

"Non Sibi"

A Life Remembered

By Ken Mayeaux '73



Frederick Richard Minier
Ensign, United States Navy



A little over 30 years ago, I, along with 892 of my closest friends, threw away my well used midshipman's cover, put on a shiny new officer's cap, paid a dollar to the first salute I received, and headed out to meet my destiny. I was feeling pretty good and proud of myself, with my Naval Academy class ring wrapped around my finger, forever signifying me as a member of the graduating class of 1973. Little did I realize that day would be the last time this brotherhood would be whole. I gave little thought to exactly what the commitment we made on that day would mean to us. I am pretty sure that I was not alone in that respect.

Frederick Richard Minier entered the US Naval Academy from Culpepper, Virginia in June of 1969 along with 1380 other individuals. Fred was a small man, just barely exceeding the minimum height and weight standards. His plebe year was difficult, as the first class charged with his indoctrination seemed to have already concluded that Fred was not officer material. Obviously, they did not know then, that the measure of this man was not determined by his physical stature. Fred's future shipmates would learn the magnitude of his being and the principles by which he lived and gave his life. I hope by writing this brief story, that present and future alumni will know how one of my classmates upheld the Class of 1973 motto, "Non Sibi".

Fred's four years by the Severn were not grist for development of Tom Clancy's character, "Jack Ryan". However, they were significant in shaping the man he was to become. The vivid memories of successes and failures during our tenure there remain crystal clear

through time, even as recollections of other events in our lives fade. I am sure they were no different for Fred. After a difficult plebe year as a 23rd Company Tiger, Fred settled into the relatively easy life as a youngster in 15th Company. He was busy with the routine of the Academy, but his true love was his art and fascination with history. He was truly a renaissance man, destined for a higher calling, while the rest of us were just happy to make it to Saturday and a precious few hours to ourselves.

It was during this early shaping at USNA that Fred designed the crest for the Class of 1973. If my memory serves me well, and now days that is always a pleasant surprise; when I first saw our class crest I thought it looked "good". It was a worthy crest for the Class of 1973, of which I was a proud member. After all, I had endured the hardships of plebe year and was pretty full of myself as a young man of 20 years. But I had no clue as to its significance and obviously how deeply it was rooted in Fred's psyche. Further still, how much it would come to mean to our class some 30 years later as we reflected back on our lives and the choices made of service to self or service to others.

Midshipman Minier was a submariner at heart, but the Rickover nuclear power program didn't share Fred's dream. I think this was best summed up in the 1973 Lucky Bag on page 722 under Fred's name, in a quote from The Odyssey by Homer: "There with she dived beneath the heaving sea, but I betook me to the ships ". So with orders in hand, Fred and the rest of us were scattered to the four winds and the seven seas that sunny day in June 1973.

Ensign Fred Minier landed on the USS Sampson DDG-10, which was home ported in Athens, Greece, as the Damage Control Assistant. As surface ship assignments go, this was probably about as good as it could get for Fred. His parents were stationed in Athens working for the State Department and being a student of Greek mythology, he was right at home. He was a natural storyteller and used his art to add to the stories he told about Greek gods. To listen to Fred, you might believe that he had been there. To quote one of his shipmates, Petty Officer James Ross, "He was not your conventional officer. He enjoyed the company of me and my fellow NCOs. He was a very good artist and wonderful to listen to."

Another one of Fred's activities while he was aboard Sampson was scuba diving. Being single and always on water, he took advantage of the many opportunities to slip beneath the surface of the Mediterranean on weekend dive trips. His companion on many of these dives was Petty Officer James Ross. Ross shared with me that he and Fred had a strong bond, which was unusual in the Navy of 1973. While on a dive trip he tried to warn Fred about backing his car into a barrier. He blurted out "Mr. Minier", albeit a little too late. Even after hitting the pole, Fred told him "James, when we are not on the ship, it's Fred". That was Fred, able to see the value in each human being, regardless of rank or station.

Life is full of choices. Some are easy and straightforward requiring almost no forethought. Others require an instantaneous decision that will have a profound outcome for the decision maker and others. None of us know what choice we will make when faced with that circumstance. To quote General Charles Krulak, Commandant USMC, *"Of all the choices you will face, there is none greater than the choice between self or selflessness"*. On the morning of 30 May 1975, in Taormina, Sicily, Ensign Fred Minier made his choice without hesitation.

