

Singing like Shatner

My trip to Washington was intended to be productive and insightful. The first order of business was to meet Mark Adams at the ADCS program offices in Arlington Virginia. Peter and Richard accompanied me to ensure that there wouldn't be any misunderstanding about the anticipated test parameters. I had heard a lot about Adams, that he was a real golden boy at the Pentagon, having been a Harvard Alumnus who went on to serve as a Commander in the Navy. The ADCS offices had moved out of the Pentagon to a relatively new business complex on top of a hill in Virginia with a broad view of its very crowded neighborhood of office buildings and industrial parks. My relative optimism instantly cratered when I walked into the office and realized that Ann Barnes was now the ADCS Program Manager.

I had been informed that Karpovich was no longer directly involved with the program, but had foolishly assumed that with his departure, Barnes would resultantly follow along into whatever doghouse they kenneled him in. Having him be replaced by her was in my opinion like replacing Al Capone with the Dutchess of Schultz. I was very dismayed at the obvious and real prospect that little had changed in the time I was blissfully departed. She would not disappoint me, but as I waited to meet with Adams, I resigned myself to feinting nice to her. What a disgusting prospect that was. When Adams finally welcomed me into his office, he appeared very sharp and younger than I had expected. He indeed fit the description I had been profiled with, and with him came a fleeting fancy that it might be possible that his professionalism would set a new tempo for the program.

That myth was quickly dispelled as he called Barnes into the room. Smiling like the ice queen she was, Barnes greeted Peter, Richard and I with a Cheshire grin and a tepid handshake. Adams straightaway acknowledged that Roy Willis had informed him of his agreement to test our NT product, and then the newly minted Assistant Deputy Under Secretary concluded our quick briefing by stating he was handing over the responsibility to Barnes to work out the details. I wasn't about to let him off quite so easily, so I put Adams immediately on notice that our products had been the most outstanding performers in all of his program office's tests to date and that not only would the NT product maintain that standard, but it also met the expectations of the military installations we had come to know so intimately over the preceding fourteen years. He confirmed that he understood our UNIX product was an outstanding technological achievement and although

the ADCS project was now NT based, if this new version met with their expectations, there was an ample amount appropriated into their budget to purchase all of the copies the field requested to meet their ongoing responsibilities. Knowing that \$20M was again in the FY '98 budget that had just become effective, his words were music to my ears. I was beginning to generate some measure of confidence that this could finally be our opportunity to gain the rewards we had worked hard for and earned over so many years.

Compliantly, we stepped into Ann's office after thanking Adams for his time. Waiting for us was her usual partner in grime, the ADCS program's outside contractor, CACI. Although I had never previously met this particular representative, his conduct and attitude was uncannily familiar to me. But then it would have been a complete surprise had Barnes aligned herself with a neutral party. The CACI guy was all full of formality and bluster, rapidly firing off how the program had established new parameters, blah, blah, blah. I reiterated for Ann's benefit and his edification that Audre had an exemplary record of achievement and that our new release would be no exception. I also informed them that Deputy Under Secretary Willis had stated that the testing would commence immediately. With that, I left Peter and Richard in their company to work out the locations and details of the test, and prepared to head over to the Capitol. I had made arrangements to pay a visit with Duke at his office and I did not want to be late. Washington has a horrible traffic problem, one that they apparently have no concern about rectifying.

I finally made it through security and down the long hallways of the Rayburn Building to Duke's office. I arrived actually a little early and was politely asked to stay in his entry room while he finished up on some business he was conducting behind closed doors. I was beginning to feel that it was going to be a good day and that I was making some progress until I happened to glance around the room, quickly discovering a commemorative plaque from Wilkes' company, ADCS Inc. Now I need to preface this by informing the reader that the Duke loved plaques, medals, trophies and any other form of recognition. Since he had a storied career, there were a lot of awards sitting or hanging everywhere. The best ones were in his personal office, but it was disturbing to see that he had placed Wilkes' memorabilia in a prominent location.

I casually walked over and read that it was congratulating the Duke for his participation in helping them get a conversion project scanning the building

archives of the Panama Canal. It was disturbing to me to see that the Duke considered the Panama Project worthy of any memorial. In all my years working with the military, I had never heard anyone mention a pressing need to scan the old building floor plans of the Panama Canal. In fact, the military had stopped using the Panama Canal decades earlier after Navy ships became too large to pass through. When I was originally informed that Duke had personally intervened to send Wilkes millions of dollars for the project, I had a hard time understanding his motivation. Surely, I thought, there were innumerable priority projects within the military that were in desperate need of automation.

In fact, thousands of hours are spent by each branch of the services to determine their information conversion priorities. Audre had already worked on bombers, submarines, personnel carriers, missiles and the like and those projects were just a drop in the bucket. How in hell could some nonsense in a Central American jungle have anything to do with military preparedness? Well, the truth was that everyone knew that it didn't. Nobody wanted the software Wilkes was peddling and he had to find someplace outside of the conventional command to hide his shit so he could suck up the bucks. I have learned only over the past two years that the justification was even more devious than that. My understanding was correct, but it missed some very big points. Apparently, Wilkes was unable to become a military subcontractor due to his total lack of experience and a distribution agreement for a product that nobody wanted, so along comes Congressman Lewis to set him up as a subcontractor to a Veteran's Administration contactor who had an ongoing project to scan some medical related documents. It appears that Lewis and the Duke funneled program funds through that project in order to get it to Wilkes. No one really cared about Panama. It was just a convenient place with a vehicle to perpetuate their scam.

