvelous things he had done and seen on the east coast. Everyone wanted to know about the horseless carriages that were becoming fashionable around Annapolis. When the party was over, everyone gathered on the front porch. The strain on the porch was so great that it broke down. No one was hurt, but it did end the party.

The next day Van took Mrs. Nannie and Etta to Slayden, Tennessee. While in Slayden they were invited to dinner at the home of one of Mrs. Nannie's close friends, Mr. Tom Potts. They had an excellent meal of fried chicken, peach preserves, rhubarb pie, and plum jelly. While the women were cleaning up the kitchen, the men gathered on the porch to sample some hard cider. Mr. Billy Hayes, an old Confederate veteran who was in the 11th Tennessee Regiment with Uncle P. V. H., stopped by when he saw the hard cider jug on the porch. Mr. Potts went after his fiddle and Mr. Hayes started singing some old anti-Yankee war songs between samples from the jug. The men were about to turn the afternoon into a full blown party when Mrs. Nannie came out and announced that she was ready to go home.

About a week later Van rode a horse over to a picnic and colt show given by Sam Weems and Marshall Cunningham,

two of his cousins. There were pretty girls galore, good horses, and plenty of good things to eat. Van was introduced to Miss Fannie Wattciu's little Memphis cousin, Miss Mary Baxter. He had been dating Miss Clara Nicks while he was home but Mary Baxter really turned his head. Summer leave passed quickly after he started calling on Mary. He was having so much fun he hated to leave Tennessee and return to Annapolis.

By the fall of 1909, Mammy had made the varsity football team. But his first "N"⁹ was earned in wrestling in the spring when he won the light-heavy wrestling championship for the first time. He also became a member of the crew team. Van was determined to buckle down and do better in his studies. While he was home Cousin Loch had talked to Van about making better grades. Van was delighted with a letter from Cousin Loch after the first report in the fall had reached home.

W. L. Cook
Judge 9th Judicial Circuit
December 23, 1909

Dear Van -

I enclose your last report. You seem to be making your marks, in fair shape, and I want to see you keep it up.

Never in life have I considered brilliant men of much value to the world. It is the bulldog of a

⁹Athletic letter given for achievement and proficiency in a sport.

fellow that gets there. Tenacity and tact are worth most - Get Elbert Hubbards [sic] "Message to Garcia" and read it. It covers about three pages of an ordinary book and tells a simple tale with a world large lesson of life in it.

Napolean was a genius, he was a great warrior, and a great statesman. But where one great man was brilliant a hundred was [sic] dull. Wellington, Grant, Gladstone, are samples. These men did things because they knew how to keep at it. Let others be considered smooth, brilliant. You want to keep your grades up so you can pass, and when you have a duty to perform - when you are ordered to do a thing do it in spite of h__l and do it with a cool determined rational purpose.¹⁰

Van took his guardian's advice and combined it with the Academy's system of grading to pull himself up in academics. "In the Academy you get a mark every day. If you work every day and earn your mark you do not need a bulge."¹¹ By the end of Van's second year he was getting excused from about half of his final examinations. Van, also, noticed that his classmate Harold E. Saunders, "Savvy," never wasted a minute of work time in practical exercises and that was how a man of average ability could lead the class in academics.¹²

¹⁰Letter as above, Tennessee State Library, Op. Cit.

¹¹Interview with Captain P. V. H. Weems by Mr. John Mason, Ibid. A bulge is a high accumulative grade point average to insure passing.

¹²Speech given by P. V. H. Weems, November 19, 1962, at the dedication of the Harold E. Saunders Memorial, copy of speech in Weems collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

Van began to search for goals in life. He determined that there were two things that he wanted to do. The first was to write good English composition, and the second was to "know music" better. To improve his writing ability he made a decision to keep a diary starting with the 1910 summer cruise. To improve his music he learned several popular songs and purchased a second hand violin. He was almost run out of the dorm by his classmates when he attempted to practice.

Van's class departed for its summer cruise on June 4, 1910. He was assigned to the USS Iowa. Some of the early entries in his diary are:

June 4, 1910 - embarked out on the tug "Standish" at 9:30 A.M. lashing hammocks 1st item of business.

June 7, 1910 - coaling today, ate with bluejackets in general mess, others may complain but I will not complain about the food. Fulton beat me in two of three chess games.

June 10, 1910 - Fed the fishes - supper, breakfast, dinner, I lay part of it on the coffee. The difference between land sickness and seasickness "When landsick a person hopes to get well, when seasick he hopes he doesn't get well."

June 11, 1910 - Feeling better, no coffee, I had drunk coffee only once in last two or three years.

June 13, 1910 - a fellow from Nashville by the name of Howse is stroking [sic] on the same watch I am on. He seems to be a dandy fellow but I can't understand why he is stroking [sic] (shoveling coal in the boiler room). His brother is Mayor of Nashville. The oiler gave me a sandwich of beans, onions and bread, which he called a bean sanga.¹³

¹³Diary entries from 1910 Diary, P. V. H. Weems papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

Van had learned to play chess from his Mother. She was the family champion. Van's cousin Andrew Gennett never forgot how she defeated him.

I prided myself on my knowledge of the game. When Aunt Bessie suggested a game one evening I had no misgiving. However, I soon found that I was a child in her hands. She had a natural bent for chess.¹⁴

Van enjoyed chess throughout his life. In the diary a note is made of the winning or losing of chess matches with good players.

During each cruise the midshipmen were given liberty in one or two of the better ports of call on the cruise. On the 1910 cruise the main port of call was London, England. The first entry in the diary concerning liberty was on June 23, 1910, when Van changed ten dollars in gold for English money. On the following morning Van discovered that his strongbox had been broken into and that his money, and the money he was keeping for his shipmates, W. E. Greenman, and "Red" Sowell, was missing. After much excitement the class members loaned Van, and the others who had money taken, enough English money for their shore leave.

Van, his roommate Sowell, and his best buddy, Greenman, decided to stay together during the liberty. By the middle of the morning the trio had boarded a train at Plymouth for

¹⁴Unpublished Autobiography of Andrew Gennett, Duke University Library, Microfilm Division, p. 40.

London. Lunch was served on the train. "Most of the fellows ordered some kind of strong drink, but lemonade was the strongest" Van wanted. Upon arriving in London, they obtained a room at the Metropole Hotel and immediately began their grand tour. While visiting the Westminster Abbey, Van became separated from Sowell and Greenman. He decided to stroll over and take in the House of Parliament.

When I got there, I was told that it was open only on Saturday from ten in the morning to three in the afternoon. For a project I went over to the next door and started to walk right in and make myself at home. I saw a card which said "Peer's entrance" and another which had on it "House of Lords" but I pretended to think that I was allowed in the building. I had butted right into the door when a guard hailed me and informed me that that entrance was for the peers and their eldest sons only. "Oh, you mean to say only the Lords are allowed into this door," all the time looking as innocent as you please. I had a short conversation with the guard and then "beat" it. I went back over to the Abbey and in a short time I ran into Greenman and Sowell.

That evening the three midshipmen ate supper and went to see the play "Richard III." After the play they purchased oranges and strawberries for a snack and returned to their hotel room to write home. Van had eighteen pieces of mail when he had finished. The next morning after breakfast they visited St. Paul's (Cathedral) and the Tower of London. After that, they hired a cab for a tour of the London Bridge, St. James and Buckingham Palaces, Hyde Park; and they were dropped off at the British Museum. They skipped lunch in order to see everything in the Museum by

closing time. That evening they saw the play "Odd Man Out," which would be made into a talkie movie by Sir Carol Reed in 1944 starring James Mason. The trio "slept in" the next morning and barely made the last train back to Plymouth to catch the ship.

The next event on the summer cruise that had a lasting effect on Van was the death of a classmate, Richard R. Landy from Lewisburg, Tennessee, on August 20, 1910. Landy was one of Van's friends.

Landy was a splendid young fellow in the third class. He was bright, stood well in his class, and from everything I have learned of him, he had a wonderful knack of making friends. He was one of the few Christian fellows aboard ship with moral stamina enough to stand up for his ideals. As dead to Christianity as the majority are aboard this ship, he was an enthusiastic and earnest student of R. N. Perley's Bible class having met every night, with few exceptions, in the central station and devoted about thirty minutes to Bible study work and personal talks. Every one would lead in a word of prayer, then we would read about eight verses apiece from the Acts, which we finished once and have started again.

Richard R. Landy died of typhoid fever. His body was preserved in a leaden casket filled with alcohol and shipped home to Tennessee upon returning with the cruise ship to the United States.

By October 1910, Van had returned to Annapolis from his September leave in Tennessee, and was practicing hard to make first string center on the football team. Van was in competition for the position with A. B. Anderson.

" . . . Anderson beat me but again and I'm expecting to be on the 2nd lineup tomorrow." During the game the following Saturday, Sowell, Van, and Frank Loftin played much of the game. Van made a special note that this trio were all from Tennessee.

October 20, 1910 - After about twenty minutes of playing Wheaton (Coach) called me out of the second team and told me to take 1st Center.

October 22, 1910 - We trimmed V. P. I. three to nothing. I got a cut above the eye that required three stitches.

Thanksgiving 1910 - I have a lots to be thankful for. I haven't boned very hard, yet my marks are fair and none are low enough to make me uneasy - I am in splendid health - I am happy and good fortune has smiled on me for I play Saturday (ARMY) on our fine football team which is ranked about 2nd in the country.

November 26, 1910 - . . . we licked the "gray legs" 3 to 0. Sowell got hurt pretty badly, had one rib broken but would not come out of the game.

November 27, 1910 - Left Philly at 2:17 and arrived at Annapolis at 5 o'clock, the brigade turned out and I never saw such a demonstration as greeted us on our arrival. The fellows didn't let us touch the ground from the car to the carriages and pulled the carriages themselves. When we got to the main gate the sky lit up. The 2nd Battalion with brooms blazing formed a double line for us to pass through. When we got to Bancroft Hall all the burning brooms were thrown together to make a bonfire, locking hands the fellows did the serpentine dance around the fire.¹⁵

The Army-Navy game ended the 1910-11 football season.

The next day Van moved his gear from the football locker room to the wrestling and boxing team locker room. As

¹⁵"1911" Diary, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Op. Cit.

listed in the 1912 Lucky Bag yearbook Van was a "perpetual inhabitant of training tables." He was a star athlete earning school letters in football, crew (rowing), and wrestling. He was given the sword for excellence in athletics by his classmates.¹⁶ This sword is not given every year, only when there is a truly outstanding athlete. His football "N" has two stars for "playing on the winning football team twice against Army."

Sportswriter Ted Coy put Van on the second All-American football team at the center position. The Richmond Virginia Dispatch put Van in the first lineup. Walter Camp placed him on the 3rd All-American team.¹⁷ This was the year that a young man named Jim Thorpe had made headlines from a team called the Carisle Indians that Navy played. When all-time Navy teams were chosen a few years later, George Trevor wrote, "Mammy Weems was rather light for a pivot but he was a wildcat from the Tennessee backwoods. He was the fightingest, wildcat roving center the Navy ever produced."¹⁸ Van was also the light-heavy wrestling champion. It was this sport that kept Van in the sports news for several more years.

¹⁶Annual Register of the U. S. N. A., Annapolis, Maryland, Washington Printing Office, 67th Academic Year, 1911-12, p. 194.

¹⁷Times-Herald, New Port News, Virginia, December 4, 1930.

¹⁸George Trevor, Baltimore Sun, March 28, 1927.

Van was elected as President of the Y.M.C.A. during his senior year at the Academy. This was the only elected office in his class. All other positions were filled by appointments by the faculty based on academic and merit standings. Van considered himself a "rough-house character," rather than a religious person. Mammy had attended the Y.M.C.A. meeting and read the new Testament from cover to cover that Sister Violetta had given him.¹⁹ He had only an average conduct record. All of his demerits had been for little fun things like "sky larking" or "not saluting" of which many of his friends were guilty. Together, they were gaining the attention of the upper-classmen, as "wooden headed" athletics. Van enjoyed athletics and the jokes he received but he also wanted to be a good Y.M.C.A. president.

Van was concerned about how his classmates would act at the first meeting. To insure that he did not "mess up," he wrote out what he wanted to say in his diary:

May 4, 1911 - Program for the first meeting with the new officers elected for 1912. The Lords Prayer - Familiar Hymn - Short talk by me as follows: 1. First of all let me thank you for electing me President of the Association for the coming year. 2. We the officers realize that nothing can be done without your moral support. 3. One word about the "hard guys." There are some fellows that think they are too hard to stand with the association though these same fellows are from Christian homes and were accustomed to give their active support to Christian work. Well, we don't even

¹⁹"1910 Diary," August 25, 1910 entry, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

solicit the support of such fellows. All we ask of them is that they not hinder the fellows trying to help the Association. - Introduce speaker, sing hymn, chaplain to dismiss us.²⁰

"Fats" Elmer, Robert Emmett Elmer, and others composed a hilarious song to catch the spirit of the Regiment and how they felt about their buddy, Mammy Weems, newly elected President of the Y.M.C.A. Mammy never allowed it to be sung at the meetings, but it became so well known that the first line of the song is in the 1912 Annapolis Yearbook.²¹ The first three verses are:

WEEMS Y.M.C.A.

We are, we are, the Weems Y.M.C.A.
We are, we are, the Weems Y.M.C.A.
What the hell do we care what the people say,
For we are, we are, we are, the Weems Y.M.C.A.

There was a God-damned spider crawled up the water
spout,
Along came a thunder storm and washed the bastard out,
And when the sun came out again and drove away the
rain,
The God-damned spider crawled up the spout again.

Yes we are, we are, we are, the Weems Y.M.C.A.
We are, we are, we are, the Weems Y.M.C.A.
What the hell do we care what people say,
For we are, we are, we are, the Weems Y.M.C.A.

Van graduated from Annapolis on June 7, 1912. He stood 61 in a class of 156. This tied him with Richard E. Byrd, later of polar exploration fame, in class standing.

²⁰"1911 Diary" Weems collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

²¹Lucky Bag, U.S.N.A. Yearbook for 1912, p. 133.

Attending the ceremony was Cousin Loch, his son Collier Cook, and Van's brother-in-law, Mr. John Alvin Slayden. Senator Taylor had planned to attend. He had promised Van during a visit to his apartment at Stoneleigh Court in December, 1911, that he would "paint the town" when his farm-boy from Tennessee graduated. Senator Taylor died on March 31, 1912, after an operation for gallstones.²²

After graduation Van returned to Tennessee for a visit with his family before reporting to his first duty station.

