

THE NAVY SCHOOL

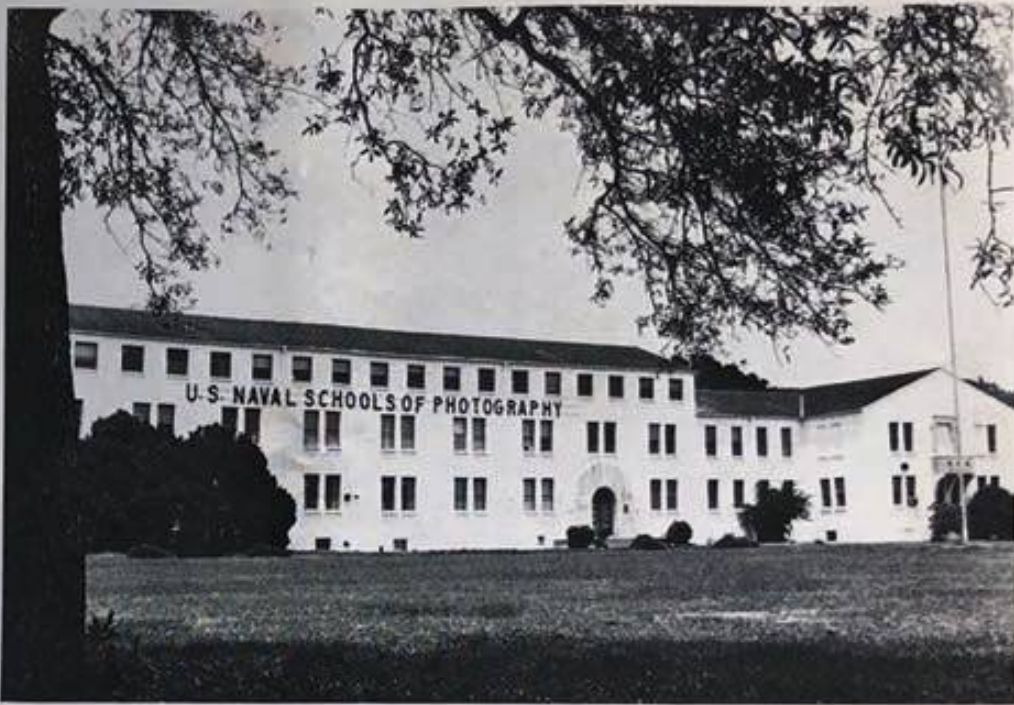
CAMERAS AWEIGH . . . HOW A CRASH COURSE TURNS OUT TOP-NOTCH PHOTOGRAPHERS

BY MIKE LAURANCE

Me spend a week on a Navy base? Long haired, bearded, pacifist Mike Laurance spend a week with the military establishment? It sounded like a joke at first. Later, I ascertained that Farber wasn't kidding . . . I was, in fact, to spend a week at the Navy School of Photography in Pensacola, Florida. So, armed with visions of such gonzo journalists as Hunter Thompson and their visits to the other side, I called the Navy.

Captain C.H. Boldt, from my insulated position at the L.A. end of a Pensacola-Los Angeles long distance telephone call, sounded very much like a nice guy. He gave me a quick rundown on the Navy photo school and mentioned that I should stay in the Bachelor Officer's Quarters and would have a car and driver at my disposal. I spoke with Lt. Commander W.R. Kemp, who also sounded like a nice guy, and got more info about the school. Then, after having talked to the Commanding Officer (Boldt) and the Director of Training (Kemp), and deciding not to cut my hair, I grabbed a plane for Florida—wondering what they would think when they got a look at me.

As it happened, the first Navy type to encounter the freak from L.A. was LTJG L.L. Harris, who met me at the one-horse operation known locally as the Pensacola Airport. Les Harris wasn't at all freaked out by your faithful reporter, instead, he seemed mostly concerned that my accommodations be comfortable



Slightly resembling a beached white whale, the Navy School of Photography building at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida, houses the "A" school training facility.



The Director of Training, LCDR W.R. Kemp, is a dynamic individual who expects, and gets, the best efforts of both staff and students. If anyone can be called the "force" behind the school and its teaching methodology, Kemp is the man.

L OF PHOTOGRAPHY



Students behind cameras are a common sight around the school. This sailor is learning the ins and outs of vertical and horizontal perspective correction using a 4x5 view camera.