No wonder it had such a place of prominence in the Duke's foyer. It signaled to all astute scrutinizers that Cunningham could do as he pleased and anyone who did not like it could go to hell. He had participated in pushing a project to pay off a patron and he was proud of it. Not really the right stuff I had expected to encounter, and it was going to get worse. But before everything went dark, a small ray of pleasure trotted by in the form of Duke's Jack Russell Terrier. Duke, it seemed, had taken his pet to Washington to keep him company, true to the old rule that if you need a friend, get a dog. The terrier had the run of his office, and I had no problem with that at all. Audre had long welcomed dogs into its offices, and I was glad to find the little

fur person was taking my mind off of Wilkes and his plaque. I also happen to have a way with animals and Duke's Jack Russell was no exception. We were becoming fast friends as the door opened and the congressman's new Chief of Staff walked out, motioning for me to sit down in his office to wait while Duke finished a phone call. I had not met Patrick Mc Swain before and he was surprisingly cold and detached. I tried to find some comforting common ground by taking very complimentary of Duke and his prior Chief, Frank Collins, but to no real avail.

I remember thinking that maybe a lot of the Chiefs thought that dealing with constituents was an annoyance, because that was always the impression I got from Duncan's Chief, Vickie Middleton. There was, of course, the very real possibility that Mc Swain had been under the influence and sway of Wilkes. After reading the commemorative plaque in the lobby, everything was possible. Duke was the ADCS, Inc. publicist after all, providing a ringing endorsement for a German product in advertising print. But still, I thought I knew Duke pretty well, and we had always gotten along. Mc Swain could cop an attitude, but the Duke was the boss and that was where I needed to make some headway. I stood up and shook hands with Mc Swain after the Congressman opened up his door to the inner sanctum upon concluding his call and motioned for me to come in. I confidently strode through his door with a warm smile and his Russell Terrier at my side. It was a distinctly familiar setting. Like I mentioned, the Duke's best memorabilia was in his office and it was all just like I remembered it. There were of course a lot of celebrity photographs and framed commendations like his Navy Cross and Silver Stars, but my favorite was a large three-paneled depiction of Duke's dogfight with North Vietnam's mystical Colonel Toon. The aerial acrobatics shown step-by-step in an artist's rendering were both astonishing and awe inspiring, and I always took time to study them whenever I was there.

It was while I was looking up at the panel that Duke brought my attention to a large and ornately embellished knife that was residing in a luxurious box sitting on top of the credenza placed along his trophy wall. Duke went on to explain that he had San Diego's Buck Knife company make them to his order. Chuck Buck was well known for his quality knives, and he was often a fixture at Duncan's events, with his factory located in his 52nd District. The Cunningham commemorative Kalinga style knife was spectacular, with an antler handle and engravings of Duke's famous flight suite pose, along with the Congressional Seal and the American Fighter Aces Association logo. As I was holding and admiring the knife, Duke asked if I wanted to buy it. I was

quite surprised by the solicitation and stammered “how much?” in reply. He responded with \$595, which was certainly more money than I was interested in spending on a knife, and besides, I already had a lot of Cunningham memorabilia already. Unlike other members of Congress, Duke always sent gifts to his largest donators, a group he called his “Aces”. It took \$2,000 to be an “Ace” and to thank his closest supporters, Duke would send you gifts. I had accumulated a couple of silver artifacts with the Congressional Seal emblazoned on them, along with a collection of frosted Old Fashioned glasses with the American Fighter Ace logo, the Congressional Seal, a F-4 Phantom jet, Duke’s name and the date he became an ace “Vietnam 10 May 1972” printed in gold and white on them.

I had gotten a couple of commemorative items from Pete Wilson’s campaign, and a couple of wine glasses from the California Secretary of State, but nothing as tasteful and elegant as Cunningham handed out. It showed a lot of class, but selling a knife outright in his office to a constituent seemed to be going a little too far, and I declined by telling him it was too beautiful to be useful and I would hate to mar it up around my ranch. He did not seem to be too pleased by my answer, but waived me to sit down and catch him up on events. I relayed to him how I had been returned to running the company and that Willis had committed to testing a new version of our software that I discovered had been hidden in our warehouse for almost a year. With that Cunningham launched into how he threw those bastards out of his office when they came to him after they had fired me from Audre. He told me he had admonished them for thinking that he would be part of making a success of their scheme to steal from me all that I had worked so hard to build. With his characteristically mischievous wink, he said he told them that Tom Casey was Audre and that he would never recognize anyone else as the rightful head of the company.