June 13, 1912 - I am thankful to say that I graduated with my class on June 7th and that now I am enjoying myself here at Sister's home in Waverly (Tennessee).²³

Van left Tennessee several days before he was scheduled to report for duty aboard the newly commissioned battleship U.S.S. North Dakota. He wanted to pick up his new tailored uniforms and meet in New York City his classmates who were shipping aboard the North Dakota with him so that they might report aboard ship together.

²²James P., Alf A., and Hugh L. Taylor, Life and Career of Robert Love Taylor. The Bob Taylor Publishing Co., Nashville, Tennessee, 1913.

²³"1911" Diary. Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

EARLY SERVICE

The 1912 Annapolis class was the first to graduate with a commission to the rank of Ensign. Previous classes had graduated as "Past Midshipmen" in which rank they served for two years. Van's first duty assignment was aboard the newly commissioned battleship, USS North Dakota, under the command of Captain H. B. "Tugboat" Wilson. Credit for this outstanding initial assignment is given to the Captain's daughter, Ruth Wilson. During Mammy's senior year, Ruth attended a football game at Annapolis. After the game Mammy and several of his buddies were talking to the lovely sixteen year old redhead. One of them said, "Ruth, ask your old man to get us aboard ship with him." They gave her the names of those who wanted to serve under her father. To their pleasant surprise, she passed the word on to her father, and orders were sent to Annapolis prior to graduation to report for duty at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in early July, 1912.

When Van, "Fats" Elmer, Greenman and several more of his buddies reported in full dress with gloves and sword,

¹Interview with P. V. H. Weems conducted by Mr. John T. Mason, Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland, on April 1, 1969.

it was one of the hottest days in July. Workers in the yard smiled as they saw the new officers marching toward their new ship. When they reported to the officer of the deck, they were told to report to the personnel office building five blocks away. The new ensigns trooped back across the docks dragging their swords. The personnel office checked off their names and instructed them to make the third trip through the yard. By the time they reached their junior officer quarters aboard ship, they were washed down with sweat, feeling like plebes after their "parade" through the Brooklyn Navy Yard.²

Mammy had mixed emotions about his duty assignment on the North Dakota. He wanted line duty on deck standing watch with the captain. But his assignment was assistant engineer under the supervision of the chief engineer, Commander J. O. Fisher. The North Dakota had the first "Curtiss turbine engines" installed on a Navy ship. Captain Wilson, trained as a young officer on sailing ships, knew very little about steam engines and allowed Commander Fisher a "free" hand.³

²Interview with P. V. H. Weems conducted by Mr. John T. Mason, Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland, on April 1, 1969.

³Interview with P. V. H. Weems, Ibid.

Van had two challenges. One was working with Commander Fisher on finding the correct chemical mixtures to keep the turbine blades from rusting. Within a few years commercial firms would develop the chemicals based on recommendations from the North Dakota and other ships with steam engines. The second challenge was to meet the writing requirements of his boss. Commander Fisher required Van to keep a journal and write each week an original thesis on some phase of the operation and function of the engine room. He was not allowed to sketch and describe. This writing requirement formed a good foundation for Van's Naval writing career. In future years Van would write down everything he was planning to do, starting with the objective of the project. Next he would list the facts or issues bearing on the subject and finally the logic for his conclusions.

After a cruise in 1913, the North Dakota anchored at Newport, Rhode Island. Invitations were received aboard the battleship North Dakota for several young officers to attend various parties given by some of the prominent families for the debutantes. Mammy and several of his shipmates attended a masquerade party given by Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish. Being in the Navy, the young ensigns arrived a few minutes before the party was scheduled to begin. None of the young officers had attended a masquerade ball before. While the ensigns were standing around, a "husky chap"

entered the room dressed as a doorman. Small talk was exchanged between the "doorman" and the young officers about the party, the cost, etc. Mammy was entrigued by his manner and his friendliness and asked him directly, "Say, who are you anyway, are you the chamberlain?" The "chamberlain" turned out to be Mr. Fish. Mammy was kidded by his classmates, but they had a grand time. Mr. and Mrs. Fish could not have been nicer and extended invitations for other parties whenever the ship was in port.⁴

Van was called a "beach hound" by his shipmates. At every opportunity he would go ashore. When the ship was in New York, he made a special point to attend plays and enjoy life in general. At Annapolis Van was known as the "King of Fussers" or the champion dater of ladies. He was interested in people. He was careful to learn their name and as much as he could about a person the first time that he was introduced to him. His popularity in Annapolis and his athletic achievements opened many doors to social events. Mammy did not drink at parties, but this did not prevent him from being a good mixer and an excellent conversationalist. He liked to gather up some of his friends and eat out. One "mistake" he made, as an ensign, was going to the Century Grove, a restaurant on the roof of the Century

⁴Interview with P. V. H. Weems, April 1, 1969, Ibid.

Theatre, for refreshments after attending the opera. The tab was eighteen dollars for a party of four. This was more than Van could afford on his salary.

Many of Van's classmates and friends were getting married. This did not worry Van as much as the fact that he could not decide what love was all about and which girl he wanted to date. Van was a "good catch" by all social standards; college graduate, All-American football player, intelligent, etc. He was introduced to some very "eligible" young ladies in top social circles.

I have been having some interesting times socially. I was presented to Miss Helen Taft at a reception last month. Also I met the Governor's niece, Miss Goldsborough, and liked her immensely. Miss Weedham, Congressman Weedham's daughter (Cal.) was my partner at the last hop.⁵

Van had not forgotten Tennessee, and especially the young ladies that he knew there.

While at home this leave I met several girls that I like real well, and some of my old friends I like better than ever, but there seems to be something lacking. That is, I don't love any of them. Sometimes I think that I haven't enough confidence in girls but at the same time, I have seen enough of them in the last year or so to make anyone lose confidence in lots of them. When you can meet a girl and be with her only a little while before you can fool with her in most any way you care to, it causes you to stop and ponder awhile. You ask yourself, "Is the ordinary girl virtuous and true?" Usually I have the utmost confidence in most girls, but I have been

⁵P. V. H. Weems, 1912 Diary, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

with a few presumably nice girls that cause me to want to become familiar with a girl as soon as I get in their company. Myrtle Loggins is one girl that I have a lot of respect for, Alma Cook is all right in my estimation.⁶

In April 1914, Van was ordered to the survey ship USS Leonidas, which was scheduled to survey the entrance to the nearly completed Panama Canal. Diary entries reflect daily routines with an occasional entry that reflected domestic and world events.

April 22, 1914 - Got underway at noon. . . . I am just starting my career as a watch officer. When a light is sighted, Take its bearing, note the time, read the log and report to the Navigator. Colors come down at sunset, lookout in masthead lays in, and running lights are turned on. Law has been passed that abolishes liquor aboard ship. Officers on board are kicking like horses.

May 12, 1914 - . . . somehow I don't seem to be able to stand rough weather as most of the other fellows do. I began to feel woozy on account of the long swells that are giving us a considerable pitch.

May 17, 1914 - Put in official request for temporary duty with the volunteer Infantry in the event of hostilities with Mexico? . . . in accordance with the late Volunteer Army Bill.

Duty aboard the USS Leonidas was demanding when the ship was performing its survey duties for the U. S. Navy Hydrographic Office. The coast line and entrance waters to the Canal had never been surveyed. The exact depth of the water would be of primary importance to ships maneuvering into and from the Panama Canal. Van was assigned to

⁶P. V. H. Weems, 1912 Diary, Ibid.

one of the survey launches, but he had plenty of shore time to explore the Canal Zone, to hunt, and date Miss Margaret Thackray, his bride to be.

May 15, 1914 - At 0500 Ray Holland and I turned out to get an early start across the Isthmus. We arrived at Gatun Lake at about 0630 A.M. and stopped to see some barges passed through the Canal. When we learned that the barges were the first commercial vessels to be sent through the Canal, we forsook our contemplated train ride to Panama (City) and went through with the barges.

May 21, 1914 - Went hunting after 3:30 P.M. but failed to kill anything. However, we saw the natives pound some corn into meal in the old primitive way. The natives are interesting to me.

June 21, 1914 - At 0300 A.M. Ray Holland and I turned out and got underway with the motor dory for a hunting trip near Gatun. We landed at the locks and walked over into the jungle beyond the spillway for about three miles. After we had gotten down into the swamp and kept quiet and still for awhile near a nut tree. I killed a squirrel. Then I noticed a slight noise and glanced through the bushes and there were six or eight peccaries (wild hogs) trooping along in single file. I whispered "pigs," and Ray and I opened fire. Each of us shot one immediately, then I tried one more in the bunch as it ran within a few feet of me. I wheeled and gave him a parting shot, guessing his location. I couldn't see him plainly. Then I turned and pumped another shot into the one I had first shot as he was trying to get away. When I shot this time, he turned and headed for me. I don't know his intentions, but I do know that I stopped him with my last shell when he was about ten feet away. The next question was to get them back to the ship. Each pig weighed about forty-three pounds and three miles was a long way.

When we got to the ship we left the pigs in the dory and dragged aboard with the squirrel in order to give our mess mates a chance to rag us a bit. This they did. Harry M. McCloy said I was charged up with the shells we had been wasting. After telling him it was poor sportsmanship for the mess, I asked him if he would be willing to pay for any fresh meat we might

get up. "Yes, I'll give you ten cents a pound for all you get." I verified his statement by repeating it once or twice and then sent down and got the two wild hogs. Ole McCloy was taken down a bit!⁷

On the 4th of July 1914, the Canal authorities sponsored a big celebration and dance. Mammy went ashore in dress whites. When he found out that one of the featured activities was an aquatic wrestling match, he made up his mind that he wanted to enter the event. The mat was a fourteen foot square float covered with grease. The only rule was that the last man aboard won the match. Van's approach was to dig toward the center and not "fight" until only three or four remained aboard. There were twenty to thirty aboard, including sailors, civilians and a couple of professional wrestlers. Van won the event, but allowed the next to last man aboard, a sailor from his own ship, to collect the cash prize of twenty-five dollars.

The next challenge was to clean off the grease and dress back into his whites. There were no shower facilities available. He wiped the grease off his hair and sunburned body the best he could and re-dressed. He walked over to the dance and saw a young lady that his roommate, Red Sowell, had "dragged" to a couple of Annapolis "hops," Margaret Thackray. He recognized her and said, "Margaret

⁷P. V. H. Weems, "1914" Diary," Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

Thackray, what you you doing here?" Her answer was, "I'm married and living here." She was only kidding P. V. H., as she called him, but it took awhile to convince Van that she wasn't married.

Margaret introduced P. V. H. to her host and hostess, Mr. and Mrs. "Happy" Pearce. Van immediately started competing with the high paid civilian engineers and the other bachelor naval officers for dates with Miss Thackray. Additional details of their dates and the details of their marriage are contained in Chapter eight.⁸

Day after day Van worked aboard his small boat with a crew of about ten sailors moving up and down the coast taking depth measurements by hand and "shooting" the positions. This duty gave him the background needed for handling navigation instruments in later years, and instilled the need for complete accuracy in recording the sighting obtained with instruments.

When the survey work was completed, Van was assigned to the new battleship, USS Nevada. (This is one of the battleships that was sunk at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.) One of his duties was to command one of the main gun turrets. In one of the service practices, his turret

⁸Interview with Mrs. P. V. H. Weems, on April 17, 1973, in Annapolis, Maryland. At age 82, she has good recall.

made nine shots, scoring nine hits in a minute and forty seconds. This was considered to be a world record at that time.⁹

In June 1917, Van was promoted to Lieutenant Senior Grade and transferred to the USS Georgia to train gun crews for merchant ships. Ten months later he was transferred to the troop transport, Orizaba. This ship made six trips with troops from April to November 1918. During this period the Orizaba stood number two in the transport service. Van was awarded a letter of Commendation for quick turn-arounds and ship upkeep as Chief Engineer. From the Orizaba, he was ordered to the USS Murray, a new destroyer on convoy duty, and remained aboard this ship until shortly after the Armistice.

A few days after the armistice was signed, Van met his brother, Hatton, in France. Hatton had graduated with the first war class from West Point on April 20, 1917, and immediately entered active duty with the 9th Infantry Regiment at Syracuse, New York. Hatton was sent into the World War in France as a member of this unit on September 5, 1917. He commanded a machine gun company near Verdun from March 15 to May 2, 1918. In July 1918 he distinguished

⁹"Naval Record of P. V. H. Weems" furnished by Weems & Plath, Inc., Annapolis, Maryland.

himself by extraordinary heroism in action at Chateau Thierry during the Allied drive on Vaux. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.¹⁰

Van invited Hatton as his guest to make a "short run" to England aboard the Murray. The crew had been given a short leave in Plymouth, England. On December 9, 1918, as the ship was returning to France, the Division navigator misread a light and signaled the destroyers to turn. Several of the destroyers ran aground. Van was in the engine room when the rocks ripped open a hole in the fire room and the forward engine room. The signal from the bridge flashed, "full speed ahead." The ice cold water had killed the steam in the engine, and there was no power to move the ship. Then the signal was flashed, "full speed astern." One of the crewmen swam across the flooded room and pulled open the low pressure steam valve and the ship backed off the rocks.

The next problem was to stop the water that was pouring into the engine room. Van, being the strongest swimmer, personally drove the wooden wedges into the holes in the metal deck. The engine room was pumped, and some power was obtained from the main steam engine. Van went to the bridge

¹⁰Stanley J. Folmsbee, Robert E. Corlew, and Enoch L. Mitchell, History of Tennessee, Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1960, p. 876.

to explain to the Captain why he could not go forward when the skipper signaled "full speed ahead." The skipper gave Van one of the few compliments he ever received while assigned to the ship, "You did damn well to back off, Weems."¹¹

Van's next assignment was with a sister destroyer, the O'Brien, as Executive Officer and Navigator with the new rank of Lieutenant Commander. This was Mammy's first official assignment with navigation, and it marked an upward trend in his "fitness ratings." The O'Brien was assigned the duty of picket ship for the first Atlantic crossing by an aircraft, the NC-4.

Lieutenant Commander Philip Van Horn Weems, one-time Tennessee farm boy, scanned the skies from the deck of his ship just off the Azores. It was May, 1919, and the world stood on tiptoe for news of the first airplane flight across the Atlantic.

