

## OVER THE BACK FENCE

By Jack Fichter

## New York City, Rockettes brightened holiday season

New York City takes on an extra magical quality at Christmas, and has been the subject of movies and books. It seems to be a destination for many local residents who want to experience big stores and big shows.

Rather than drive into the city, we rode a bus chartered by the 4-H Club that left from Rutgers' Cooperative Extension at 7 a.m. and had us in New York at 10 a.m. We had until 7 p.m. to do whatever we wished.

Our son surprised us with tickets to Radio City Music Hall's Christmas Spectacular featuring the Rockettes. He stood outside in the cold for two hours to purchase the tickets.

I have wanted to see Radio City Music Hall since I was a child and five decades later it met all of my expectations. The building itself is a wonder. The Christmas Spectacular runs through Jan. 5.

I worked on a stage crew in school, so I have always been fascinated with staging technology. While Radio City Music Hall dates to 1932, everything in the current Christmas show is state-of-the-art. My experience in theater was using heavy canvas backdrops that were tied to battens and hoisted high above the stage. That has been replaced with projection, which provides almost unlimited possibilities for scenery.

The stage at Radio City Music Hall is loaded with hydraulic lifts that not only bring the orchestra out of its pit to the stage but move the entire orchestra to the rear of the stage, allowing the Rockettes to dance close to the audience. They provided all the rou-

tines you would expect, including the Parade of the Wooden Soldiers. The show captured all aspects of Christmas from a stage filled with dancing Santas to a Nativity scene with live camels and sheep.

A cast of 88 dancers and singers performs the show four times per day. The building itself is fascinating with its art deco lobby featuring a giant Christmas tree chandelier.

We also visited the Museum of Modern Art to see Van Gogh's "Starry Night." Another planned destination was FAO Schwarz but the line to the iconic store stretched for an entire block, and we were told it could take more than an hour to get inside.

We settled on Saks Fifth Avenue, which was a major disappointment to me with its ridiculously overpriced designer merchandise such as \$500 T-shirts and \$60 Christmas tree ornaments. Our only purchase was a \$5 cup of Ralph Lauren coffee.

I consider myself devoid of any sophistication; I buy my clothes on sale from L.L. Bean and Land's End, so Saks was out of my league.

We saw the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree along with many other folks, as New York was very crowded. We had a nice lunch in an Irish pub.

I no longer have the patience to drive in New York traffic, so taking the bus was a pleasure. Leaving at nightfall, it took 45 minutes to get from Bryant Park at 40th Street and Fifth Avenue to the Lincoln Tunnel. I'm glad I wasn't driving.

On the return trip, the movie "Elf" was shown on the bus which helped pass the time.

It was a magical day in a magical city.



## OTHER SIDE

## Celebrate holidays with family you choose

By MARK ALLEN

Mrs. Judge said it best when she encouraged recruits to, "Celebrate the holidays with the family that you choose."

Wearing the uniform of one's country can be a hard life, especially around the holidays. Married to a career Coast Guardsman, Judge knows the life well; hence her words of encouragement to a base chapel full of recruits after a Sunday service during the holidays.

I was privileged to have been in the chapel that particular Sunday and Judge's words transported me to a distant past, actually several distant pasts.

I fired my first missile, an AIM 7e2 Sparrow, on Easter Sunday 1978. I was a first lieutenant assigned to Marine fighter squadron VMFA 333, the "Shamrocks." We had deployed from our home field, Beaufort, S.C., to the Naval Air Station Roosevelt Roads on the northeast coast of Puerto Rico.

The goal of the deployment was to acquaint new guys, like myself, with the Phantom's primary weapon system, the AIM 7 Sparrow missile. It was also a good opportunity to exercise the squadron's maintenance and ordnance troops while at the same time ensuring that our Phantoms were combat-ready.

I had been crewed with another lieutenant, David "Sarge" York, for this deployment. We were not scheduled to fly that Easter Sunday, so Dave was getting in a round of golf while I was puffing my way through a 6-mile run when a blue Navy pickup pulled up next to me.

The driver rolled down the window and shouted, "Hey lieutenant, you're up. You and York need to get your butts down to the field, ASAP."

Thirty minutes later we were driving through the gate past a contingent of local protesters who were not at all happy that we were flying and firing missiles on the holiest day of the

Christian calendar.

Two hours after that, we were winging our way eastward toward the island of Vieques and its associated gunnery range.

Things happen quickly when flying Phantoms. We checked in with the controller, were given a vector and pointed our nose in the direction of our "target."

Sarge dumped the nose and stroked the burners, pushing us through the mach. Meanwhile, I acquired the bogey at 18 miles, locked on and commenced an intercept. The controller cleared us to engage and 11 seconds later a vicious thump under my right boot informed me that our \$381,169.74 AIM 7 was on its way.

Looking forward through the bullet-proof windscreen, I watched as the 12-foot-long, 188-pound missile corkscrewed, then straightened out and began tracking true. It was a good day, a very good day, but I was far, far from home.

Three years later, same squadron, same fighter, now home-based in Iwakuni, Japan on the other side of the world. Crewed with Dave "Chicken Man" Law, we were part of a two-aircraft detachment sitting air-defense alert at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa. There were eight of us flyers total and it was Thanksgiving; always a tough time to be away from family.

Actually, there were nine of us because Mrs. Hulick, Bruce's wife, had followed her husband to Japan and then on to Okinawa. An adventure-some, resourceful and very determined lady, Hulick always seemed to turn up no matter where we had deployed. And this time, she didn't turn-up empty handed, but had brought along a turkey and all the fixings.

