

A Wild Navy Rover in Ireland

8/27/12 – 9-4/12

Greetings to all from two weary travelers who will apparently go anywhere to watch a live Navy football opener. The trip was over a year in planning with the USNA Alumni Association and Anthony Travel out of Dallas. Thousands of Navy and Notre Dame fans from all over the USA converged mainly on Belfast, North Ireland (U.K.), and Dublin, and Galway, Republic of Ireland. within a two day window, with multiple tour itineraries. I am still in awe at the way the two organizers managed to have hotels ready, buses in the right place, and entrance tickets available all at the right times.

The account that follows is of the experiences of Ralph Buck (USNA '58) and Lynn Callaway (Crimson Tide and Navy fan).

DAY 1 – Monday 27 August: Departure Day

Our driver picked us up at 1800 for Dulles International airport, and a United Airlines flight scheduled to depart at 2200. Check in was the normal process, with passports added. Currency was exchanged for Euros and we rode the subway to terminal C, where we met the TSA team and then had a light supper, cased the duty free shop, and chatted with other fans. The 200 passenger plane was full and legroom was barely adequate

DAY 2 – Tuesday 28 August: Arrival in Dublin & Transfer to Belfast

Arrival was at 1000 local time (5 hours later than the East Coast USA). We processed quickly and efficiently and were met by Anthony reps and local guides. Buses were allocated according to city and hotel. Our guide, Peter, herded us several blocks to the bus park, where Alan, our driver, stowed our luggage. The trip to Belfast was about 2.5 hours through the green countryside and an open border via a restricted access motorway. Only indications of the border, contrary to Ralph's experience in the 1960s, were the color of the highway stripe, sign distances went from kilometers to miles, and Gaelic was dropped from the dual language names.

We stayed at the Wellington Park Hotel (4 stars), which was well appointed but had no air conditioning. Our assigned room on the 1st floor had not been fully renovated and had several other problems. With the help of 2 Anthony reps, we were moved to a 3rd floor room that was the equivalent of a Marriott room, and had a window we could safely open for the breeze. All Irish hotels have a "master switch" in each room, consisting of a slot into which you put your room keycard to operate the lights, TV and wall plugs. When you leave, you take your card and the switch shuts off the electricity after 30 seconds.

We were suffering from jet lag and opted for a light repast, with a Guinness, at the pub next door, where we chatted with the friendly female bar tender. Back to sleep ourselves into time synch. Some light reading and good TV coverage on the flat screen. Lynn checked in on line, but Ralph elected to remain web-free for the trip duration.

DAY 3 – Wednesday 29 August: Belfast



Hoofed it back to the museum and hit all 5 stories. A lot of history (Ulster spans North Ireland and parts of the Republic) going back to pre-history, through “the Troubles.” Lynn appreciated the crystal, china and ladies wear most, while I liked the Titanic displays, wildlife, and siege artifacts. I acquired some local currency through the device of charging some water on my credit card and taking pounds sterling as cash back. We later encountered several USNA classmates nearby.

The afternoon tour covered several points of interest and got us up to date on how North

Full breakfast provided: coffee, tea, milk, juices, porridge, toast, croissants, biscuits, jam/marmalade, sausage, bacon (like our Canadian bacon), grilled tomatoes, scrambled eggs, baked beans, and fried potatoes. This was the fare at each hotel during our stay.

We got out early to walk around the south end of the town. Saw the Botanic gardens and observed the Ulster museum would not open until 1000. Returned to the hotel to chat with the Anthony reps and check time for afternoon tour of Belfast and the Titanic dry dock and pump room.



Ireland came to be, and a short history of “the Troubles,” when the Nationalists (mostly Catholic) fought the Unionists (mostly Protestant). The Irish are very passionate in supporting causes, as we saw at the street of posters, and at the DMZ between opposing neighborhoods. 25’ walls and access gates that close at 1800 daily testify to the tensions that still exist, despite the peace treaty. After we left Belfast we heard of a riot where Unionists [with the UK] marched beating drums outside Nationalist [one Ireland] churches in one quarter of Belfast.