Weems was navigator of the U.S.S. O'Brien, one of the ships strung out at fifty mile intervals from Newfoundland to Portugal to stake out a path for the three Navy seaplanes making the try. Two had already dropped out by the time they had reached the Azores.

"Suddenly the plane came up over us," Weems said, "It was a great thrill." From that moment, Weems caught the vision that would change his career.¹²

The official world record established by the flight of the NC-4 is listed as the first transatlantic flight by

¹¹Interview with P. V. H. Weems, April 1, 1969, Ibid.

¹²Louise Davis, The Nashville Tennessean, May 29, 1966, p. 16.

Lt. Cdr. Albert C. Read and crew in a Curtiss Flying Boat, NC-4, from Newfoundland, to Lisbon, Portugal, on May 16 to 27, 1919.¹³ As navigator of the O'Brien, Van had the responsibility for the exact location of his ship. The flight was delayed several days waiting for favorable wind and water conditions for the aircraft to take off from the refueling stop in the Azores. During this wait, Van worked continually trying to compute the exact location of his ship as it slowly steamed on station. This delay and the importance of his duty focused Van's attention on the problem of air and sea navigation.

After several short stretches of duty aboard other ships that were being placed in the "moth-ball fleet," Van was put "ashore" as the recruiting officer for the State of Maryland with his office in Baltimore. He took this duty very seriously and quickly learned that the key to recruiting was publicity. In an effort to obtain "free" publicity, Van accepted a challenge to wrestle one of the local "champion" wrestlers that worked at the Baltimore Sun newspaper. Van had been wrestling at the Y. M. C. A. to stay in shape and was not afraid to wrestle anyone near his size. Van threw the challenger so quickly that it was suggested that he enter the South Atlantic Amateur Wrestling

¹³Norris and Ross McWhirter, Guinness Book of World Records, Bantam Books, New York, 1973, p. 319.

Championship that was scheduled to be held in Baltimore in a few months.

Mammy won the 175 pound class championship at the meet and was invited to try out for the 1920 Olympic Team. He made the team as an alternate and Naval-officer-in-charge and went to the 7th Olympiad in Antwerp.

I failed to get a crack in the Olympic wrestling. Johnson (Amateur Champ 1917) and Fairty (the fellow that won from me in New York) went in. As they tied for 3rd place, and as I practically tied Fairty in New York, I might have come out 3rd or 4th had I got in. It is a disappointment to me not to have gotten into the game, for I gave up my recruiting job to get over here. However, if a man stays in the athletic game long enough, he must finally meet with reversals and when that time comes the good sport will consider it all in the game and make the most of it. That is what I am trying to do. I judged and refereed two of the elimination bouts.¹⁴

Upon his return from Antwerp, Van was ordered to duty as navigator of the USS Rochester, a cruiser that was the flagship of the special service squadron based in the Canal Zone. As navigator Van was given higher ratings by his senior officers that he had received in the past. But he had already become known as an officer who "forgets the details." When his wife arrived in Panama to establish their home, Van was restricted aboard ship because he "forgot to send the boat ashore to pick up the Captain while he was watch officer."¹⁵

¹⁴Letter from P. V. H. Weems to Gen. G. H. Weems, dated September 16, 1920, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

¹⁵Interview with Mrs. P. V. H. Weems, April 17, 1973, Ibid.

Van had continued his writing and was successful in getting a number of items published in the Naval Institute, a semi-official Naval publishing facility. Writing articles for publication was a natural extension to his training under Commander J. O. Fisher. The Naval Institute offered a "cash prize" of two hundred dollars for the best essay on "handling personnel." Van wrote his article and sent it to the Institute. But in the next issue of the magazine, the list of those that had entered the contest appeared. Van forgot about his chance of winning when he saw the names of several of the Navy's Admirals and Captains that had reputations as excellent writers. To Van's surprise, he was notified that he had won the contest, but he could not do much advertisement of the fact because of the "big names" that had entered the contest. As the winner, Van was offered the job of returning to the Academy and "flesh" out his essay into a book that would be used by the Academy to teach the midshipmen how to "handle personnel." Van officially was assigned to the Academy in the department of Navigation.¹⁶

While at the Academy another navigation instructor, Lt. J. G. Gingrich, pointed out to Mammy some Japanese Navigation tables, saying, "Here is a sweet way of computing

¹⁶Interview with Captain P. V. H. Weems, April 1, 1969, Ibid.

the altitude." Van saw the importance of the method and enthusiastically supported Gingrich in the idea of exploiting the method.¹⁷ They published, with the author's permission, the Japanese tables in English with some modifications. Van and Gingrich met such sharp resistance from senior officers that Gingrich dropped the project rather than jeopardize his Naval career. Van showed his "stubbornness" and refused to give up once he was convinced that the tables would improve navigational methods. Van continued to rework the tables and these efforts launched him as a pioneer in the field of aerial navigation.

Sickness and fate also played an important role in Captain Weems' navigational life.

In June 1926 I was ordered to the USS HOPKINS, a duty that I desired. Just about the time I was to leave Annapolis - with a ticket bought, etc., I had a stomach hemorrhage, (caused by a duodenal ulcer) which was a surprise and a disappointment. I was kept in the hospital several weeks, and the doctors recommended that I not be sent to sea for one year. This held me over at Annapolis one year, then I went to the USS FARQUHAR and brought her to the west coast. The day I arrived at San Diego I went to the hospital with a recurrence of the same trouble. In fact a hemorrhage of the stomach occurred about two or three days before I reached San Diego. I did not suffer, or feel sick, yet I was scared and knew enough to go easy.

I asked that the FARQUHAR be held for me, but this request was not granted. Finally after Starr King had taken command of the FARQUHAR, I became

¹⁷Leslie W. Baker, Unpublished paper, "History of Weems System of Navigation," undated, p. 3.

interested in my hobby of navigation, partly in self-defense to keep from rotting in the hospital. I kept busy on that and finally asked for temporary duty with the Aircraft Squadrons [sic] Battle Fleet, where I had convalescent leave and started to work on aerial navigation research.¹⁸

Van remained in the hospital for almost six months in San Diego, California. His family re-located to nearby Coronado, California. Mammy found it very difficult to rest quietly in the hospital bed. He worked navigation problems mentally and later on paper to keep himself busy and to keep his mind off his physical problem. This "hospital time" formed a basis for the data for Van's first book, Line of Position Book, published in 1927, that propelled him into the limelight as a "navigational expert."

¹⁸Letter from P. V. H. Weems to Lt. Commander H. H. Good, dated February 9, 1930, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

NAVIGATION

While in the U. S. Naval Hospital in San Diego, Van worked on several navigational items that he had thought of while teaching navigation at Annapolis. He had noticed that the midshipmen were having a great deal of trouble finding the Greenwich Mean Time. To help the "wooden midshipmen," Van thought up the idea of putting another stem on a watch. This would enable the midshipmen accurately to "re-set" the second sweep hand the same way the hour and minute hands were "re-set." When Van showed his "two-stemmed" watch drawing to his father-in-law,¹ he was encouraged to work out the bugs and apply for a patent. When Van started working on the gear ratios, he found that the ratio of the speed of the second-hand to the hour-hand was so great that the second-hand could not be set with a stem in the usual way that hour and minute hands were "set." The final design was a device to read the accurate time directly from the watch face.

When you set a watch, you can adjust the hour and minute hands, but the second hand sweeps on irrevocably. To the layman it is not important if

¹George E. Thackray, patent engineer as well as a metallurgical and chemical engineer at Bethlehem Steel Co., author of Cambria Steel.

his watch is twenty seconds off. To the navigator it can be a matter of life and death. So navigators, when they synchronized their watches with observatory time, used to make a note of how many seconds their sweep hand was off. This factor, plus or minus, had to be figured into every calculation they made on a voyage.

Weems mounted a movable rim on his watch, marked the sixty seconds on it and, since he was unable to adjust the second hand to the watch face, he simply adjusted the face to the hand.²

This device was so simple that many of Mammy's navigation friends were saying, "It's so simple, I should have thought of that."

From the hospital bed, Van wrote to the United States Naval Institute³ and requested that they publish his book of tables, Line of Positions Book. They agreed to publish the book under one of the most unusual contracts ever issued by the Institute: "the author agrees to guarantee the Naval Institute against loss, and will allow the Institute fifty percent of the profits, if any." The publication cost was estimated to be nearly three thousand dollars. This caused Van to study seriously the navigation book market. He finally decided that he wanted to be the "daddy of a book" and put the family finances on the line. When Van had recovered enough to be put on a "sippy" diet,

²Michael Kernan, The Washington Post, December 12, 1968, p. F1.

³The United States Naval Institute is a "semi-official" non-profit Naval organization that prints articles in a monthly magazine. Naval related books and papers are also printed.

he was given a convalescent leave and allowed to join his family in Coronado, California. He continued to use his hobby of navigation to keep his mind occupied. His name was becoming associated with aerial navigation by the naval assignment officers in Washington. They assigned him to the West Coast Battle Fleet, Aircraft Squadrons, as navigation research officer.

One of the first things that Van did when he reported to duty was to check out a sextant. The next thing he noticed was that the sextant was inaccurate. A stripped thread caused the sextant to be several hundred miles off in the reading. Van was able to repair the instrument himself and started working on a way to modify it to make it useful to the air navigator.

Admiral J. M. Reeves, commander of the Battle Fleet Aircraft Squadron, allowed Van a "free hand" in navigation research. When Van asked him if he could modify a "torpedo boat watch" with a second setting feature, the Admiral immediately authorized the paymaster to give Van eighty dollars for the modification. Van had failed to inform the Admiral that the Naval Observatory had already turned his idea down. Jessup Jewelers in San Diego modified the watch. Photographs were taken and sent to the Naval Observatory. The watch was finally accepted by the Naval Observatory as "useful." In recent years navigators and aviators purchased

"navigator" watches with a "bezel" ring without knowing that Mammy Weems originated the idea. The Thomas Gray Award, given by the Royal Society of Arts, was presented in later years to Captain Weems for his second setting watch.

Using his improved sextant, the second setting watch, and the Line of Position tables, Van had a completely different method of navigation. The "Weems System" required two "shots" of the sun, accurate time, and the tables to find a position. All previous systems required extensive calculations and the use of mathematical formulas.

Van had made the mathematical calculations and graphed the results in the Line of Position tables. The "Weems System" was extended to "The Weems System of Navigation."

Van was not one to shy away from publicity. At Annapolis, his year book states that his "greatest delight is having his picture taken." As recruiting officer in Maryland, he learned that it paid to become known by as many people as possible, and the easiest way to become known is to stay in the news and write about current events. Van considered that news coverage or written articles were much more valuable than purchased advertisement space. With this basic philosophy, Van increased his writing output, concentrating on his navigational ideas and equipment.

When Van was pronounced "fit for sea duty," he was assigned to the fuel ship, Cuyama. After he had shipped to

sea, requests for his navigational items continued to arrive at his home. Mrs. Weems was forced to buy a license and form the Weems System of Navigation Company in order to sell the navigational items. Some of the money required to form the company came from a mortgage given on the small home in Coronado. Mrs. Weems continued to run the company with the help of Mr. Rodney Stokes and other office managers. This arrangement side-stepped the problem of Captain Weems doing business with the U. S. Government while on active duty with the U. S. Navy.

Several weeks before being transferred to the Cuyama, Van was at the local airfield waiting for a flight with one of the fleet pilots to work on aerial navigation when he noticed Colonel Charles Lindbergh waiting in his plane near the hangar. Van walked up to the plane and said, "Colonel Lindbergh, I would like to show you my sextant and watch." Lindbergh, who had a scientific mind, took the sextant and looked through the eyepiece. He said, "Commander, I am very much interested in this; I would like to get together with you on it." The conversation lasted a few minutes longer, and Colonel Lindbergh turned his attention to his airplane. Van thought that he would not hear from Colonel Lindbergh again as he walked back to the fleet aircraft.⁴

⁴Interview with Captain P. V. H. Weems by Naval Institute. Op. Cit.

Aboard the Cuyama, Van performed his duties as Executive Officer. After duty while the other officers played bridge or talked, he worked on a parallel project to the Line of Position. The new project called "Star Altitude Curves" would allow the navigator to find his position at night using the stars. He used every opportunity to talk about his navigation projects. When the Cuyama was fueling the Admiral's ship, he would go aboard the flag ship and "shoot a fix" for the Admiral. In some cases he was well received, and in others he was dismissed as a "navigation nut." He was not afraid to talk, ". . . Weems is a man of great personality . . . even while he talks, and he can talk and even though you do not agree, you feel you must listen. . . ."5

Mrs. Weems was surprised at her office by a voice on the telephone saying, "This is the White House calling." Mrs. Weems, who had been plagued with crank phone calls the past few weeks, answered, "Oh yes, this is my little gray house in the West answering." The voice on the other end said, "This is serious. This is Mr. Dawes'6 office, and I

⁵Speech by Mr. Arthur Hughes, October 13, 1936, London, England, at a dinner in honor of Captain Weems. Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

⁶Vice-President Charles G. Dawes, close friend of Mr. Lincoln Ellsworth who had studied with P. V. H. Weems in California.

would like to speak to Commander Weems about joining Colonel Lindbergh for a series of instruction on navigation." Mrs. Weems quickly explained that her husband was at sea and gave the White House caller the correct duty address.⁷

The Captain of the Cuyama was very unhappy to lose his executive officer, who had orders to report to Washington immediately to work with Colonel Lindbergh.

Lindbergh makes a fine student. He bones till twelve or one o'clock and does not get "fussed" or rushed. I went along with him, and when we were in the air, we could play along as we liked.⁸

One of the flights used in training was from Washington to Detroit. While Colonel Lindbergh was meeting with several people at the Ford Motor Company office, Van was left in the outer office. He was reading something when he was tapped on the shoulder, "Have you had lunch?" Van immediately recognized Henry Ford.⁹ Van enjoyed the lunch and small talk with Mr. Ford. Wherever Van went with Colonel Lindbergh they were mobbed by reporters wanting to write a story on the "Lone Eagle."

Col. Charles A. Lindbergh today refused to discuss the nature of his conference with Henry Ford and Edsel Ford at Dearborn yesterday. The transatlantic

⁷Mrs. P. V. H. Weems interview, April 17, 1973, Ibid.