I'll never forget that Thanksgiving that she gave us. Nine of us sat around a small BOQ (Bachelor Officer Quarters) room sharing drumsticks,

stuffing, green bean casserole, mashed potatoes, gravy and stories of Thanksgivings past.

It was the best gift she could have given us, and it was, for me, perhaps the most memorable Thanksgiving of my life.

It is also why Gretchen and I open our home to Coast Guard recruits during Operation Fireside. I cannot give back to Hulick, but I can pay it forward to young recruits just starting out in their careers. And as I say to them every year, "Operation Fireside makes my holiday."

That being said, I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to those of you who participated in Operation Fireside this year and in years past. You have done a wonderful thing and trust me when I tell you that those young Coasties will never, ever forget you.

I also want to thank Mr. and Mrs. Ballan who volunteer to coordinate the effort every year. Finally, to all our Other Side readers, we wish all of you a happy holiday, be it a merry Christmas, a happy Hanukkah or a blessed Kwanzaa. Be well, be safe and take care of each other.

The radio version of this column at 1 p.m. Jan. 3 on WFLA 101.5 FM will feature "The Life and Times of Robert Smalls, and His Cape May Connection," featuring Jeffrey Hebron.

Smalls was the slave who absconded with a confederate gunboat during the Civil War and escaped to freedom with his crew and families. Smalls went on to fight in 11 battles and was the first black captain in the U.S. Navy. He later served in Congress.

It's an amazing true story and will be recounted by Hebron through this radio theater.

Mark Allen is a retired lieutenant colonel with 27 years' flying experience with the U.S. Marines and Air Force National Guard. The Other Side radio show is broadcast at 1 p.m. Fridays on WFLA-101.5 FM

## WAVES FROM THE PAST

## City buys bank building for use as city hall

The Cape May Star and Wave, the nation's oldest weekly resort newspaper, has been published since 1854. Each week, we revisit stories from earlier editions. This week we turn the calendar back to Dec. 17, 1942, when the city purchased a bank building at Ocean and Washington streets for a new city hall and the Star and Wave praised the purchase in an editorial. The building today is the Winterwood shop:

Purchase of the Camden Trust Company bank building for use as a city hall is one of the most progressive steps taken by the City Commission during this administration. Acquisition of the building to house municipal offices serves two very important purposes. It provides adequate offices for city departments and at the same time eliminates the depressing aspect of having one of the city's most impressive structures standing vacant.

The purchase price of \$7,500 makes the new city hall building one of the bargains of modern times. The huge vault alone could not be replaced for that price even if there were no restrictions on such purchases during the present emergency.

To be sure, acquisition of the building removes it from taxation, but the loss is not nearly so real as it may first appear. The county Board of Taxation this year chopped

some \$7,000 from the assessed valuation after an appeal from the former owner, and because of the difficulty in finding any local enterprise that could utilize the building profitably a continued vacancy and additional tax cuts are inevitable.

Cape May for years has needed a new city hall. Several years ago, there was talk of attempting to obtain a WPA project or some similar federal assistance to construct a new building, but it was found the cost to the city would be prohibitive.

The idea of constructing a new high school and using the present building for a city hall was also considered, but here again the cost to local taxpayers and the difficulty of obtaining adequate federal aid made the plan impractical.

Meanwhile, city departments labored in antiquated and inadequate quarters. Proper facilities were not available for permanent filing and safekeeping of important records. Cape May has for years been a leading contender for the doubtful distinction of having the worst municipal building in South Jersey.

The location of the new city hall is ideal. At the principal intersection of the business district, it is easily accessible from all sections of the city.

Its architecture is emi-

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Have something on your mind? Write a letter to the editor:

Email to: [cmstarwave@comcast.net](mailto:cmstarwave@comcast.net).

Include your name, address, daytime phone.

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## How to Contact Your Representatives

## U.S. Senate

Sen. George Helmy, 528 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510, (202) 224-4744; Go to [www.helmy.Senate.gov/contact](http://www.helmy.Senate.gov/contact).

Sen. Cory A. Booker, 141 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510, (202) 224-3224; Go to [www.booker.senate.gov/contact.cfm](http://www.booker.senate.gov/contact.cfm).

U.S. House of Representatives  
Congressman, District 2, Jeff Van Drew, 331 Cannon House Office Bldg., Washington, D.C.

20515, (202) 225-6572; (202) 225-3318 (fax), website [vander.house.gov](http://vander.house.gov); District Office: 331 Tilton Road, #3, Northfield, NJ 08225. (732) 233-9539.

## Governor

Gov. Phil Murphy, State House, Trenton, NJ 08625, (609) 292-6000.

## Legislators, District I

Sen. Michael Testa (R), Assemblyman Erik Simonsen, (R), Assemblyman Antoine McClellan (R) — Contact state legislators at: School House Office Park, 211 S. Main St., Suite 104, Cape May

Court House, NJ 08210; Phone: (609) 778-2012; email: [Sentesta@njleg.org](mailto:Sentesta@njleg.org), [asmsimonsen@njleg.org](mailto:asmsimonsen@njleg.org), [asmcclellan@njleg.org](mailto:asmcclellan@njleg.org).

## Local Government

Cape May: Mayor Zack Mullcock and City Hall, (609) 884-9535, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Cape May Point: Mayor Robert Moffatt, Borough Hall, (609) 884-8468, ext. 20, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Lower Township: Mayor Frank Sippel and Township Hall, (609) 886-2005, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

West Cape May: Mayor Carol Sabo and Borough Hall, (609) 884-1005, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.