Eventually, we arrived at the Titanic dock and pump room. They are separate from the Titanic museum and privately owned. While the early reaction was to ignore the Titanic, the current attitude is, “It was fine when it left here.” This was the only time during our 8 days when there was heavy rain. Luckily we all had rain ponchos decorated with the Emerald Isle Classic logo. Ralph descended to the bottom



of the dry dock – it is immense, with the original keel blocks, and is currently being protected with a new cofferdam outside the sliding door. Lynn was wiser and stayed in the pump room chatting with our feminist guide, who plans to move to Africa to take up the cause of women's rights there. She was lively, friendly, and very knowledgeable on the tour.



The rain stopped near the end of the tour and we headed back to the hotel to arrange dinner. We walked to several likely places, but ended up at Deane's at Queen's Quarter, across the street from the Methodist College (known as Methody), which holds classes for ages 3-18, where the young ladies wear a school uniform that is very business stylish – school colors navy and white. Deane's was a lucky choice as the food was excellent, the service superb, and the view was at left through large windows.

DAY 4 – Thursday 30 August: Transfer to Dublin

After a leisurely breakfast, we completed packing and boarded the bus for the Alexander Hotel in Dublin. Our tour guide was again informative and we even had a short comfort stop for a bite to eat. The motorway into Dublin, the capitol of the Republic, afforded us a distant view of Aviva stadium, the ultra modern football stadium set up for the Emerald Isle Classic. We were treated to running commentary as we slowly traversed the crowded and narrow streets. We noted Ireland's one Navy ship, a patrol craft that mostly performed coast guard duties, tied up in the Liffy River. There was also a tall ship left over from the prior weekend gathering of tall sailing ships.

Arrival at the Alexander Hotel was in Navy tradition. It was fully decorated with blue and gold balloons and bunting as a



Navy HQ hotel. Both Anthony (in red shirts) and USNA Alumni Association teams were present to ensure easy check in and fast exchange of information about events. We also learned we had left a jacket in Belfast – Anthony delivered it Saturday morning, in time for the game.

We got settled and headed to Grafton Street (closed to

traffic shopping mall) for Navy Dublin logo shirts and clothes for Lynn + lots of people watching. There were several musical groups, several panhandling mothers with kids in carriages, and a group of living statues. Dublin's economy took a major upward trend while we were there!





floor inside a huge, 7-story atrium.

Wine was served before dinner as we jockeyed for seats. Entertainment was provided on five levels during and after dinner: fiddlers, singers, and dancing (with some audience participation with costumed characters).

A final highlight was the Guinness store on the ground level, where we managed to spend a few more Euros. ☺

Back to the hotel to refresh and change for the Navy fan tour of the Guinness Storehouse at 1930. Buffet tables were set up for dinner on 5 levels and we passed displays that explained the origin of Guinness porter and the method of putting all the ingredients together to create this ruby red beverage. We were directed in groups off escalators at each



DAY 5 – Friday 31 August: Dublin



Today was busy. After a traditional large breakfast, we trooped out to our first tour at 0840 to The Garden of Ireland in County Wicklow. Most of the trees in Ireland are in this county, as



well as several lush formal gardens, such as the one at Powerscourt Gardens, where we visited. The roads are narrow and winding, difficult to navigate with our big tour bus, but the driver did a great job, as usual.

Scenes in these 19th century gardens include: The Triton pool with 100' fountain; American, Italian and Japanese gardens; pet cemetery; and views of the local mountains.

We then enjoyed tea and scones at Powerscourt House on the golf course.



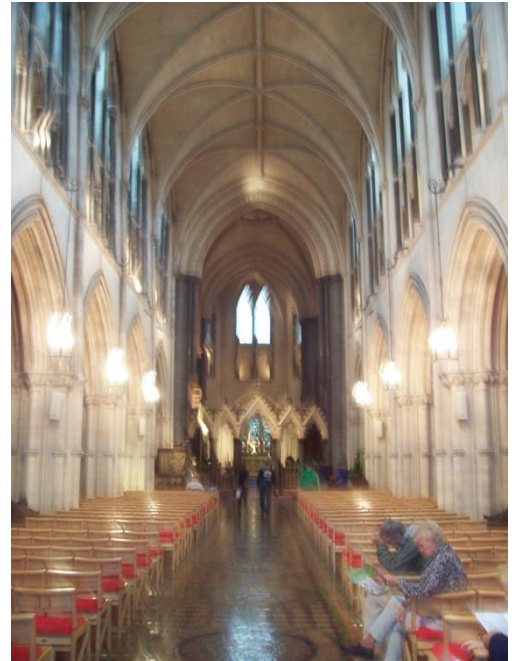
More commentary ensued on the way back to the hotel, where we had about one hour to make ready for the afternoon tour of Dublin city.