⁸Letter from P. V. H. Weems to Fairlamb, dated July 14, 1928, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

⁹Interview with P. V. H. Weems, Naval Institute, Ibid.

flyer arrived at Curtiss Field, L. I., last night after what he described as an uneventful trip from Detroit. He was flying his new Ryan Monoplane and was accompanied by Captain P. V. H. Weems.¹⁰

Van was keenly aware of the value of having his name linked with the world popular Lindbergh. He immediately began to write articles on "Teaching Lindbergh to Navigate"¹¹ for publicity. Van and Colonel Lindbergh developed a mutual respect that led the Colonel to endorse the Weems System of Navigation. A copy of his letter printed on the back of a company advertisement is on page 129. The publicity that followed the Lindbergh instruction period pointed the way for pioneer aviators that needed a "short method of navigation" to the Weems System of Navigation.

When Van returned to the West Coast and duty aboard the Cuyama, he worked feverishly to complete the star altitude curves and started a book on air navigation. Financing the star altitude curves proved more difficult than the Line of Position Book which had earned the Weems family five hundred dollars for the first edition. This time the cost of printing would approach fifteen thousand dollars. There were no orders for the curves, but Van believed in himself and his method of navigation and "pressed on." Fifteen hundred of the fifteen thousand had to be

¹⁰Press Scimitar, (New York), May 11, 1928.

¹¹Liberty, November 24, 1928, p. 31.

borrowed from Brother Hatton, Cousin Andrew Gennett, and Uncle F. A. M. Burrell. Lincoln Ellsworth, wealthy American sportsman and explorer, donated seven hundred dollars. The remainder of the money was obtained from bank loans, profits from other navigational items, and family funds.

The best-known graphical reduction method to appear between the wars was Weems' star curves . . . Weems' patent application stressed that, with the curves, less schooling was required of the aerial navigator . . . Gatty . . . used the second edition of the star curves on his world flight with Post and praised them.¹²

Van, also, developed a navigation instrument of clear plastic that he called the Mark II plotter.

The plotter was designed to do only two things, measure directions and distances, and to do this in the simplest possible form. There is no accurate record of how many have been produced for the Military, but over a million have been sold commercially.¹³

This "ruler device," together with the tables and navigation instruments, gave the family company a complete "short method of navigation" to market. To "build a market," Van authorized navigation schools to teach his system and sell his equipment. He also developed a correspondence course that was sold for a flat fee. Later he obtained the rights to the correspondence course and built it into one of the financial pillars of the company.

¹²Monte Duane Wright, Most Probable Position, The University of Kansas Press, Lawrence, Kansas, 1972, pp. 161-163.

¹³"The Weems Story" by G. D. Dunlap, undated.

Harold Gatty became associated with the Weems System of Navigation after a slight misunderstanding about a fee charged to his navigational school. "Mrs. Weems was most favorably impressed by young Gatty's directness and good manners."¹⁴ He and Van collaborated on a drift indicator and several other navigational devices. Because of the praise Gatty gave the Weems System of Navigation after his world flight with Wiley Post, Van was assigned to the Hydrographic Office in Washington as an air navigation researcher.

In 1931, McGraw-Hill published Van's book, Air Navigation. It had taken Van almost two years to write the draft. When he sent it to the publishing company, the editor returned it and requested that it be updated. Van had attempted to write on everything that was known concerning the navigation of aircraft. Navigation techniques and aids were being changed and improved so rapidly that Van was afraid the book would be of little value. The book was recognized as the best technical book of the year in the United States, and won the Gold Medal given by the Aero Club of France. The book was selected from twelve United States books in competition and twenty-two French books.¹⁵

¹⁴Speech by P. V. H. Weems, "Harold Gatty as We Knew Him," Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

¹⁵Editorial, Baltimore Sun, August 20, 1932.

Young men with new ideas on navigation devices started coming to Mammy with ideas for advice and development. The most profitable to the company were the ideas given by Lieutenant Philip Dalton for the "Dalton computers." Van convinced Dalton that the Weems System of Navigation could market his device better than he could continue to sell it by himself. Van agreed to an exorbitant royalty of twenty percent. It turned out to be a good sound business decision because of its popularity.

Van continued to seek publicity for himself and his company. He had kept in close contact with his classmate, Dick Byrd. When he learned that Dick was going to the South Pole, he made a special effort to supply him with his navigational equipment.

When the Weems family moved East, Harold Gatty was appointed manager of the Weems System of Navigation. Unfortunately, the profits were not enough to support Gatty's growing family. He had to take on additional work and arrange for new financing, which he did partly with Mr. T. Clement. When Gatty received an opportunity to work with Wiley Post, Mr. Clement took over the management. Mr. Clement had imagination, but not enough business ability to put across his sizeable projects of publishing a magazine, promoting his book, and managing the Weems System of Navigation. The Weems System of Navigation was floundering, and so was Van's Naval career.

In October 1932 Van took command of the destroyer USS Hopkins. Less than one year later, he was passed over for promotion and put on the retired list.

The only regret is that it is not entirely voluntary (retirement in June, at age 44 on 62 $\frac{1}{4}$ of pay) although there is no onus attached to my retirement, and my record for 25 years in the Navy has been good. About 38% of my class are being retired. I am leaving behind many friends, and a record of which I am proud.¹⁶

Van was being put on the "beach" at the worst possible time to obtain a job. The depression had hit the United States, and business was very slow in the aviation field.

Interviewed about six firms ashore about business. Apparently it is at rock bottom. Most are mentally depressed. Have figured that our fixed expenses for interest, taxes, and insurance is about \$218, while income starting in July will be \$217.¹⁷

Van tried to obtain a job to support his family outside the navigation field. One of the positions he tried the hardest to obtain was with the Tennessee Valley Authority. He also thought of teaching, running a business, and selling real estate in Tennessee.

If only I can land the position with the Tennessee Valley Authority, I shall feel all set up for the

¹⁶Letter from P. V. H. Weems to Judge W. L. Cook, Tennessee Supreme Court, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

¹⁷P. V. H. Weems, "1933 Diary," April 18th entry, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

next ten years, or perhaps longer. If for any reason this falls through, I am thinking seriously of going into realty business in the Tennessee Valley.¹⁸

As always, desiring the opinion of his guardian, Tennessee State Supreme Court Justice W. L. Cook, his brothers and sister, and in business situations the advice of his cousin, Andrew Gennett.

I plan to visit home about June and see all my folks and get their counsel. If you have any suggestions at this time, I will appreciate them . . . If you see a business with good prospects for about \$10,000 purchase price, please let me know. Is there a possibility of buying into one of the Nashville papers? I believe I could do fairly well in that line of work.¹⁹

Brother Hatton advised "not to take a position at a prep school, because they are fast going out of existence."²⁰ Because of the depression, Van was not able to obtain any of the positions he wanted. Van turned to the two things he knew best, writing and navigation.

Van took over management of the Weems System of Navigation by assuming the debts personally. He attempted to put the company on sound financial footing again.

¹⁸Letter from P. V. H. Weems to Mr. Andrew Gennett, date August 8, 1933.

¹⁹Letter from P. V. H. Weems to Supreme Court Justice W. L. Cook, undated.

²⁰Letter from George Hatton Weems to P. V. H. Weems, date February 28, 1933.

Additional items were added to the inventory: averaging sextants, Wind Drift Plotters, and numerous other navigational aids. The business was transferred from San Diego, California to the family home in Annapolis, Maryland. Van worked long hours at technical and non-technical writing, trying to make enough money to keep the business and the family on an even keel. An example of the non-technical writing was his "The Flight of the 'Tingmissartoq,'" which was an account of the 1933 survey flights of the Lindberghs. Included in the story were photographs of the Weems System of Navigation equipment used.²¹

Over the garage at their home, Van rigged up a studio where special students in air navigation could learn directly from Van on a daily schedule. He, also, started teaching air and sea navigation at Johns Hopkins University in nearby Baltimore.²² Later he taught similar classes for New York University, Division of General Education, at the Hayden Planetarium in New York City.

Months before retirement, Van saw his "Air Almanac" published by the Naval Observatory. It received a great deal of publicity.

²¹p. V. H. Weems, Aviation, April, 1934, "The Flight of the Tingmissartoq."

²²Editorial, Nashville Tennessean, November, 1936.

Of interest to amateur navigator as well as aviator and mariners the Air Almanac, the first of its kind to be published, has made its appearance. The idea of the almanac was developed by Lieut. Com. P. V. H. Weems . . . improvements embodied in the Air Almanac are declared to cut down the work of the navigation twenty five percent.²³

Van worked hard at the two things he enjoyed the most, writing and navigation. His attitude during the first couple of years after retirement is reflected in an earlier letter to his brother Joe B. Weems of Dickson, Tennessee.

Fortune for us in the Weems System of Navigation seems always to be just around the corner. At least we are getting our feet on the ground and are beginning to know where we stand. Ultimately we hope to make some nice profit, but it seems pretty slow sometimes. In the meantime, we get about all the compliments one could wish - If only compliments would buy shoes for the children.²⁴

Retirement and management of the Weems System of Navigation did not muddle Van's ability to think big about the future of aviation. "My vision for the future is for large, long range planes equipped with radio, with a pilot and a relief pilot. The relief pilot operates the radio and navigates." Van was disturbed that the United States was turning against the ideas of Billy Mitchell. It seemed that other countries showed more interest in Van's

²³San Diego Tribune, January 23, 1933, "Air Almanac Makes S. D. Debut."

²⁴Letter from P. V. H. Weems to Joe B. Weems dated October 24, 1929, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

work than the United States. Japan was asking for prices and time of delivery of new sextants at \$450 a copy in lots of 50 and 150. The United States War Department ordered only six. He asked for and received advice from the State Department on what he could sell abroad.

By the middle of 1934, the company showed a modest profit. It continued to grow at this slow rate until the navigational demands of World War II mushroomed the growth rate and the size of the company.

By 1939 the Weems System of Navigation was known across the United States and around the world. Companies or individual navigators were retailing navigation supplies or teaching the Weems System of Navigation in New York, San Francisco, Berkeley, Los Angeles, San Diego, New Orleans, Seattle, Denver, London, England, Karaci City, India and in Melbourne, Australia. Students of navigation by correspondence were not limited to English speaking students. Spanish and Russian students took advantage of learning to navigate by the magic of the written word and the reliable U. S. Mail system.

Teaching navigation under the Weems System of Navigation was not restricted to men. Miss Mary Tornich of San Francisco became interested in the mechanics of navigation while attending the University of California when she studied mathematics and astronomy. She had already earned her pilots license and graduated from the City's navigation school in the Ferry Building.

Miss Tornich studied navigation under Captain P. V. H. Weems in Annapolis. She returned to San Francisco to establish a navigation school using the Weems System of Navigation techniques and retailing their supplies.²⁵

Time and paper does not permit a detailed discussion of all the projects that Captain Weems worked on before the war.

He addressed aeronautical meetings, contributed to the aeronautical press, wrote textbooks, and kept up correspondence with inventors and manufacturers both here and in Great Britain. While his firm dealt in all navigational instruments, celestial navigation has occupied a special place in his interest. As late as 1936 he was still trying to convince overland airlines to use celestial navigation. But in spite of his best efforts, he had to 'count more on other branches of air navigation, and on celestial navigation for the mariner' as sources of income until the approach of World War II.²⁶

²⁵San Francisco Examiner, September 3, 1939.

²⁶Monte Duane Wright, Most Probable Position, The University of Kansas Press, Lawrence, Kansas, 1972, pp. 147-148.

LATE SERVICE

By the end of 1940, there was no doubt in Van's mind that the United States would become involved in another way. He was just as positive that there would be a "keen demand for navigators, especially celestial navigators." He continued to encourage developments that would aid the celestial navigator. The Naval Observatory finally published the Air Almanac. This book "provided the location of the celestial body; the sextant measured the height. These items defined the celestial triangle"¹ . . . that could be solved with the Star Altitude Curves. Van had been publishing the Almanac in the United States, under copyright of the British firm, Hughes & Son, that combined the features of "Weems 1933 edition of the American almanac with those of the French almanac." The Commanding Officer of the Naval Observatory had refused to acknowledge the need of an air almanac since he took office in 1934. He was forced to accept it in the shadow of the coming world war. He knew the free world would need young men who could navigate with a "short method" such as the Weems

¹Monte Duane Wright, Most Probable Position, Ibid., p. 160.

System of Navigation. Van did not receive an award or special recognition for his Air Almanac book of 1933, nor for his efforts to have the book published for the navigator in 1941. He received only self-satisfaction that again he had been proven right in the field of navigation.

Many people have incorrectly assumed that Captain Weems made a "killing" selling navigational items to the U. S. Government during World War II. Most of the patents issued to Captain Weems were obtained while in the U. S. Navy. The U. S. Navy, therefore, retained the "shop rights." This means that if the item is needed by the Government, purchases can be made directly from the manufacturing firm, and the "middle man profits and royalties" are cut out. The "Weems Plotter" and the "Dalton Computer," sold by the Weems System of Navigation, became standard items of issue for aviators and navigators. No money was made on these items, but the Government allowed the manufacturing firms to deliver the items with the name "Weems System of Navigation" printed on the equipment. This was satisfactory to all. The Government obtained the needed equipment, the manufacturer did not have to "modify" the printing plates and could deliver the same item to the government or to the Weems System of Navigation. The Weems System of Navigation received a "million dollars" worth of free advertisement. This led to future sales after the war

when the combat fliers and navigators returned to civilian life to open small airfields or navigational schools near their homes.

The business did boom during the war selling navigation equipment to civilian firms, charts to the Government, and correspondence courses. Many of the correspondence course applicants during this time were attempting to obtain their navigator's license that would allow them to join the Army Air Corps or the Merchant Marine as a navigator rather than be drafted into the Infantry.

During May, 1942, Van instructed a class of U. S. Marine navigators that would be doing long range flying. He was not told their specific mission, except that they in turn would teach other Marines to navigate long range. Mammy was not recognized for this early war effort until 1971.

In February 1942 he trained six marines (five officers and one enlisted) in overwater aerial navigation, without charge, in his navigational school at Annapolis. To the best of my knowledge these were among the first, if not the first, trained aerial navigators in Marine Aviation during World War II. These six Marines were utilized as instructors, three in each Air Wing. The first graduates of their courses successfully navigated the 5,200 miles from San Diego to New Caledonia in airplanes of UMJ-253, which promptly began flight operations in support of Marines on Guadalcanal in September 1942.²

²Letter and Plaque presented to Captain Weems by Major General H. S. Hill, U. S. Marine Corps, Shipmate, July-August, 1971.

