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NAFA Loses A Champion

— by Ralph Rogers

In the fall of 1937 a Harvard freshman wandered into the Widener Library in search of ideas for an English paper. Locating the considerable collection of books on falconry, Samuel Wendell Williston Shor chose falconry as his theme....falconry captured Will...and our sport had one of its luckiest moments.

One of life's truths is that individuals who are great are great in all aspects; and so it was with Will Shor. Will entered Harvard with the Class of 1941 but by his sophomore year had accepted an appointment to the Naval Academy in Annapolis and graduated with the midshipmen of 1942. Will (aka "Salt Water Willie"), was soon assigned to the cruiser Chicago during WWII. When the ship was hit by the Japanese, Will elected to be the last man on board throwing wooden barrels off the sinking ship to swimming sailors unable to launch lifeboats. He left the ship only after it exceeded the angle at which he computed it would sink.

The Navy sent Will to MIT in 1946 to study naval architecture and physics, where he graduated in 1949 with the newly created degree of nuclear engineer. By 1953, Will was selected to work for Admiral Rickover in Connecticut designing and testing nuclear submarines. The first and second atomic submarines (USS Nautilus and Seawolf) were Will's babies. In 1955, in the middle of all of this, Will reports to his Harvard classmates, "My principal side interests have been falconry and a little skiing."

Falconry had another stroke of luck in 1958 when Will married Joby (Bopp) Shor, who was teaching psychology at Connecticut College for Women. In 1963 Will was transferred from the Brooklyn Naval Shipyard to the Navy's failing SONAR program where his leadership turned disaster into success. For the 1966 Harvard Classmates yearbook Will writes, "I do not share the common opinion that the world is in bad shape. On the contrary, I believe that future generations will look back on this as the golden age." He also reports: "My spare time goes into falconry...and watching my two small fry get bigger (Peter and Molly)."

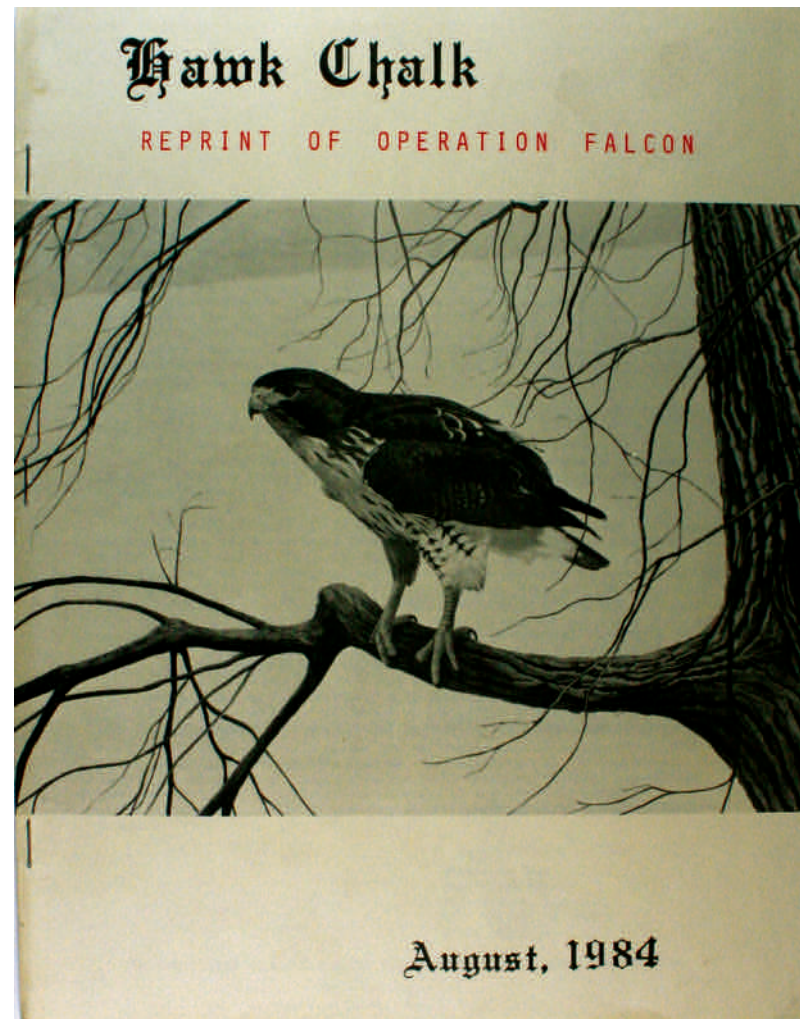
Will retired from the Navy in 1973 and worked as an engineer for Bechtel Corporation in California until after his 82nd birthday. It seems that each time Will reached mandatory retirement age, Bechtel changed its policy allowing him to remain employed. In 1976, Will reports with pride to his Harvard classmates: "I am the editor of the North American Falconers Association thrice-yearly magazine; every few months all of our spare time goes into editing, typing and, after the printer gets through, stuffing envelopes and getting it off to the post office." All of Will and Joby's spare time went into producing the *Hawk Chalk* for 30 years (1971-2001). It was always perfect, always on time, and the entire operation was completed by hand, a truly amazing tenure of dedication to our sport and organization. The move to California, also allowed Will the time and opportunity to fly his hawks. In the 1981 Harvard Anniversary Report, Will reports: "I have a more successful hunting hawk than I ever had before — this one took sixty rabbits (mostly big jacks) before I put him up for the moult last summer.