Our bus driver navigated many streets, with associated commentary on hospitals, gardens, architecture, James Joyce, Oscar Wilde, and historic buildings. We drove through a park larger than Central Park in NYC, where the President of Ireland lives (house looks like a smaller White House, and was designed by the same man), the US Embassy is located, and the Dublin zoo has its home. Then, it was on to St. Patrick's church for a look 'round the outside (inside costs extra and we had no time).



Christ Church Cathedral was the next major stop. We toured inside, remarkably like the Washington National Cathedral, including the reputed tomb of Strongbow (Richard de Clare, Ireland's 1st Norman conqueror), side chapels, and a crypt that extended the entire length of the nave + choir + chancel.

Unfortunately, the line at Trinity College to see the Book of Kells was too long.



DAY 6 – Saturday 1 September: Game Day! In Dublin

Lynn managed a quick walk back to Grafton Street to make some exchanges of clothing, so we decided to ride the bus to the game at the new Aviva stadium, even though it was only a 40 minute walk away. Naturally, we had to park several long blocks away (this was a recurring problem with our buses) and walked in with the throngs converging from every direction. Spirits were high and anticipation was in the air.





As we rounded the stadium to our designated gate, the Navy pipers and dancers were performing for the crowd. And a fine job they did too!



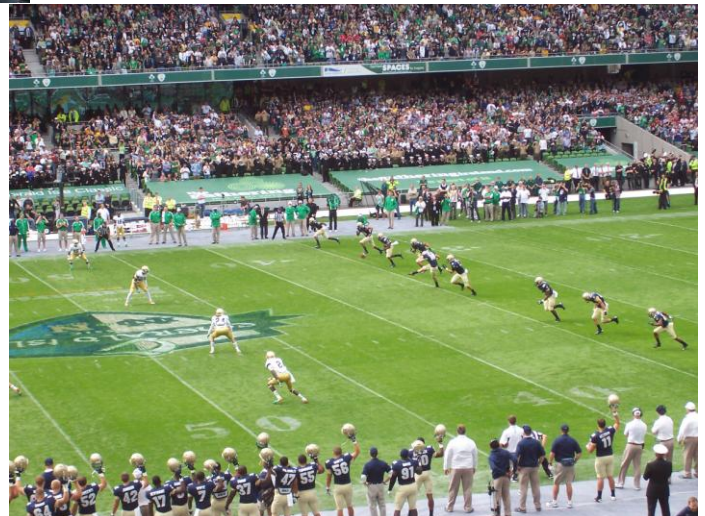
We had great seats on the 40yd line on the club level. Refreshment was close by but there were always lines for food and drink. The fans were lubricated and rarin' to go.



Navy was "host" and performed the march-on

with a reduced Brigade, followed by the Star Spangled Banner and the national anthem of Ireland, "Amhrán na bhFiann", the text of *The Soldier's Song*, and finally the Navy kickoff.

Despite fine execution by Navy, we soon found that the Notre Dame recruiters had fielded a much larger and faster team. A particular nemesis was their 6'7" tight end, who was unstoppable by ordinary mortals.



ND did miss their 1st extra point, while Navy connected with our kicker doing a great job (bodes well for the season).

The final score of 50-10 was, of course, a great disappointment for Navy, but the spectacle was worth the trip! Bill the Goat even appeared for the first time in a USMC uniform!!