On July 9, 1942, Van was returned to active duty as Lieutenant Commander. After a short period of duty as Convoy Commodore, he was promoted to Commander and later to Captain. Mrs. Weems, again, was forced to take active management of the Weems System of Navigation. The company suffered through the same problems other companies experienced, that of material and labor shortages. The children were reaching maturity, and they were taken into the company as partners because of "love and affection," and the need for their services. Mrs. Weems was assisted by several retired Naval friends and Colonel A. Illyne, who had been with the company since 1935.

Colonel Alexis A. Illyne had held a commission in the Russian Air Force, under the Czar Nicholas. After the Communist revolution, he fought with General Wrangel against the Communists. He was forced to flee Russia. After his arrival in the United States in 1922, he was employed in various occupations. "Captain Weems said he was probably the best star cartographer in the nation, being the author of Illyne Star Charts in Russia and in this country."³

As Convoy Commander, Captain Weems had assigned to him a couple of young Naval Reserve officers and several

³Evening Capital, (Annapolis, Maryland) May 19, 1952, p. 12.

enlisted men. This small "command" would board one of the merchant ships and establish the "convoy headquarters." The merchant ships would assemble in port, then steam out to sea in formation. U. S. Navy escorts would join the convoy when they reached "dangerous" waters and leave the convoy when it entered a friendly port.

The actions of Captain Weems and his command group shocked some of the young Naval officers aboard the war ships. Captain Weems ran a haphazard command, delegated authority to his young officers and worried only about the "big picture." He was not overly conscious of his dress, "nine out of ten times, he would have his hat ensignia on incorrectly." This and his familiarity with his command members led outsiders to believe that his "command" did not have proper respect for their Captain. The exact opposite was true, they had the "highest respect for their Captain."

He always had his sextant and books aboard ship and used every opportunity to talk about navigation and to work on new improvements.⁴

Captain Weems and others conducted a seminar on navigation . . . on the table was the book, Star Altitude Curves, a Link Bubble Sextant and a Mark II plotter . . . it seems our course is being plotted by these gadgets, all standard equipment in the Air

⁴Interview with Mr. G. D. Dunlap, April 16, 1973, member of Captain Weems' Convoy Command Group.

Force . . . and all brain children of the learned Commodore (Weems), who also designed the Air Almanac used by the Army. Your soldier-reporter was beyond his depth and prepared to reel to the door when the conversations come out of the clouds and turned to farming. Captain Weems graduated from Annapolis in 1912, a class that boasts a record of 28 Admirals and Commodores . . . for the big picture of the Commodore, add to the halo of science . . . infinite charm, lively humor and a warming smile that spells affection for the seven seas that he holds in the palm of his charts.⁵

Captain Weems' first convoy was from New York to Galveston on September 18-26, 1942. His thirty-second and last convoy was from Southampton, England, to New York on February 10-22, 1945. During these convoys, over one thousand ships were under his command. He considered himself very lucky not to have lost a single ship. Only one ship was extensively damaged. The Matt W. Ranson⁶ hit a mine off the coast of Casablanca. There were numerous minor accidents between the merchant ships in the convoy during bad weather while attempting to "zig-zag" to avoid enemy submarines.

Captain Weems followed his pre-World War II pattern of Naval service by speaking up when he believed there was a better way of doing things. As before, his suggestions

⁵Poop Deck, September 26, 1944; a mimeographed "newspaper" published aboard one of the troop ships, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

⁶A liberty ship built by North Carolina Shipping Co., Wilmington, N. C.

were not always "cheerfully" received by his senior officers.

I question the value of zig zagging, considering the overall 1944 situation, I believe getting there first with the most outweighs the questionable value of zig zagging. I believe the escort gives better protection with the convoy on a steady course at top speed. The most direct course greatly increases convoy efficiency by:

1. reducing time at sea and consequently U-boat danger.
2. reducing danger of collisions.
3. increase goods delivered.
4. reducing fuel consumption and other expenses.

It is being said that more ships are, at present, being lost or damaged by collision than by U-boat attacks.⁷

Captain Weems included these ideas and added additional information on a report of anti-submarine warfare at the conclusion of the war.

When materials became scarce during the war, Captain Weems became very conscious of the waste of "valuable material" thrown overboard as trash. He made a detailed study on his own of the type of waste that was being thrown away and the "black market" prices for similar material in North African ports.

. . . there is a serious waste of valuable material thrown overboard at sea or into garbage lighters in port. This material consists of wooden boxes, paper cartons, tin cans, etc., all this would have little value in the United States but is sorely needed in the war-ravaged countries of our allies . . . The following plan is submitted:

⁷Captain P. V. H. Weems, After Action Report on Mercantile Convoy Number Cu25, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

1. put entire program under the American Red Cross and give them the proceeds.
 2. give definite, brief instructions to all ships, merchant and Navy, to eliminate waste.
 3. utilize local or prisoner-of-war labor at various ports to collect and process the material.
 4. make regular, daily collections in port.
- . . . the "black market" in North African ports and elsewhere is not generally understood, but is due to lack of source materials, and can be logically corrected by supplying urgently needed items to meet the demand . . . In the writer's opinion Americans will save under these conditions.⁸

In 1945 Van earned his wings as a Naval Air Navigator. On February 6, 1945, Captain Weems once again returned to civilian life and assumed active management of his company. For his three years service as Convoy Commodore, he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal.

When Captain Weems returned to Annapolis, Maryland, he was forced to make radical cut-backs in production due to over-supply and to the Government surplus of navigational items on the market. The principal market items for the next few years were the books authored by Captain Weems, Star Altitude Curves, Air Navigation, Marine Navigation, Line of Position Book, Instrument Flying, Learning to Navigate, a few navigational instruments and correspondence courses. The post-war correspondence courses "boomed" when

⁸Captain P. V. H. Weems, November, 1943, "Report on Waste Salvage Material on American Ships." Tennessee State Library, Ibid.

the Veterans Administration approved the course as part of the "G. I. Bill and related benefits."

Captain Weems was not a good businessman, in the normal sense of the word. He allowed others to keep track of the details that make a business profitable, and "never" placed emphasis on a project for its potential monetary value. It was very fortunate that the Weems System of Navigation had accumulated some capital. This enabled him to hire a competent staff to assist in the development of his ideas and to run the company.

One of the young men hired during this time was G. D. Dunlap,⁹ who had been a member of Captain Weems' staff during the war. Dale Dunlap and the other members of the company's staff were used as a "sounding board" for the Captain. Friendly arguments would occur concerning the feasibility of a project. The staff soon learned that saying, "no" or, "that will not work," was like waving a red flag in front of a bull. The Captain would dig in to prove his point, and his staff would be forced to "do their homework" to show how the idea could be modified to work. This healthy work atmosphere turned out a number of practical navigational items, many of which were not profitable.

⁹Managed the company for years; purchased part of the Weems System of Navigation after it was sold to The Times Mirror Company of Los Angeles in 1964.

During arguments, Dale, "kept in mind the Captain's batting average with navigation. The number of times world experts had said his ideas were not practical, and he had proven them wrong. I can not remember a conversation when he reached a decision to develop something based on making money on it."¹⁰

¹⁰Interview with Mr. G. D. Dunlap, April 16, 1973, Annapolis, Maryland.

WIDE HORIZONS

As an extrovert, Captain Weems loved people. His interest in meeting all types of people and sharing their experiences throughout his life led him into a very diverse number of fields outside of navigation. After he became financially secure and had found competent managers to run his company, he devoted a great deal of his time and money to civic duties and other interests.

He supported the United States Naval Academy through the U. S. N. A. Alumni and Athletic Associations in every possible way from donations of items to be used as class awards to attendance at all athletic events. He made his home the gathering place for midshipmen and graduates.

Van kept open house on Saturdays when there were athletic contests at the Naval Academy, which Van attended regularly. Van usually met old out-of-town friends at the events and would invite them to come to their home. Margaret never knew how many to prepare for . . . she was always pleased and cordial, a mark of a good disposition.¹

Van used the facilities of the Academy to keep himself in top physical shape. In 1939 the coaches of the wrestling team would remark, "If you don't shape up, I'll make you

¹Letter from Captain Robert A. Lavender, Classmate of P. V. H. Weems, in a letter dated April 4, 1973.

wrestle Mammy Weems." One young midshipman, who was a member of the varsity boxing and wrestling team, recalled meeting Mammy on the mat.

I was in the gym working out when this older man (Mammy at the age of 48) wanted to know if I wanted to workout with him on the mat. I had heard the coaches talk of Mammy Weems, but I had not seen him wrestle. I agreed to a match and before I knew what was going on, Mammy had me pinned. He killed me with a grape-vine hold and a take over and I was finished. We continued to workout for almost an hour. He would show me how to break the holds and how to pin an opponent. I worked out with Mammy many times after that, but I was never able to pin him.²

The list of civic duties that Van undertook is long and extensive. Some of the activities were formal, others were things that he felt should be done. Some of the formal activities included chairmanship of the Anne Arundel County Welfare Board in 1934; ward representative for Citizens League, Ward one, Annapolis, Maryland; Chairman of the Armed Forces Day Committee in 1957; Commander of G. C. Barlett Post Number Seven, American Legion; and a member of the Chamber of Commerce. In 1957, the Chamber of Commerce staged a re-enactment of an historic event to dramatize high taxes. Captain Weems played the part of Anthony Stewart, part owner of the Peggy Stewart, a ship that was burned in the Annapolis harbor in 1774 in protest of the tea tax imposed by the British.

²Personal Interview with Captain Joseph Linehan, Class of 1939, on April 9, 1973.

Perhaps the one civic duty that Van undertook, without being asked by anyone, best exemplified his attitude toward the Navy and his fellow man, concerns the Buick dealer in Annapolis. Van met one of the owners of the Buick dealership at a Chamber of Commerce meeting and heard him say that some of the Naval Officers who had departed Annapolis were not paying their bills. Van resented the fact that an automobile dealer claimed that he had lost money on Naval officers. He asked if he could write the officers and clear up the accounts for the good and credit of the Navy. The number of accounts that Van cleared up are not recorded. He received no recognition for the many letters that he wrote on behalf of the "honor of the Navy."³

Van believed that he had an obligation to help his fellowman, especially those that were less fortunate than he. He was very proud of his heritage, and the fact that he had been able to grow up on the farm and make good. He was always willing to help his family in Tennessee.

Let's look at the whole set-up: two of five brothers have had good to excellent salaries, the other three have had the usual run of depression experiences. We might even include Sister and Mr. Slayden with this picture for they also had been through the mill. For years I was [sic] best fixed financially, but now you are in the best position, while later I or some of the others will possibly be.

³Letters to individuals owing money to the company.
Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

In all these years we have had calls for help from all of our brothers - including Mr. Slayden. To date, while they are indebted to us, we have not lost anything on any of them, and if we hang together, I do not believe any of us will lose on the others.⁴

Not only did he feel obligated to his immediate family, but he joined his brother in helping to establish an education fund.

In the summer of 1938, Captain P. V. H. Weems and his son, the late Lt. Cdr. George T. Weems (Bee) were visiting Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Slayden at Waverly, Tennessee. . . . This group discussed the possibility of persuading Brig. General G. H. Weems to consider several thousand dollars he had loaned previously to nephews and nieces for educational purposes as a revolving fund to loan to others, as needed, for educational purposes. The name of the fund was suggested as the G. H. Weems Educational Fund, in memory of Joseph Burch Weems and May Elizabeth (Bessie Rye) Weems.⁵

In 1956, this fund was changed from a family educational fund to an "open" fund to make it eligible for federal income tax deductions. As an open fund, anyone can borrow money for educational purposes. Captain Weems contributed to the fund and has served as a trustee of the fund since its beginning. The fund has continued to grow and recently purchased a building in Waverly, Tennessee, as its permanent headquarters. Colonel William H. Slayden, a trustee, is the editor of the G. H. Weems Educational Fund newspaper Weemsana.

⁴Letter from P. V. H. Weems to Major G. H. Weems, dated February 14, 1935, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

⁵Weemsana, February 16, 1959, Number 1, Volume V, p. 1.

Colonel Slayden started the newspaper in January, 1943, as a means of keeping up with the news of the Weems family during World War II.

It just occurred to me, Bill Slayden, that during the war, with so many Weems taking such an active part in it, we ought to have some way for all of us to keep up with all the rest of us.⁶

Listed on the front page of the first edition of the Weemsana were the names of thirteen members of the Weems "Clan" who were serving in the war. Included were the names of Captain Weems and his two sons. Captain Weems was an active contributor to the newspaper, and in later years, encouraged Colonel Slayden to continue the paper as a means of preserving the historical and family records of the Weems family.

Van could almost be described as a soft touch. He has always been willing to help friends settle an argument about flying, or support someone who had an idea about navigation; or invest his money in a venture because he was asked to invest by his friends; or help a kid with a trained dog. A friend, Wilson Garey, asked Van to help set up some performances for his son's trained four year old dog. Van arranged several stage appearances, and then wrote the Hal Roach Studios in Hollywood, suggesting that they look into the possibility of using this dog like they

⁶Weemsana, January 1, 1943, Number 1, Volume I, p. 1.

were using the then famous Rin Tin Tin. A typical request for information by the American Public concerned two major league ball players.

I am Miss Kyle, recently of the Racquet Club navigation class . . . yesterday I met a man named T. C. Stephens and found out he had been selected judge for a hundred dollar bet between two big league baseball players, "Lefty" O'Doul and Watson Clark of the New York Giants. The problem is - if an airplane, with a speed of 100 miles per hour, encounters a head wind of 100 miles an hour, what happens? One player says it will stand still, and the other said it would progress. Mr. Stephens would like a letter addressed to him, signed by an authority, which is you, so the fellows will take the answer as authentic.⁷

Philip R. Burton was a math teacher in Geelong, Australia who had an idea about putting a device on a sextant that would allow the navigator to obtain a "fix" without a horizon. Captain Weems became interested in the idea and tried to obtain support from the Naval Academy and other educational institutions for a research project. No one believed the device would work and would not set up a research project. True to his "bull dog" nature, Captain Weems would not give up. He finally paid Mr. Burton's fare to Annapolis. "It turned out that Mr. Burton was an alcoholic and began charging his bills to Captain Weems."⁸

⁷Letter from Fern D. Kyle to P. V. H. Weems, dated 14 June 1934, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

⁸Interview with Mr. Dale Dunlap on April 16, 1973, Annapolis, Maryland.