In June of 1984, all falconers' lives changed because of Operation Falcon, but Will, especially, had a different demeanor and look out of his eyes when he realized the sport he loved so much was being attacked by the government he had served so faithfully (The Law Enforcement Division of the US Fish and Wildlife Service). The warrior in Will emerged once more and he fought Operation Falcon calmly and intelligently with his strongest attributes — those being his dedication to the truth and incredible mind. In the midst of the violent flood of anti-falconry publicity and exaggerated claims of wrongdoing, Will researched, verified, and published the truth about what U.S. congressman John Breau would refer to later in committee hearings as "this shabby operation." I testified for the defense in the only three cases that actually went to trial and clearly remember Will traveling to

Montana, correcting each misstatement, spin, or exaggeration Law Enforcement would attempt to deliver. In each bloated national Law Enforcement news release, interview, or attempt to sway Congress, Will was always there with the truth and delivered it together with his research so that our word was never questioned. Will must have driven Law Enforcement crazy. He was NAFA's champion; he believed that knowledge was power, and he had all the power when it came to the facts of Operation Falcon. It is frequently pointed out that after this attempt to discredit, financially break, and nearly destroy us through over regulation, falconry emerged from Operation Falcon stronger than ever. Well, we cheated. We had Will on our side. For his 45th Harvard Anniversary Report, Will writes: "I am now, more than ever, convinced of the importance of judicial control for police forces, including the federal game wardens...."

In 1983, Will initiated a raptor-banding program north of the Golden Gate Bridge. This program grew into the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory





where, through the years, more than 1000 volunteers have banded about 500 raptors annually making significant contributions to the scientific body of knowledge on raptor migratory behavior. Of course Will, the engineer, was constantly improving the trapping equipment, and publishing blueprints for the "new and improved" equipment in the Hawk Chalk. For the 1991 Harvard Report, Will says, "I think we are probably living in the Golden Age, with enough of the wild animals and open spaces still there to enjoy and at the same time an unprecedented burst of scientific discovery going on."

Will's last report to his Harvard Classmates was delivered in 2001; he was 81 years old. "Joby and I are still editing the *Hawk Chalk* and I am still working. Also, still banding hawks, and doing research that stems from that work. Catching hawks is like fly fishing, but in the air instead of in the water." 2001 was also the last year that I saw Will personally, chatting with him and embarrassed at my physical conditioning before this octogenarian who had just returned to the NAFA Meet headquarters after his morning jog. As a Board member, I miss seeing Will seated in the audience rapidly scribing notes during meetings. I was never sure if light was reflecting from his wonderfully bald pate, or if that incredible brain of his was radiating its own energy. He was always there for us and was one of the best we had for so many years.

Will Shor had degrees from the US Naval Academy, MIT, and New York University. Will was a hero, an intellect, and a man of huge conviction and integrity. He was truly a Renaissance man from the "greatest generation." Anyone, anywhere would have welcomed Will's help but he chose us. North American falconry is enormously lucky, and our sport has been shaped because Will (and Joby) volunteered the greatest of all gifts — their dedicated service.

Our profoundest thank you to Joby, Peter, and Molly for sharing Will. His place is empty. We will always miss him.



Will and Joby Shor