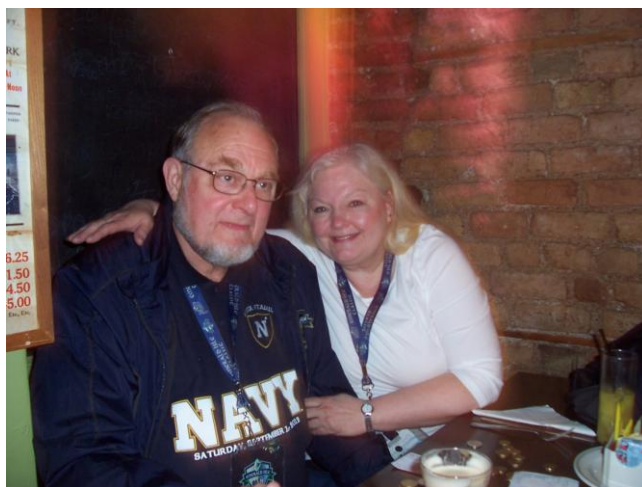


The Brigade remained enthusiastic to the end, with our cheerleaders never losing hope. Navy Blue and Gold was sung with no less feeling than ever, and we all saluted the “Irish” for their alma mater as well.





Our last evening in Dublin we had a few in the hotel bar (our bartender pouring a “Fighting Irish” for Lynn) and listened to a trio of Irish musicians, then meandered downtown to a pub we had seen several times, from which Irish music often emanated. We stayed late, drank hearty, and had a rousing time with the Irish songs by two fine young lads on guitar. Only two 1st class Mids came in, and were quickly swarmed by civilian patrons buying them drinks.



DAY 7 – Sunday 2 September: Transfer to Galway

After breakfast, we settled up and boarded our bus for Galway. En route we stopped off at Birr Castle Gardens and Ireland’s Historic Science Center, where we also had lunch in town.



The barrel of the telescope is hauled up, pivoting at the bottom, along side rails marked in degrees.

The moat is now dry, but there is a stream on the grounds, with a small waterfall and a suspension bridge.

The castle proper is currently occupied by the Earl’s family, but we were free to roam the grounds and wander the science center. The grounds were focused around the huge telescope built by the 2nd Earl.



After 5.5 hours we reached Galway and were delivered to the Ardilaun Hotel, where we navigated narrow corridors and a small lift to reach a new, air-conditioned wing. We walked the hotel gardens and got oriented before changing for dinner and a show at the Salthill Hotel on the Promenade (of Galway Bay). A seated dinner was served in a private room, where about forty Navy fans gathered at 4 tables.



The show, “Troed on the Prom.” was a miniature version of Riverdance, with several performers from that show, as well as The Chieftans and Lord of the Dance.

The producer held forth with words and on several guitars, while his wife played the fiddle and sang a few numbers, and his sister-in-law played about 4 of the 19 instruments on which she is proficient!

Four female step dancers were lovely, graceful, and very talented – one was a 4-time Irish champion; the male lead step dancer used to be Michael Flarety’s understudy; and two brothers put on a very

energetic championship performance.

Two guest performers played keyboard and the elbow pipes and penny whistle – both were award winners also. All in all, a great show.

DAY 8 – Monday 3 September: Galway

Ralph developed a severe upper respiratory infection and Lynn was plain worn out. We skipped the day’s tour to the Cliffs of Moher & Burren, south around Galway Bay, opting to rest up and hit the hay early for the arduous trip home.

DAY 9 – Tuesday 4 September: Departure to Dublin and to the USA

Wakeup was at 0230 for a 0335 bus departure to Dublin to catch our 1125 local time United flight (with a Continental crew) to Washington. There was coffee and pastry waiting in the hotel lobby, as well as our Anthony rep. Our old friends Peter and Alan arrived on time and collected bleary eyed fans from 3 hotels for the 3 hour trip to Dublin airport via motorway. We sang Irish songs (in accented English) and listened to an Irish comedian en route.

We had plenty of time to check in, get some breakfast, make purchases at the duty free shops (The Loop), clear customs, and be subjected to TWO security inspections. There was actually a 3rd inspection on the jetway to the plane, but no shoe removal. The plane was the same type as our trip over, and also full. We each had people in front of us who wanted to recline their seats...leaving NO room to move, read, or eat! Polite negotiations ensued. Despite the primitive conditions for seating, the passengers were mostly well behaved.

Touchdown at Dulles was 20 minutes early at 1405 EDST. Since we had already cleared customs in Dublin, it was then a simple matter of collecting luggage and boarding our reserved super shuttle van to home.

Pulling a Guinness – step One



Lynn with Arthur & Mrs Guinness



Lynn & Ralph ready for the game

