I can’t take credit for the title of this piece. That belongs to fellow Old Guard member and Naval Academy graduate, the late John McMullen. By chance, I met Mr. McMullen in the fall of 2002 at the University Club in New York City. As the Provost of the Naval War College, I was attending a meeting of the board of trustees of a foundation that supported the College as its representative to the board. John McMullen and I were having a very early breakfast the morning of that meeting and he noticed my Naval Academy class ring and invited me to join him at his table. After the usual “What class?” and other Naval Academy and Navy questions were asked and answered, the conversation turned to Scouting, Camp Glen Gray and the Old Guard. At the end of that wide-ranging exchange, John McMullen concluded by likening our discussion about Glen Gray to one of the verses from the Naval Academy’s alma mater, Navy Blue and Gold – “But still when two or three shall meet and old tales be retold…” This short piece is my attempt to tell my “old tales” about a piece of the history of Camp Glen Gray.

My first “expedition” to camp was in May 1956 to participate in Troop 1 Cedar Grove’s annual spring camping trip. My initial impression, and one that was permanently etched into my memory, was the drive up “the road” – that narrow, less than smooth “path” that led to Glen Gray. We arrived late on a Friday afternoon and trudged up the hill past the Old Guard Cabin to our camp site. Being one of the two newest members of the troop, I found myself making several trips with Bill Mathes, my neighbor in Cedar Grove, up and down a portion of that hill over the course of that weekend to the old water tank above the Mess Hall to get fresh water for our patrol’s campsite. Why we didn’t camp at the troop’s traditional site near its cabin is still a mystery to me.

Saturday dawned bright, clear and very, very windy and was the first time I got to see more of Camp by hiking to Matapan Rock with a portion of the troop. During that hike I began to realize just what a striking portion of the Ramapo Mountains was available to the Scouts of the Eagle Rock Council. When we reached Matapan, we begin a signal flag relay across Skyline Drive and thence by runners across the ‘pipeline’ to the head of Lake Vreeland where the message was again passed by signal flag to the patrols’ teams on the Dam. We got back to our campsite site just in time to cook dinner before it started to rain, and I do mean rain. It poured all night Saturday and all day Sunday. The only break from that downpour was attending Catholic mass in the Mess Hall on Sunday morning. Cooking breakfast and breaking camp in that rain were memorable experiences as was “lugging” those very, very wet and very, very heavy Baker tents down that hill.
My first trip to Glen Gray during the summer was a two-week period during July 1956 with about twenty members of my troop. We camped in the long-since abandoned, but never forgotten by those who camped there, ‘Stumbleup’. Roger Hook from Upper Montclair was our provisional Scoutmaster and Carl Hess from Verona was our provisional Assistant Scoutmaster. I had a picture of all of those folks that was taken in the camp’s council ring but, as with many other things, it has been lost over the 30-plus years of moving while I was on active duty in the Navy. As best as I recall, my tent platform was number seven which was almost at the top of that semi-mystical, quasi-legendary camp site. Over the course of that summer, we came to appreciate first hand why it was branded as ‘Stumbleup’!

Trying to get hot, or at least warm, water for a shower in ‘Stalingrad’ – another semi-mystical, quasi-legendary “convenience” of Glen Gray – proved to be a humbling experience. But, like many other things, my skirmish with the showers in ‘Stalingrad’ had a positive side to it because it introduced me to Bob Holfelder, the camp’s Ranger. One day, I was assigned to help Bob pump-down the tank at ‘Stalingrad’. My part of the job was relatively simple – just help him haul a hose from a tank truck parked in front of ‘Mothercroft’ to the latrine. Over the course of the pump down, Bob struck up a conversation with me. Most of it focused on how to get hot water for the showers. He showed me how to regulate the draft of ‘Stalingrad’s’ near-prehistoric wood stove to heat the water more effectively as well as showing me how to set a nearly non-operational mixing valve on the equally ancient hot water tank. Faithfully following his advice coupled with the fact that a new mixing valve mysteriously appeared a few days later improved the shower situation in Stumbleup such that the folks from Troop 1 elevated Bob Holfelder to the status of a minor celebrity that summer. During that pump-down, Bob and I also talked about the Navy. He was a Navy veteran and I found it interesting what he had to say about his experiences in the Navy.

I checked into Camp that summer as a newly minted Second Cass Scout and, after passing Troop 1’s Board of Review in the Library on the last Saturday of our term at camp, left as a First Class. Glen Gray afforded me the opportunity to complete the requirements for that rank as well as earn the First Aid, Swimming, Athletics and Pioneering merit badges. The Pioneering badge was indeed a challenge. Only a very few of the folks at camp during that period chose to pursue that badge and we all agreed with our merit badge counselor, Ralph DeCamp, that building a monkey bridge from the flag pole to the shore just below the bridge over the spillway was the best way to satisfy the badge’s requirement to build “…without the use of nails, spikes or wire, a bridge capable of supporting two hundred pounds in weight…” Those words and the decision to commit to building a monkey bridge as the way to satisfy this requirement taught me two enduring lessons – words have real meaning and everything is generally harder than you think it will be! It was a demanding project and one that proved to be more a test of our will than our skill! But, we succeeded thanks to our persistence, the help of Bob Holfelder in getting the “stuff” that we needed, and the guidance and encouragement of Ralph DeCamp.
I distinctly recollect getting up one morning at reveille in late July and turning on my portable transistor radio to learn of the collision between the *SS Andrée Doria* and the *SS Stockholm* in the North Atlantic somewhere off Nantucket and the moment of silence that was observed at breakfast in the Mess Hall that morning. Later that day we learned that *Andrea Doria* had sunk. My time at camp that summer also offered me the opportunity to qualify as a ‘Sharpshooter’ at the Bar 5 level at the rifle range. Glen Gray’s old range was not the most shooter-friendly place given that it was usually a sea of mud and the target holders were about to disintegrate because of age as was the old wooden backstop. I also earned my first ‘GG’ that summer. I was uncertain about the true purpose of the ‘GG’ until a few years later when, during a conversation with the late Jud Leonard, I realized that this small patch, which had no meaning *per se* within Scouting at the national level, was a unique, very practical way to challenge campers and make scouts like me aware of just how much Glen Gray offered to them during the summer camping season.