The idea was mathematically possible, but it could not be transformed into a workable sextant. Captain Weems did not give up on Burton. It is against his nature to turn down a "friend." Mr. Burton drifted off, and nothing was ever said about the expenses caused by the idea that didn't work.

Van had been enticed into several financial ventures with friends. One was "oil leases" in Tennessee that showed enough promise in 1940 to "buy" more leases.

J. Ray Goodwin of Nashville, who has formerly operated in Mid-Continent Fields, has acquired leases of several thousand acres along Barton's Creek near Cumberland Furnace, twelve miles from Dickson, and has covered that territory heretofore designated as the Cumberland Furnace anticline. This territory has been pronounced as favorable territory.⁹

Another was a land syndicate that purchased sixteen hundred acres on Deep Creek Lake in Western Maryland. There are others, but these two show the diversity of investments outside navigation. He would invest because his friends asked him to join them. None of his investment ventures outside of his own field of navigation were successful.

In 1936, Van worked with Mr. E. A. Link¹⁰ on a bubble sextant. Over the next twenty years, they worked together

⁹Nashville Tennessean, May 24, 1940, p. 2.

¹⁰Navigation inventor, holder of 27 patents, developed the Link trainer which is a ground-training device used in instrument-flight training for pilots.

on numerous projects and wrote a book together, Simplified Celestial Navigation. Mr. Link, like Captain Weems, became financially secure after World War II. As a hobby, Mr. Link turned to sailing and then to underwater "historic" exploration. Captain Weems was invited to join their expedition and participate as a diver, and an assistant on navigation in attempting to locate Columbus's route to the new world.

. . . our very good friend, Philip Van Horn Weems, retired U. S. Navy officer and founder and head of the Weems System of Navigation, arrived aboard the Sea Diver for a brief stay. It was Captain Weems who had first introduced us to Verhoog's theory, and we soon found ourselves involved in long debates with him as to the relative merits of Morison's and Verhoog's¹¹ arguments. It was during these discussions that the idea first occurred to us to go and see for ourselves.

. . . Captain Weems enthusiastically agreed to go with us. We could have chosen no better companion, for he is without doubt the outstanding navigation expert in the world today, and a man who plunges heart and soul into whatever he undertakes. A man of nearly three score years and ten, his broad shoulders and powerful muscles bear testimony to a lifetime of physical activity. From early youth in the Naval Academy, to the present, he has maintained a high level of physical health and dexterity.¹²

During this expedition, an anchor was found "which there is good reason to believe came from the Santa Maria." The

¹¹Two of the theories on the exact route Columbus took to the new world through the Bahamas and the exact spot he first saw land that are accepted as possible routes.

¹²Marion Clayton Link, Sea Diver, University of Miami Press, Miami, Florida, p. 143.

anchor was presented to Guillaume Sam, Governor of Northern Haiti.¹³

Four years later, Van was asked to join a joint venture with the Links, National Geographic, and the Smithsonian. This time the underwater exploration was of the city of Port Royal, a city that sank in 1692 during an earthquake. Port Royal is on an island near Kingston, Jamaica. For his work on a map of the sunken city of Port Royal, Captain Weems received a lifetime membership to the National Geographic. A photograph and reproduction of the map is on page 167 of the February, 1960, issue of the National Geographic.

Business appointments, visits to relatives, or just to be in on what was going on kept Van traveling or planning a trip. His three most memorable trips were: a flight over the North Pole in an early weather reconnaissance airplane; a flight with his son from London to Alice Springs, Australia; and a four month around-the-world trip with his wife. The flight in 1948 was made in a World War II converted bomber before inflight re-fueling and North Pole flights were accepted as practical.

In February, 1949, Van's son, Lt. Comdr. G. T. Weems, had completed the Empire Test Pilot School with the Royal

¹³Life, May 9, 1955, p. 126.

Air Force in England, and had taken a leave of absence. He had agreed to fly a small twin-engine DeHaviland Rapide bi-plane from London to Alice Springs, Australia. He asked his father to come along as navigator.

Among those men who know air and aircraft, however, it created quite a stir. A pretty risky business, they said, flying over all that water with no radio, and navigation equipment so compact it requires not much more space than a Nashville telephone directory.¹⁴

The total distance flown was twelve thousand miles. The range of the aircraft was about five hundred miles. The average speed was only 110 miles-per-hour. The aircraft was delivered to the Connellan Airways of Australia, which used the plane for flying doctors to remote points in the bush country.

The pace was slow, and the stops frequent. The trip took a total of twenty-three days. This was the most enjoyable experience Van ever had with his son. "He would recall with pleasure some of the pleasant things that happened on the trip with Bee flying the plane and Captain Weems navigating."¹⁵

Van had talked about taking a trip around-the-world with his wife, but he kept putting it off because of

¹⁴The Nashville Tennessean, April 30, 1950.

¹⁵Interview with Mr. Dale Dunlap, Annapolis, Maryland, on April 16, 1973.

business or other projects. Finally in 1953, Mrs. Weems made some tentative plans, leaving plenty of open dates for side trips, and marched Van to the American Airlines plane at Washington National Airport. The trip took almost four months, with frequent stops to visit friends, sightseeing, and talks about navigation.

The Weemses spent twenty days in Japan. They visited their old friend, Vice Admiral Z. Hoshina, who had visited in their home in Annapolis. Captain Weems made a special point to meet the family of the late Dr. Ogura, who in 1927 had given him permission to publish Dr. Ogura's navigation tables. At one dinner party given for the Weemses, nine Japanese admirals were present. Each one signed a fan that was given to Mrs. Weems as a souvenir.¹⁶

On each leg of their trip, when the airplane had reached the desired altitude, Captain Weems would send his card to the pilot. The pilot, recognizing the name "Weems System of Navigation," would invite Captain Weems forward to discuss the aircraft, the flight, and navigation. Upon arrival in each country, the Weemses would make a courtesy call at the U. S. Embassy. They dined with Adlai Stevenson, Former Consul, General Doolittle, and Ambassador Luce,

¹⁶Interview with Mrs. P. V. H. Weems, Annapolis, Maryland, on April 17, 1973.

to name the most well known. They visited the normal tourist attractions, Angkor Wat, Taj Mahal and the Vatican, and stayed in famous hotels like the Imperial Hotel in Japan and the Anfa Hotel in Casablanca.¹⁷

Upon their return to the United States, Captain Weems wrote a brief account of the trip and made some general observations.

The world is fast becoming standardized in dress, food, music, transportation, and business methods. This is especially true along principal world travel routes, and is accelerated by radio, television, airplanes, movies, and automobiles.

The English language is now the principal business and diplomatic language for world intercourse.

The average American does not visualize the terrible poverty and relatively high intelligence of the great majority of human beings.

A world tour, to be entirely enjoyable, requires more than the necessary time and money - the constitution of a horse, the digestion of a camel and the patience of Job, are essential.¹⁸

¹⁷The Anfa Hotel is where President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill met in 1943.

¹⁸Mimeographed paper, "Round World Tour of P. V. H. and M. T. Weems" 19 Feb. - 7 June 1953, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

FAMILY

The story of Captain Weems' life is closely identified with the Weems System of Navigation. The Weems System of Navigation story is not complete without the details of Captain Weems' family. His wife, Margaret Thackray Weems, founded the company, acted as manager for a number of years, and encouraged her husband to continue in the navigation field. The children were legal partners and worked in the business.

Margaret Thackray's childhood was completely different from her husband's. Her father, George E. Thackray, was considered to be "the dean of the engineers of the country." He earned degrees in metallurgy and civil and mechanical engineering. He encouraged Margaret, his oldest child by over three years, to read any of the books he kept in the home, including business journals and engineering reports.

Education for Margaret was by private tutors, a couple of years of public high school, and Bryn Mawr College. She was two years younger than Van in age. However, she graduated from college the same year he graduated from Annapolis, 1912. She, like Van, was very active in sports. Her favorite activities were tennis and gymnastics. In tennis she reached the championship level by winning the

mixed doubles championship at the Westmont Tennis Club in 1913 during the second annual tournament in Southwestern Pennsylvania. She "excelled at the net" in the tournament.

While attending college, Margaret was invited to Annapolis as a blind date for "Red" Sowell by one of Red's high school female classmates in college at Bryn Mawr. Margaret met and danced with Red's "outstanding hero roommate," Mammy Weems. But Van never asked her to a "hop" nor did they correspond. When Margaret visited Annapolis, she enjoyed "watching Van's classmate, Dick Byrd, an outstanding gymnast, work out on the rings."¹ At West Point, Margaret dated a young cadet named Arnold who played opposite Van at center in the 1910 Army-Navy game. She and her date shared in the sorrow of defeat by Mammy and his Navy team at the "hop" following the game.

After graduation from Bryn Mawr, Margaret studied "library science" under Miss Burke at the Carnegie Library across from her father's office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. She was presented as a debutante and became active in the social life in the area. Having studied psychology in college, she was asked by the superintendent of the local school system that she teach a class of "backward children."

¹Interview with Mrs. P. V. H. Weems, April 17, 1973, Annapolis, Maryland.

The Thackray family attended the graduation exercises at Penn State when her oldest brother graduated in 1914. At University Park, Margaret met an engineer and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Pearce, who were on leave from the Panama Canal Commission. They were chaperoning a house party. During the graduation activities, Margaret and the Pearces became good friends, and they invited her to Panama for a summer vacation.

During the ocean voyage to Panama, Margaret became seasick. They arrived on the 4th of July and went directly to the dance given by the Canal Commission. Margaret had a migraine headache from seasickness but pretended to have a good time while dancing with the young engineers. During one dance, she glanced across the floor and "saw this guy with big ears." Margaret recognized him immediately, because "no one in the world had ears like that but P. V. H. Weems." After a couple of dances, Van asked her to lunch aboard his ship the following Sunday. She accepted, not knowing that the invitation would require her to travel across the Isthmus on a train to keep the date. Their meeting was the first time Van or Margaret had seen or heard from one another in three years.

Margaret and Alma L. Hodges were the only two eligible girls in the Canal Zone. All of the engineers knew Margaret's father by reputation and expected her to listen

with interest to engineering stories. She startled them by revealing that she knew how to work a sliderule and was familiar with some basic engineering principles. She could ride, dance, beat most of her dates at tennis, but she could not swim. Dressed in long black stockings and a long black swim suit, she presented her dates with a challenge to get her into the water.

All of the bachelor engineers were attempting to entice her to remain in Panama by finding her jobs. "Fred Sill decided that I could be the librarian and arranged an introduction to General Goethals." General Goethals' first question was, "Are you related to George Thackray?" When Margaret replied, "He is my father," General Goethals stated, "You have had library training." He asked several questions and then directed that Margaret "see the personnel officer and arrange for employment."

The duties of the "Panama Canal Technical Librarian" consisted of establishing a library from the numerous boxes of books and technical catalogues that had collected in various Canal Zone offices. She had to order shelving, file cabinets, replacement books, etc. Cataloguing the French engineering book left by Mr. Bunau-Varilla² was not a problem because Margaret had taken French in college.

²Philippe Bunau-Varilla, former chief engineer of the French Canal Company.

But the Spanish technical books had to be translated with the help of her male Jamaican assistant. Establishing and managing the library was valuable practical experience for Margaret when she had to organize the Weems System of Navigation in later years.

Van began to call on Miss Thackray as often as he could get ashore. They dined and danced at the Cotillion Club or attended parties given by the Pearces or Rear Admiral and Mrs. D. E. Dismukes. The first "serious" entry Van made in his diary followed a hunting trip.

August 15, 1914 - Reached Gamgoa at noon and joined Mr. and Mrs. Pearce and party of thirteen, then began our sixteen mile trip up the Chagnes river to our camping place. After an informal supper, two hunting parties were organized. Miss Thackray and I went together, and took a native boy for a guide. We hunted till nearly twelve, saw a few eyes with the head light. Shot all of our shells away, and had the most novel and interesting trip through the jungles I ever made. Miss Thackray' "Tack" wore riding trousers, puttees, a plain panama hat and a flannel shirt. She carried a pistol in her belt, and was in fine trim every way. After returning to camp, Tack and I proceeded to dry out by the fire and talked till 4:45 A.M.

August 23, 1914 - Spent the night after the hop at the Happy Pearces. Miss Thackray and I sat in the hammock and talked all night. This is the third time we have done that - looks serious and in fact I do think a lot of her. I am honored she would talk all night with me.

August 26, 1914 - To the dentist then to Panama to see Miss Thackray - spent the night at the Happy Pearce's. I am getting it pretty bad with "Tack." Everyone seems to like her including myself. She is bright, original, witty and simply charming.³

TO M. T. BY ME

Dame moon might shine,
 At the same time,
 On both my love and me;
 And each beam bear
 Some message clear
 To the dear one across the sea.
 Yet, all the dreams
 On all the beams
 Of all the Moonshine fair
 Would not equal
 The thoughts hopeful
 Sent each day on the air.⁴

Van never formally proposed to Margaret. The first demonstration of their intentions occurred after a deer hunting trip with Mr. and Mrs. Pearce. They missed the last train forming at Gatun to go across the lake. Someone in the party made arrangements for passage on the only boat available, a small, coal burning, work boat. Sitting cramped in the small boat, "sweating in the noon-day sun, he had the nerve to hold my hand, and I had the nerve to let him."⁵ Word soon got around that they were making wedding plans. When Van's ship had made a trip up the east coast he visited Johnstown to ask Mr. and Mrs. Thackray for Margaret's hand in marriage. Mr. Thackray and Van hit it off immediately, and Mr. Thackray gave his approval of the marriage. The wedding was to be held as soon as everything could be arranged.

⁴October 30, 1914 entry in Diary, loc. cit.

⁵Interview with Mrs. P. V. H. Weems, April 16, 1973, Ibid.

Margaret returned to Pennsylvania on a convalescent leave after an attack of appendicitis in the summer of 1915. She had been gone only a few weeks when Van was suddenly reassigned from Panama to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He requested Margaret to meet him in New York when the ship docked there enroute to Portsmouth. Mr. Thackray, a man of impulse, suggested that "they finish it off now" rather than have Margaret go back to Panama, plan the wedding, and then return for the ceremony.