The Sampson was nested in Taormina, Sicily with several other ships. The ship had been having some issues with its propulsion system. During the evening of May 29th Fred and the Engineering Officer had come to the conclusion that there might be some fouling in various pump intakes, including the main condenser intake. The main condenser intake is the point on the bottom of the hull of the ship where large volumes of seawater are sucked into the ship to cool the steam after it has passed through the various pieces of equipment necessary for ship operations. The power of the suction at the entrance of the main condenser intake can pull in a man who gets within the vicinity of this opening. Great caution is exercised when the main condenser intake is in operation and divers are in the water around the ship.

The next morning, Ensign Minier, Petty Officer Ross, and the Engineering Officer entered the water at the stern of the Sampson and began inspecting the hull forward. As the trio approached the

area of the main condenser intake, the Engineering Officer ventured too close and was sucked against the intake grate. In an instant, Fred's choice of selflessness fulfilled his destiny, saved the lives of two men, and forever embodied the spirit of Non Sibi as a standard for all alumni, present and future.

For this act of heroism, he was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, posthumously.



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
HAS AWARDED THE

NAVY AND MARINE CORPS MEDAL

TO

ENSIGN FREDERICK RICHARD MINIER, USN

FOR
HEROISM

While engaged in diving operations in Taormina, Sicily, 30 May 1975, a diver in Ensign Minier's party was sucked against the main condenser intake. Ensign Minier, with complete disregard for his own safety and fully aware of the personal dangers involved, unhesitatingly swam to his assistance and freed the stricken diver. As a result of his heroic efforts, Ensign Minier was himself sucked up and lodged in the main condenser with simultaneous loss of breathing apparatus. The third diver in the party, attempting to aid Ensign Minier was now himself in danger of being sucked into the condenser. At this time Ensign Minier, again fully aware of the personal dangers involved and with complete disregard for his own safety, activated the last diver's flotation device, forcing him to the surface and safety. As a result of his heroic conduct, Ensign Minier succumbed in the condenser intake, gallantly sacrificing his life in order that his shipmates might live. His courageous and prompt actions in the face of certain death undoubtedly saved the lives of his fellow divers and were in keeping with highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Petty Officer James Ross was also awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for heroism. James Ross proudly wears his medal which is pinned upon his motorcycle jacket in remembrance of his friend, and the man who saved his life, Fred Minier. As a note, Fred is

in good company, as Ltjg. John F. Kennedy was also awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for heroism.

My roommate during most of my four years at the Academy was Doug Leland. At some point during our first class year Doug had the occasion to room with Fred for one set while I was engaged as company sub-commander. In one of his "Monday Messages" to his clients he had told the story about Fred to drive home a message about living your life. I would like to share part of that message with you, as I could not have said it better.

"In each instance when one individual has decided that service to others is more important than service to self, they have raised the bar for humanity. Some will make this declaration through death- everyone else has the opportunity to do so through life. This, I believe is their greatest gift-an invitation to all to serve a higher calling, to feel for others rather than being consumed by thinking of self."

Doug Leland '73

I am sure as Fred walked through the chapel doors at the Academy, he read the inscription, "Non Sibi Sed Patriae", which literally translates to "Not for self, but for country". When he designed the Class of 1973 crest, Fred shortened this phrase to "NonSibi", Not for Self. I believe that he did this because Fred saw no limits when it came to selflessness. Not just for country, but whenever and wherever he had the opportunity. This was never more evident than in his actions that morning in Taormina, Sicily.

Recently the Class of 1973 returned to Annapolis for its 30 year reunion. As I talked with some of my classmates, we joked that in years past we might have forgotten all of the names but the faces still looked familiar. I must say that at this reunion, the face shave changed enough that recognition now has also become harder. During those 30years we have lost classmates in the line of duty, to accidents, and to illnesses. It diminishes us all each time one of our number falls and we each pause to remember the way they touched our lives. Since Fred Minier never had the opportunity to return for are union, we, the members ofthe Class of 1973, 15th Company, have faithfully raised a glass to him at each of these gatherings

because he so truly embodies what he espoused over 30 years ago. We never know when we will be in a position that will present us with a choice of self-verses selflessness. I can only hope that if and when I face that choice, that I respond as Fred did, with ***Non Sibi.***