Even his terrier was paying me a lot of attention, jumping onto my lap and curling up as I told Duke that I appreciated his support. Not only was he crucial to my ability to bring the company back from the abyss those assholes had thrown Audre into, he could also play a large role in restoring value to the many shareholders in his District that had been wiped out by the forced filing for bankruptcy. He didn’t seem particularly inspired by my calling on him to help me carry the day moving forward, but instead he looked down at his calendar and asked if I had time to join him on his boat for a glass of wine. Of course, I instantly accepted the invitation and with that we left his office with the dog under his arm and headed to the Capitol Yacht Club. It

was a very short ride to the docks from his office as we drove past some of Washington's grandest buildings and monuments. I had been to the marina on only one previous occasion when I met Karpovich there for lunch. As was typical of him, by the time I got there he was only interested in a liquid lunch, and we never left the bar. This time we proceeded through the private club gate onto the docks themselves and headed to the end where his home away from home floated.

I knew a lot of Members of Congress struggled to afford a second home, especially in Northern Virginia, Maryland, or Washington DC's Georgetown area. It was a stroke of brilliance to live at the Yacht Club in a houseboat he had bought from Alabama Congressman Sonny Callahan. With a 65' flat-bottom and three staterooms, the boat was relatively large and stable. While not in the best of condition and of questionable seaworthiness, the "Kelly C" was a great way to soak up the ambiance of such a great city. As Duke guided me on a tour of the boat and its decks, the Jefferson Memorial and the Washington Monument were adjacent to the marina, large as life. Cunningham went on to complain that the yacht got claustrophobic at times and cold in winter and that he was looking for a replacement, but I nevertheless complemented him on his prize.

We shared a glass of wine on the top deck and then at his suggestion took seats in the lounge area to further our discussions. To set the mood, Duke asked if I would like to hear a recording of him reading the Gettysburg Address at Wolf Trap to full orchestration. I didn't know what to expect, but assured him that it would be fine with me. As the music started up with a lot of grandeur and Duke went on to pour us each another glass of wine, I found myself eerily experiencing a William Shatner "The Transformed Man" kind of session, with Duke dramatically speaking Lincoln's words to music. I think we were both getting slightly buzzed from the wine, but Duke was getting downright emotional. He seemed to be drifting off into a dream-like patriotic state, mouthing his lines in what seemed to be an often-practiced parody. I had to prevent myself from laughing as it so reminded me of Shatner talk-singing "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds", but he was taking it very seriously and I did not dare make fun of it. After the recital was over and the orchestra resumed the remainder of their performance, Duke got down to business. Unfortunately, none of it had any reference to Audre.

First, he went off on a rant I have heard him relate numerous times before, about how he was robbed by the Navy Brass of his Congressional Medal of

Honor. He was going to get his revenge, however, as he was next in line to become the Chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee and there would be hell to pay at the Pentagon once that happened. As part of his soon to be new found responsibilities, he also had a broader agenda he needed to ply and that was where I could help him. He had set up "The American Prosperity" Political Action Committee to distribute money to causes and candidates of his choosing and it needed a lot cash to become effective and to build up support for his leadership candidacy. The Duke went on to explain that campaign contributions, capped as they were at only \$2,000 per election cycle, were far too limiting to enable him to become a major player in Washington. Even though he was in a politically safe district and was able to transfer most of his re-election funds to other candidacies, PACs were where it was at and he intended to make the most of the opportunity.

That opportunity, however, depended upon donations from people like me. What the Duke was looking for was someone who would set him up far beyond the realm of a mere "Ace" and like Shatner's Captain Kirk, empower him "to boldly go where no man has gone before". He even went so far as to suggest that the profile he achieved by hosting the '96 Republican Convention in San Diego made him a possible future candidate for Vice President, or at least a potential Secretary of Defense. There seemed to be a number of positions in the galaxy that he was well qualified for, provided that he had an ample supply of dilithium crystals in his treasure chest.

I reluctantly informed the Duke that I was in no position to even restore my status as one of his "Aces" until Audre was back on her feet, and that I had never contributed to a PAC and doubted that I would do so in the future. I wished him the best with his ambitions, but my focus had to be bringing back the company I had worked so hard to build and that so many of his constituents had invested their savings into. Much like turning down the offer to be the happy owner of one of his commemorative knives, my words had a distinct dampening effect on his euphoria, and our get together came to an abrupt ending.

I waved goodbye, but was not sure he noticed, as I departed the marina and headed back to my hotel room. Whew, he was really out there, consumed by his ambition and his anger with anyone that he even remotely perceived as holding him back. It was more than apparent that I was not up to his new standard of support, and that he and his Chief of Staff considered me a dead

man standing. They were not going to give me a lift up or even extend a hand out to help my noble cause. At least I got along well with his dog and as they say; if you need a friend in Washington... The next phone call I got was unexpected and far from pleasant. And here I was thinking this trip was going to be a success. The call came from Peter to warn me that he had really fucked up big time. It seems after we had all made nice at the ADCS offices, Peter and the CACI guy hopped into an elevator to go to his onsite office to begin making plans. Peter decided to break the ice by commenting how nice Ann Barnes seemed upon finally getting to meet her after all these years...for a crook! Well, it only took as long as the elevator door to open before the CACI crew was cawing up a storm to Barnes.