They were married on August 31, 1915, at a quiet, private, church ceremony. Mr. Thackray gave a reception for the couple at the Astor Hotel for family friends and the members of Van's crew. Margaret and her maid of honor, a cousin, had been occupying a suite where Van and Margaret planned to stay on their "honeymoon." After the reception, Van went down to the desk and said, "I would like to change a name on the hotel registry." The desk clerk looked very indignant and announced, "That has never been done at the Astor - it cannot be done." Van announced with pride, "I have just done it."⁶

After a brief honeymoon in New York, the newlyweds moved to their new duty station and set up housekeeping in

⁶Interview with Mrs. P. V. H. Weems on April 17, 1973 at Annapolis, Maryland.

a large, but comfortable home.

. . . There is room for at least three families. Everything is big except for the rent and that is six dollars a week including a dollar a week for the use of linen and the orchard. . . . it strikes me that just any girl would not care to stay alone in a strange house. This and dozens of other ways is where Margaret suits me so well.⁷

They were not able to take leave and visit Tennessee until the Christmas holidays. The trip was a revelation for Margaret. They rode a train to Cumberland Furnace, Tennessee, then hired a wagon and a team of mules for the six mile trip to the farm.

The trips about the country side to see the "site of future pikes" in springless wagons added to Margaret's dislike of the "wild country in Tennessee."

Van's wife was Miss Margaret Thackray of Pennsylvania, and she had enough northern thrift, ambition, and alertness of mind, as well as cultural knowledge, to be somewhat disgusted with the crudeness and thriftlessness of our Barton's Creek Community. I feel, however, that she may be somewhat intolerant in this respect, for out of this crudeness and lack of alertness has come a considerable amount of brains and ambition and qualities of which perhaps her own husband and children are exemplars.⁸

Margaret was three months pregnant with their first child, but "it was not fashionable at the time to announce to the world" her condition. On July 21, 1916, Philip Van

⁷Letter from P. V. H. Weems to Judge Joe B. Weems, dated October 14, 1915, Tennessee State Library, Ibid.

⁸Unpublished autobiography of Andrew Gennett, p. 41, Ibid.

Horn, Jr., was born. When he was about four years old, he gave his baby sister, Margaret Thackray II, born on January 27, 1919, a nickname that stayed with her all of her life. Philip was trying to peer over the side of the baby carriage to see "his little Missy." The youngest son, George Thackray, born on January 5, 1921, nicknamed himself. His mother was talking to the baby trying to get him to pronounce some words, "Where is the baby?" The baby answered, "Bee."

Van was a "home lover" and enjoyed being around his growing family. Margaret believed in staying home with the children and sharing with them the joys of youth. Both parents believed in keeping the family together. They took their children to chapel services and encouraged their belief in "Christian ethics." As Van was shifted from assignment to assignment or to port after port, the family moved to the nearest town to establish their home. From marriage to retirement, they moved about forty times.

As the children grew older, they joined their parents in physical exercise that both parents enjoyed.

December 11, 1932 - Licked Philip Jr. at tennis, thereby getting revenge for a previous trimming from him.

January 21, 1934 - Philip beat me in a race (swimming) for [sic] 1st time?

January 8, 1933 - Tennis with Margaret and the boys. I beat Philip 8-6. He and I about tied Bee and MTW in doubles.⁹

⁹P. V. H. Weems "1933 Diary," Tennessee State Library, Ibid.

Van was very proud of his children, and it "hurt" him when he had to discipline them.

February 3, 1933 - Bee has been promoted a full grade, makes high records in intelligence tests and is good looking. Missy won second prize of two dollars for a heading in the Coronado Journal. Philip is doing fairly well--guess we have some "unusual" children.

January 26, 1934 - Bee and Philip scrapping, Missy forbidden to go out on general principles for previous disobediences - went out for one hour anyway & I punished her with ten light lashes with a white cotton belt. She didn't cry. Hated to do it.¹⁰

Philip entered the Naval Academy in 1936. He did not do as well as the family had hoped.

Philip has got a provisional turn-back, and if he keeps his nose clean and works hard till June, he will be O.K. While I hate to see him lose the year, I know it will be for the best. Philip has been rather slow to develop mentally and to take responsibility of his age, but I hope now he is squared away.¹¹

Philip "bilged" out of the Academy and attended the University of Virginia, majoring in Journalism. He entered the Officer's Training School at Quantico, Virginia, in August, 1941. Following graduation, he went into the Marines and later World War II.

This issue of WEEMSANA calls for its first sad announcement -- the death in line of duty of Major Philip Van Horn Weems Jr., USMC, somewhere in the South Pacific.

¹⁰P. V. H. Weems, "1933 and 1934 Diaries," Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

¹¹Letter from P. V. H. Weems to Brig. Gen. G. H. Weems, dated March 29, 1936, Tennessee State Library, Ibid.

Phil, as he was known to all of us, was promoted to Major on the day of his death, and at the time was Commanding Officer of an Anti-tank Battery of Artillery of the 9th Marines. Not much is known concerning the details of Phil's death. Following is a quotation from Uncle Van's letter of July 28, 1943: "On my return from a two-months' voyage to North Africa, I learn of Philip's death about a month ago with his mechanized outfit in the South Pacific. I don't know much of the details, but I think his death was largely an accident involving the motorized equipment in which he was moving. Thus it happens that my oldest boy is the first one of the next generation to go in this big conflict. I remember saying when it started that according to the law of chance we would have to lose probably two or three of our group by death and perhaps three or four wounded before this is over. As tough as it is for Margaret and me and all of us, I feel we are merely one of millions who will suffer the same sorrow on these occasions."¹²

Bee entered the Naval Academy in 1938 and established an outstanding record as a midshipman. "He was the five-striper in the U. S. Naval Academy Class of 1942, which in those days meant the top midshipman officer in the class."¹³ He was, also, a varsity lacrosse player, and, following in the footsteps of his father, the Eastern Intercollegiate Wrestling Champion in 1941. "The only man who has ever subdued Bee in wrestling is his father."¹⁴ Senior officers

¹²Weemsana, October 1, 1943, Volume I, Number 4, p. 1.

¹³"Solomons Battle Log" U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, August, 1962, p. 81.

¹⁴Oliver Jensen, Life, "Ensign Weems," December 29, 1941, p. 54.

at the Academy said, "He has the poise of an admiral and the kid's only twenty."¹⁵

Bee's class graduated six months early. He went directly into the war aboard the destroyer McCalla. He received the Silver Star for attempting to save a sinking destroyer in the Battle of Solomon Islands off Cape Esperance. He received pilot training and served later in the war aboard the carrier Intrepid, receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross with gold stars and the Air Medal with four gold stars. After the war, he served as navigator, an aide to Rear Admiral William Keen Harrill, and as a test pilot.

Bee "engaged in the flight testing of all types of aircraft - from helicopters and gliders to 600-mile-an-hour jets."¹⁶ On January 16, 1951, he was testing a new type of pontoons on a single engine Stinson airplane on the Delaware River near New Castle, Delaware. During a practice takeoff, "a high wave on the river struck the Stinson, killing the engine and causing the plane to sink."¹⁷

The death of their sole surviving son was a severe blow to Captain and Mrs. Weems. They had "accepted" the

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Editorial, New York Herald Tribune, January 20, 1951.

¹⁷Feature article, New York Herald Tribune, January 20, 1951.

death of Philip because it happened in time of war. Bee had flown around the world several times and successfully tested the latest high speed air craft. The family knew that there was a danger of the high performance exploding in flight. But the death of their son in a small single-engine plane by drowning could not be explained or easily accepted.

The board on geographical names announced that seventy-seven new names have been chosen for the features of the Ellsworth Mountain Range in Antarctica. The names are of people who have in some way contributed in the fields of science, exploration, aviation, or were support personnel. By the suggestion of Admiral R. E. Byrd, one of the mounts in the range was named Mount Weems, for Captain P. V. H. Weems and his late sons. Admiral Byrd wanted a mount named in the memory of Captain Weems' sons who died in the military service. However, this could not be done because they were not affiliated with work in that area. Since Captain Weems had sent Admiral Byrd original tables, a watch, and other data which he used on his antarctic expeditions, the name Mount Weems could be used for the Weems family itself, thus including Captain Weems' sons. Mount Weems is located at Latitude 77° 27' 5", Longitude 86° 10' W.¹⁸

¹⁸Undated paper in P. V. H. Weems Collection, Tennessee State Library, Ibid. See also The National Geographic Magazine map "Antarctica" dated February, 1963.

Missy continued with the art work that she enjoyed as a teenager. She is now an accomplished artist. After a "one-artist" art show by Missy, a critic said, "a most mature show by a painter with a most immature name." Missy was the only child of Captain and Mrs. Weems to marry. She and her husband, Charlie Dodds,¹⁹ warmed her parents' hearts with three grandchildren. The grandchildren were named Thackray Weems Dodds, Philip Van Horn Weems Dodds, and Nathaniel Chapman Weems Dodds.

¹⁹Captain Charles Robbins Dodds, Retired, Annapolis Class of 1937.

SPACE

When the Russians placed their sputnik in orbit in October, 1957, Captain Weems began to study the problem of navigation in outer space. He knew that the space navigator's task would be to establish his "three dimension space" position for any desired instant of time and to control the spacecraft so that it would follow the desired orbital path. Captain Weems followed his normal pattern of work when he started a new project: research the subject, develop a theory, test the theory, write the conclusions to get people interested in the solution, and finally develop the instrumentation needed.

During the research, he learned that reducing the weight of navigation equipment by one pound would allow the thrust at launch to be reduced one thousand pounds. With this in mind, he worked toward a space navigation system that would be lightweight and simple to use. The instrumentation of his solution to the space navigation problem was a couple of lightweight transparent plastic spheres. One sphere was about the size of half a basketball. When the space navigator would "peer through the sphere at the earth, he would see the planet against a backdrop of

navigational stars. Two simple maneuvers of the plastic (bowl) and he can read off his position."¹

Captain Weems applied for a patent on his "Method for Space Navigation." On October 3, 1961, he was issued patent number 3002278. NASA was receiving all of the support that it could use about this time in an effort to catch Russia in the "race for space." The Navy had traditionally been the active service in the science of navigation, starting with marine navigation, the development of charts, compasses, chronometers, sextants, and radios. Both the Navy and the Air Force had worked on air navigation. In space navigation the Navy suddenly realized that it was left "in the starting blocks" while the Air Force, through NASA, was charging down the track.

Because of Captain Weems' patent on space navigation, which is believed to be the first space navigation patent, the Chief of Naval Personnel contacted Captain Weems about "conducting a class on space navigation." In a letter,² written by the Chief of Naval Personnel concerning the class, the statement is made that "This could well be an opportunity for the Navy to take the lead in this field."

¹Herbert Thompson, Associated Press Writer, printed newspaper article without a date or the name of a newspaper in the P. V. H. Weems Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

²Space Navigation Handbook, NAVPERS 92988, p. 118.

In answer to the request, Captain Weems suggested that he be called to active duty or given a flat fee.³ Thus, on January 23, 1961, orders were issued calling Captain Weems to active duty for a period of six months. Captain Weems lacked two months being seventy-two years of age. He was, without doubt, the oldest United States Naval officer ever called to active duty.

Captain Weems was given an office at the Academy and assigned four NROTC Ensigns reported to be "at or near genius level." The four Ensigns assigned were: Gene M. Cunningham, Paul D. Bowman, Rod L. Mayer, and George D. Zally. Cunningham and Zally had degrees in Physics, Mayer in Mathematics, and Bowman in Electrical Engineering. Classes or discussion sessions were conducted like a seminar with each student encouraged to specialize in one phase of the space navigation problem. The end result of the class was that the Navy extended Captain Weems on active duty for six additional months to compile the data assembled into a book. The book was written as a textbook for a broad introductory course in spatial navigation presented at the graduate level.

Before and after his year of active duty in 1961, Captain Weems acted as a "navigational" consultant to private

³Ibid., p. 119.

industry, the Navy, and the U. S. Government. In 1963, he served on the Carroll Committee which was convened to study the governmental-industrial conflicts on aeronautical charting. As the "grand old man of navigation," his opinions were requested and carefully considered. As a consultant, Mammy would "tell it as he sees it," and not merely say what the listener wanted to hear.

While on active duty in 1961, the Navy issued a physical fitness test for officers over forty years of age assigned to staff positions. Mammy believed that he could pass the test at the age of seventy-two. While taking the test, he hurt his knee attempting to broad jump the required distance. The only sport that he could participate in with proficiency after his injury was water polo and skin diving.

When you stop to think about it, water polo is a perfect sport for a man my age. If I were to play football they'd tear me up. But everything is slow motion when contact is made in the water. You don't really get hurt.⁴

When Van was in Annapolis, Sunday afternoons had been the time that he would meet his old classmates and friends at the Academy pool for a "friendly" game of water polo. If the young midshipmen requested to join the game, they were invited to do so at their own risk.

⁴Hal Burdett, Evening Capital (Annapolis), July 26, 1969, p. 3.

Mammy Weems is normally not referred to as an "old salt." However, he could be correctly called that because he held an Unlimited Oceans Captain's License and a Chief Engineer's License. An authority in marine navigation⁵ stated that "he has never heard of anyone other than Captain Weems that held both licenses."

The honors that Captain Weems received over the years are too numerous to list. Three that were presented to him in later years in ascending order of personal value to Mrs. P. V. H. Weems are: The Institute of Navigation Special Gold Medal; The La Gorce Medal presented by the National Geographic Society; and the Magellanic Premium Award.

The citation for the Institute of Navigation Special Gold Medal award presented to Captain Philip Van Horn Weems in 1962 reads in part:

The name of Philip Van Horn Weems has been synonymous with navigation throughout the memory of virtually all of those now actively engaged in this field of endeavor. . . His effective teachings and generous counsel have started an untold number of outstanding navigators on the right course along the track of successful careers. . . . His forward thinking has consistently kept pace with the times . . . Philip Van Horn Weems has truly become a legendary figure as the very personification of navigation. After fifty years of distinguished service to the science of navigation, he still goes forward with energy, patience and a devotion which the Institute of Navigation is privileged to recognize.⁶

⁵Interview with G. D. Dunlap, Ibid.

⁶P. V. H. Weems Collection, Tennessee State Library, Ibid.