"A" School Officer, LTJG Lester Harris, is responsible for everything from student traffic offenses to implementation of new training programs. Like the rest of the staff and officers, his door is always open to anyone needing counseling or encouragement.

and that my visit be conducted with a minimum of hassle to me. He also did a number on my head by telling me that the new, self-paced learning program at the school could turn a recruit into a photographer in something like 13 weeks. He also mentioned that he would see me at 0645. Since that meant that I would have to start moving about 6:00 a.m., and my body, still running on L.A. time, would think that it was 4:00 a.m., I went to bed early.

The next morning, a little bleary-eyed, I had my first face-to-face meeting with Director of Training Kemp. Sitting in his office, trying to sneak up on a cup of coffee, I began to hear strange things . . . "visual literacy" . . . "systems approach . . ." "culture shock" and the like. These were, indeed, strange things to be heard in a rigid,

formalized, regimented military school. It didn't take long to figure out that I wasn't dreaming these things but was actually hearing them. Amazed, I listened and discovered that the Navy School of Photography is *not* rigid, formalized and regimented as I had figured; it is a modern, well-designed learning facility the likes of which I have never seen.

Because the school is designed around a self-paced teaching technology, students are able to proceed at their own speed from beginning to end. A routing sheet is the only real control of the student's time. This document merely keeps track of what materials the student studies—when the proper number of subjects are shown on the routing sheet, the student is tested.

The amount of time a student spends on any piece of

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material is up to the individual. The school is truly self-paced. Even when a student first arrives at the school, he doesn't waste any time. His study begins the moment he arrives. By the first afternoon, a student has already started on the beginning study materials and has taken a picture. The fine old Navy game of "hurry up and wait" is a thing of the past.

Using a combination of programmed texts, job plans, visual slide/film presentations, audio tape presentations and the handling of actual equipment, a student learns photography. A student learns to use and repair still and motion picture cameras, learns to process film by tray, tank and machine methods, learns to make black-and-white and color prints, learns lighting, learns photojournalism, learns motion picture techniques, learns portrait photography, learns sensitometry and densitometry, learns photographic chemistry and a hell of a lot of other things. All in about 13 weeks! And, if a student completes the basic course in "A" school in less than 15 weeks, he can elect to take more training in the advanced "B" school.

Here he can get in-depth training in motion picture, sensitometry, color, photojournalism, studio and portrait or photo lab administration. All in all, quite a deal. Thirteen relatively painless weeks to learn things that most of us spend years learning...and some of us never learn. And don't even begin to think that these students are just learning to take dull "Official U.S. Navy" photos; this may have been true in the past, but the people and the photographs I saw are something



Yes, that is a lady sailor behind the Leica! Many trainees are female, and the "new" Navy is proud of its lack of sexual discrimination.

PHOTOGRAPHS ARE NOT GOOD BECAUSE THEY ARE TAKEN WITH GOOD CAMERAS, BUT BECAUSE THEY ARE MADE BY GOOD PHOTOGRAPHERS.



This sign, posted in a prominent place, reminds students what it really is that makes a good photograph.

else. The students are not only taught but encouraged to be creative photographers—thinking before shooting is a matter of course. Quite honestly, I would like to spend 13 weeks in this school. I'm sure that it would be time well spent.

The staff members are all experts in their fields and are quite willing to pass on their expertise to someone willing to soak it up. The training methodology is probably the most up-to-date of any photo school anywhere. The atmosphere around the school's physical plant (which Bill Kemp likes to refer to as an iceberg—"a calm facade with a lot going on below the surface") is just like any other photo school: students roam around with their cameras shooting everything, the building, each other and everything else in sight. The building itself is old, and the Naval Air Station at Pensacola is very pleasant—Old South and near the beaches.

In many ways, this is a preferred status; in the words of Bill Kemp, "A new shiny building just wouldn't be the same; here every bit of cracking paint is something to be seen and photographed. I sit and listen and watch through the window and hear the trainees calling back and forth, asking someone what exposure they're using, asking someone to get out of a shot, asking someone to pose or whatever—that kind of freedom and interest plus the teaching methods make for a lot of dynamics!" It sure does Mr. Kemp... it sure does.

Oh yeah, before I stop, let me tell those interested how to find out more about the school. Just call this toll-free number, (800)841-8000, and ask.

THE NAVY SCHOOL: A PORTFOLIO

□ The photographs in this portfolio represent some of the work done, as part of the training program, by the students at the U.S. Navy School of Photography. Most of the photos were made after no more than nine weeks of training. The images are typical of the type of photography done as part of the training program—quite different than one might expect of a military school. □



PHAA Jim Webster

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SCHOOL**



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