MEMORIAL ARTICLE
Published Assembly Jun '94

Hei Heiberg set out to be a military planner from birth. To ensure that his birthday would forever be observed as a holiday, complete with parades, he made his premature appearance at Camp Marfa, Texas on 11 November 1925. Weighing four pounds, two ounces, including the blanket, he spent his first days in a dresser drawer, so unprepared were his parents for his early arrival. However, by the age of six months, he was ready for his first and only four-year tour at West Point, albeit under the sponsorship of his father, newly posted to the Department of Mathematics. Hei shared his nickname with his father (USMA Class of ’19), and seemed destined to follow in the Cavalry tradition started by his grandfather, Elvin (USMA 1896). He was on a horse before he could walk, and growing up at Forts Knox, Riley, Leavenworth and Haunchau allowed him the opportunity to acquire a respectable number of horse show trophies and ribbons. However, a whole new world opened up after his first flight in an airplane at the age of fourteen when he was living in the Philippines with his mother and stepfather (Captain James B. Edmunds). He completed his first two years of high school in Manila and returned to the States in 1940 to spend a year at Fort Knox, Kentucky with his father, stepmother, and sister Heide. He joined the Edmundses in 1941 to spend his senior year at Western High School in Washington, DC with first cousins Lee and Vandrefalk. They both joined the Coast Guard Auxiliary and became deeply involved in teaching boating safety and performing operational patrols on Chesapeake Bay. Hei was elected commander of the Northern Virginia Power Squadron and was a flotilla commander in the Auxiliary. He went on to become a division captain in the Auxiliary and had been elected rear commodore (thereby regaining his “eagles” in Coast Guard insignia) when he was diagnosed with bone cancer. Hei died on 30 November 1990. He was survived by his wife Mimi; a daughter, Karen; two sons, Hal and James; and a grandson, Grady.

Civilian life was as rewarding for Hei as his previous thirty years of active duty had been. He was Assistant to the Director of Mount Vernon during the two-year Bicentennial observance and served six years as Vice President, Armed Forces Benefit Association. His final retirement in 1984 gave Hei and Mimi the opportunity to devote more time to the Episcopal church, in which they were licensed Eucharistic Ministers, and to their 44-foot cruiser, Vandrefalk. They both joined the Coast Guard Auxiliary and became deeply involved in teaching boating safety and performing operational patrols on Chesapeake Bay. Hei was elected commander of the Northern Virginia Power Squadron and was a flotilla commander in the Auxiliary. He went on to become a division captain in the Auxiliary and had been elected rear commodore (thereby regaining his “eagles” in Coast Guard insignia) when he was diagnosed with bone cancer. Hei died on 30 November 1990. He was survived by his wife Mimi; a daughter, Karen; two sons, Hal and James; and a grandson, Grady.

Although a memorial service was held at Fort Meyer, Virginia, Hei was interred at the Air Force Academy, in accordance with his wishes, on 4 June 1991, the fifty-fifth anniversary of his graduation from West Point. In a fitting gesture, the current director of the mascot program at the Air Force Academy brought a young prairie falcon to the graveside service to join family and friends in their farewell to a “founding father” of a great institution that traces its roots and traditions to the United States Military Academy.
When Col. Heiberg took office as Eastern Director in May of 1962, NAFA was in its infancy. Many of NAFA's old-timers tell me about the early days of our organization and of working with Hei — I love those stories. Although I did not know Col. Heiberg until more recent years, I am one of the few who had the privilege of working closely with him in his later years. And work we did! We spent hundreds of hours — researching, editing, reminiscing — and in spite of failing health, Hei remained feisty, dedicated, tireless, meticulous and firm. He had a love for and knowledge of NAFA unlike any other, and right up to his last day he maintained a NAFA file that rivals the Archives. When I asked him for specific documentation from, for example, a letter written in 1963, he had his hands on it pronto.

Perhaps the greatest single contribution Col. Heiberg made was co-authoring, with Jack Young, a nearly complete rewrite of NAFA's original Constitution and Bylaws. The rewritten document has admirably withstood the rigors of nearly 30 years. When President Jim Weaver charged me with updating and reprinting the Constitution and Bylaws, I called Hei for help. Together we embarked on a two-and-a-half year task. Hei's intimate knowledge of NAFA from its inception and his impeccable records ensured that the document has retained all of its original integrity and accuracy while incorporating all the subsequent amendments. Without Col. Heiberg, the task would have been nearly impossible. Over the course of the project, Hei and I developed a friendship and a mutual respect.

The Constitution & Bylaws are appropriately dedicated to "the co-author and guardian of this document," a recognition Hei did not expect. My reward for the work involved is knowing that he saw the project come to fruition and that he, in a small way, was acknowledged for a contribution recognized in the most recently published copy of that document. Even after learning of his terminal condition, Hei thoughtfully provided for our history. Not only reorganizing his remaining records, Hei painstakingly labeled and indexed some 400 of his Kodachrome slides to enhance the historic value of that collection. His NAFA papers are being integrated into NAFA's Central Records. The remainder (mostly predating NAFA's formation) will comprise the Heiberg Collection in the Archives of Falconry — a fitting equipment and those portions of his library not already duplicated in the TAF collections. Through and to this his widow, Mimi, has thoughtfully given of her own efforts to insure the proper utilization of this legacy Hei has bequeathed to all future generations of American falconers.

Hei is missed. Clearly, it will be a long time 'til we see his like again. Keep 'em flying up there!