The La Gorce Medal was awarded to Captain P. V. H. Weems on December 11, 1968, in Washington, D. C., by Chief Justice Earl Warren. The award was made for Captain Weems' contributions to science and exploration through pioneering achievements in marine, air, and space navigation. The La Gorce Medal had been given only once before, in 1967, to the American Antarctic Mountaineering Expedition for its successful assault on Antarctica's highest mountains.

The American Philosophical Society awarded the Magellanic Prize to Captain Weems for his contribution to the art of navigation by the development of quicker and simpler methods suitable for use in the air. "In addition he has for twenty years promoted his methods by teaching and writing, with the result that his system and devices are now in world-wide use. This is the best evidence of present useful application of his basic idea."⁷ This society was organized by Ben Franklin. The medal awarded to Captain Weems had been given only twenty times since 1786.

Van is a strong believer in man's ability to think. He says, "the human brain is the best computer of them all and the eye is the best scanner." Van believes that all too frequently our young navigators and pilots do things

⁷P. V. H. Weems Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

today with their automatic equipment when they do not understand what is really going on. If they had to navigate without these devices, they would be lost.

In his diary on September 4, 1963, Captain Weems listed several things he wanted to discuss with his twelve year old grandson. This checklist provides a good summary of his thinking at age seventy-four, and how, according to him, a young person should orient his life.

- Economics - start at grass roots, know how much things cost
- Exercise - regular exercise builds and tones the body
- Diet - eat good food
- Habits - establish them and make actions semi-automatic, personal habits influence efficiency
- avoid coffee, tobacco, and alcohol til 21
- Church - make a decision on church affiliation
- P. V. H. - Use me and my experience to learn what not to do
- Mental - develop mental capacity, when completely rested, let brain go to work - night or day. Try to understand the brain.
- Dress - people are influenced by personal appearance and dress and it is easier to influence people⁸

Add to this list the advice that Captain Weems continues to give to young men who have new ideas on how to do things better. If you have an idea, stick with it. Don't be discouraged when it fails to work as planned. Do not give up if you are criticized by your superiors or peers. Stick-with-it, that is the key to success.

⁸P. V. H. Weems, "1963 Diary." This is not a direct quote; the handwriting was difficult to read and some words have been added. Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division.

Captain Weems has led a full and productive life. He has been active in all four fields of navigation: sea, air, space and inner space. The four underwater explorations with Mr. Ed Link are the inner space navigational explorations referred to by the Captain.

Captain Weems is proud of his Tennessee farm heritage, and even prouder of the fact that he made the most of the opportunities that life allowed him. He calls himself "lucky" when speaking of his achievements. Those close to Captain Weems credit his success to his refusal to give up, and not to lady luck.

This paper has been an attempt verbally to toast Captain Weems for a lifetime of service and thoughtfulness to his fellowman. Therefore, it would be fitting and proper to conclude this paper with a group of words arranged in a toast to depict Captain Weems' full life, with its tragedies and its achievements. After numerous attempts, it became obvious that the results could not equal a toast Captain Weems composed for his Annapolis Class.

Lift up your glasses high
 Each sparkling to the brim,
 And while we toast our dear old class,
 Let every eye glow dim.
 Though many days have passed
 And dark clouds hide the blue,
 To you Dear Class of 1912
 We are always true.⁹

⁹Written on a dinner napkin from Carvel Hall, Annapolis, Maryland. P. V. H. Weems Collection, Tennessee State Library, Ibid.

By changing only two words--class and 1912--we can lift our
glasses of gratitude and say:

Lift up your glasses high
Each sparkling to the brim,
And while we toast our dear old man,
Let every eye glow dim.
Though many days have passed
And dark clouds hide the blue,
To you Dear ole Van
We are always true.

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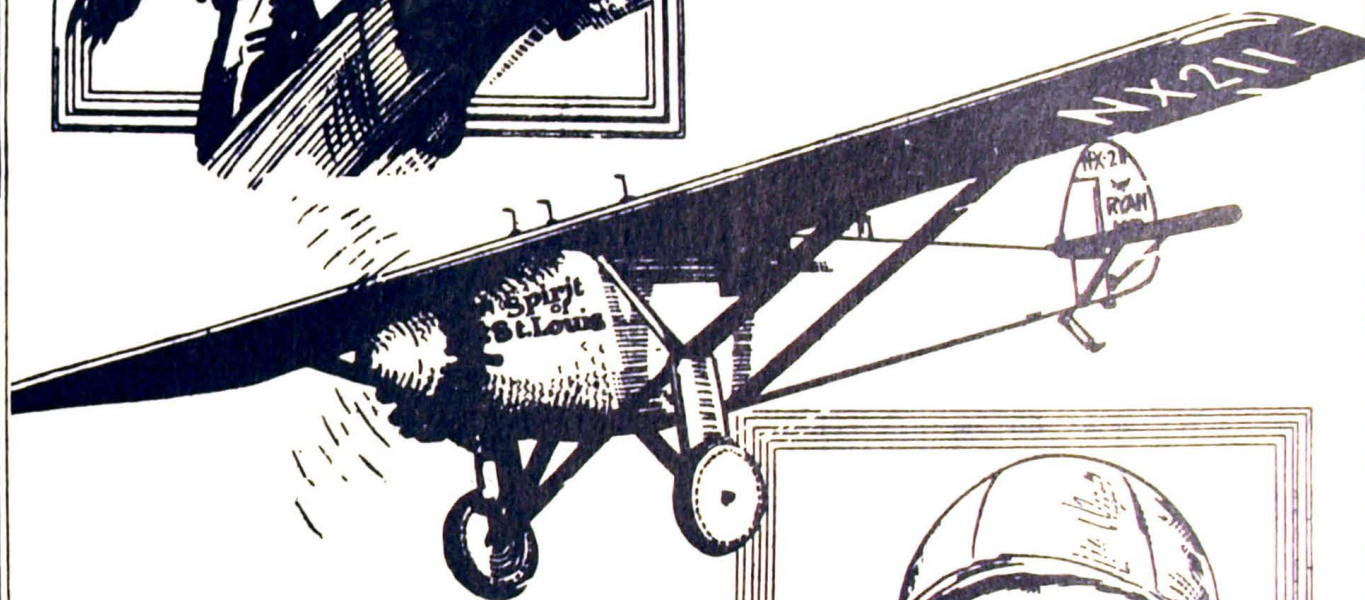
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the collection consists of approximately 15,000 items,
Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. MS 69-1902).



LIEUTENANT
COMMANDER
P. V. H. WEEMS

THE WEEMS SYSTEM OF NAVIGATION was established in 1928 and is based on the patents, copyrights, and developments of Lt.-Commander P. V. H. Weems. It has been expanded to cover the entire field of sea and air navigation. The outstanding contributions by Commander Weems include the Star Altitude Curves, the Line of Position Book, the Second - Setting Watch, the Gold Medal Text Book *Air Navigation*, improvements in the Bureau of Standards Type Aircraft Sextant, the Design of the Air Almanac, numerous articles, etc., etc. Those interested in navigation will do well to adopt this modern system.



598 MADISON AVENUE
NEW YORK CITY
October 4, 1928

Dear Commander Weems:
I wish to express to you my appreciation of your kindness in giving me such excellent instruction in your short methods of Aerial Navigation. I have profited by it and wish you success in your work in this important field.

With kind regards, I am,
Sincerely yours,
C. A. LINDBERGH

Com. P. V. H. Weems
U.S.S. Cuyama
San Diego, California



COLONEL
CHARLES A.
LINDBERGH

CHARLES A. LINDBERGH
 678 THE HUNTER, BOSTON, MASS.
 FOR THE FURNISHING OF AIRCRAFT, ETC.
 100 BROAD AVENUE
 NEW YORK CITY

October 4, 1928

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With kind regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

Commander P. V. H. Weems
 U.S.S. Cassin
 San Diego, California

C. A. Lindbergh

BYRD ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION
 9 BRIMMER STREET
 BOSTON, MASS.

Los Angeles, Calif.
 Hotel Biltmore
 October 6, 1928.

Weems System of Navigation
 San Diego, Calif.

Gentlemen:

Our expedition has received your navigation equipment and methods, and judging by the tests already made, we believe this material will prove valuable to us in our polar work.

We especially appreciate the sun tables rushed to completion for our use, the second-setting watch, and the star altitude curves.

Yours very truly,

Gerbyrd

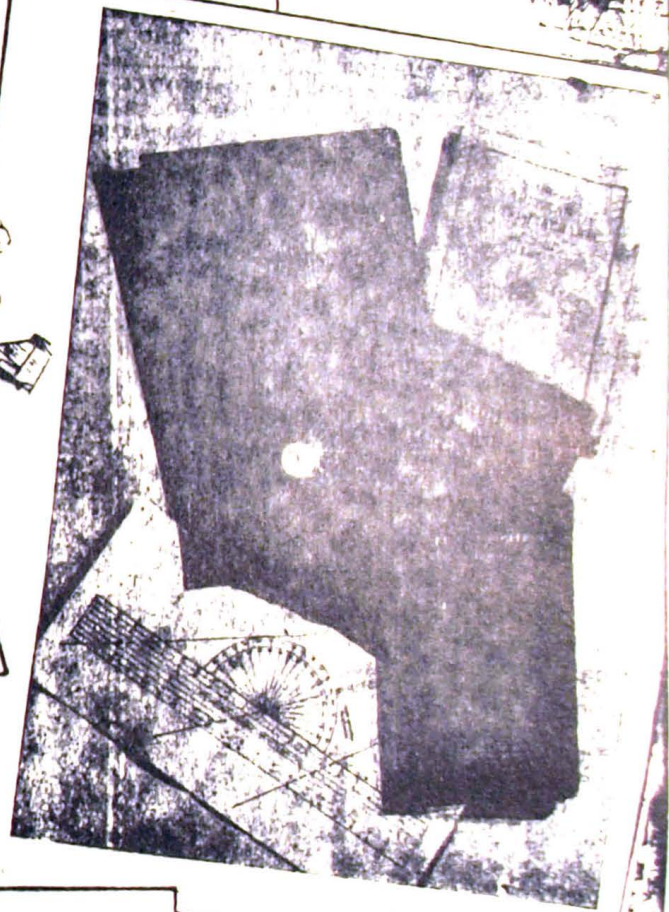
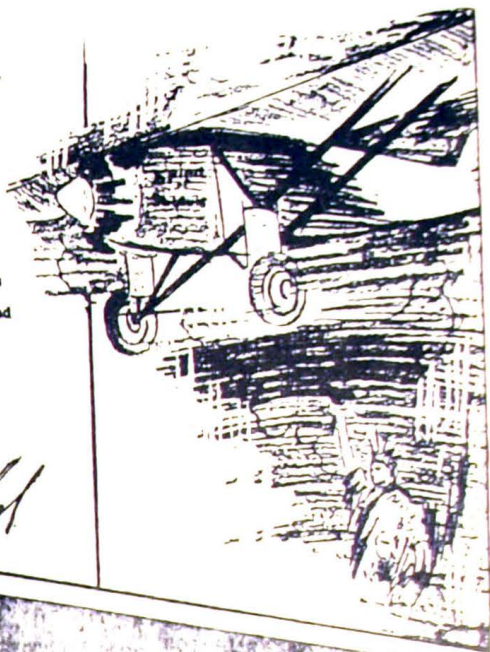
R. E. Byrd

NAME OF PERSON	ADDRESS
Mr. Byrd	San Diego
Mr. Weems	San Diego
Mr. Lindbergh	San Diego
Mr.

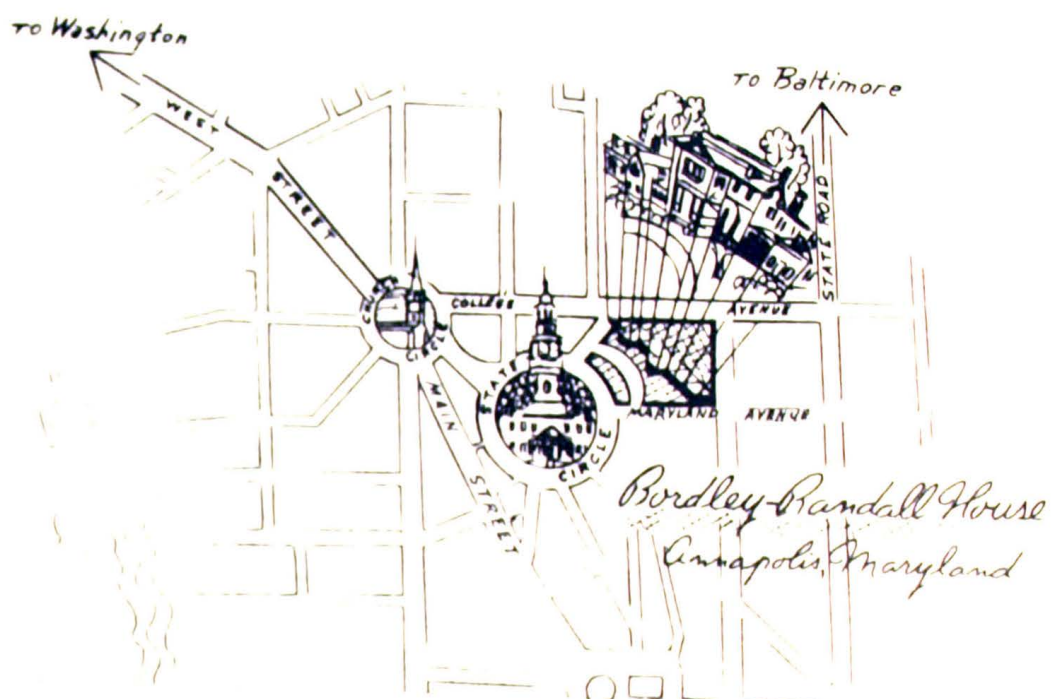
WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

NAME OF PERSON	ADDRESS
Mr. Byrd	San Diego
Mr. Weems	San Diego
Mr. Lindbergh	San Diego
Mr.

Received at
 GRAND CANYON ARIZ OCT 3 1928
 COMMANDER P V H WEEMS
 946 B AVE CORONADO CALIF
 DELIGHTED TO READ LIST OF SUBSCRIBERS TO WEEMS SYSTEM OF NAVIGATION
 CAN I SECURE IT COMPLETE OR IN PART-NOW
 LINCOLN, ELLSWORTH







Bordley-Randall House, Annapolis, Maryland

The Home of Captain and Mrs. P. V. H. Weems
Since 1939.