The large, log Mess Hall was impressive as a complex log structure as well as for the meals that it served. It was a place where we had the opportunity to meet other members of the camp’s staff not directly associated with our provisional troop on a day-to-day basis. Each table was responsible for inviting a member of the camp staff to their table for each meal. That responsibility fell to the Scout designated as the table’s waiter. I was never quite sure if the purpose of this requirement was to provide adult leadership at the table or to create a means to socialize the campers with all of the staff. Maybe it was both. In either case, it was probably a good idea. Indeed, it became almost a contest to get the preferred staff member’s name block from the mantel piece above the large, open fire place in the Mess Hall.

Living in ‘Stumbleup’ afforded its waiters an opportunity to get to the Mess Hall promptly when the camp bugler sounded “Waiter’s Call.” Some of the folks from the more distant campsites such as Dormanville and Beaverville figured out that they could pocket their desired guest’s name block ahead of time. But this practice was strictly against the rules as laid down by Wade Bartlett from Upper Montclair, the Steward of the Mess Hall. Wade had a way of knowing just who was subverting the rules and always levied some form of “extra instruction” in the etiquette of the Mess Hall for such a digression. That process enabled members of Troop 1 to get to know some truly impressive folks such as the late Jud Leonard, the camp director and professional Scouter who served Scouting with distinction for more than twenty five years; the late George Gimbel from Glen Ridge when he was in camp; Gene Byrne from Montclair, a gifted, practical leader and the only scout up to that time to be awarded two Tulip Leafs at Glen Gray; and, my good friend and fellow member of the Old Guard Mel Lyman from Glen Ridge who preceded me at the Naval Academy and served with distinction for twenty six years in the Navy’s nuclear submarine force.

Some of the best times I had at Glen Gray were the weekends that we spent at Troop 1’s cabin, a striking log structure that has, regrettably, long since passed into history. Too bad! A great place with a long, storied history! It was located near where the Hawk Ridge site is
positioned today as I understand it. The fireplace in that cabin was majestic to say the least. The troop used its cabin as a base of operations for fall and winter camping trips as well as making it available to individual patrols during the year. When I became a patrol leader, we made it a practice to use the cabin at least five times during the year as a way to get more time at Glen Gray and as a means to work on advancement and merit badges. But mostly we went to the cabin because we liked being there.

Over the years, Troop 1 had developed seven camp sites in the vicinity of the cabin. Each patrol was responsible for use and maintenance of its site. We used them regularly for the Fall and Winter Camporees. While both of these events across my time at Gen Gray were productive and memorable, the winter encampments at these campsites were perhaps more distinct in my memory. I particularly recall the January 1957 Winter Camporee; I think it was the coldest I had ever been up to that point in my life. These winter events also afforded the troop the chance to exercise another of its longstanding traditions associated with Glen Gray. The Scoutmaster, Assistant Scoutmasters and the senior Patrol Leader would prepare hot cocoa early each morning on the cabin’s large, wood cook stove during winter camporees for the entire troop. It was a clever way to conduct a “health and welfare check” to make sure that everyone was OK after a night in the cold and give them a chance to come inside the cabin for hot cocoa before they started cooking breakfast at each patrol’s campsite. To say that this “tradition” was appreciated by the entire troop, especially those participating in their first Winter Camporee, is an understatement!

After attending the fifth National Jamboree at Valley Forge in July 1957 as a representative of Troop 1 along with some fifty two thousand other scouts, I returned to camp once again with about twenty other troop members. Somehow, Bill Mathes and I were assigned to the same tent platform in ‘Stumbleup’ as we occupied in the summer of 1956. Charlie Porter from Caldwell was our provisional Scoutmaster. I continued my interest in marksmanship and qualified as an Expert Rifleman that summer. Glen Gray also afforded me the opportunity to earn the Camping, Cooking, Life Saving and Soil and Water Conservation merit badges that summer. I also earned my second ‘GG’ and was humbled at the final camp fire of the period to be presented with the Tulip Leaf award.

The Soil and Water badge was a special challenge for Bill Mathes and me. We decided to build a retaining wall in lower Mary Post Field as our project. The plan was good but the execution proved to be a challenge. The task at hand was to construct the wall on a portion of a rather step slope between Lower Mary Post and Upper Mary Post Fields that was starting to show some signs of serious erosion and, at the same time, provide sufficient drainage for any groundwater that might accumulate behind that wall. Just as in the case of the monkey bridge, Bill and I learned that this project was generally harder than we thought it would be!

Bob Holfelder had an interest in this particular endeavor because, as I later learned, it had been on his “list” for some time. He found out that Bill and I were working it and offered us
several lengths of steel pipe to serve as the uprights to secure the logs that would serve as the face of the retaining wall. He also put us onto the location of a small stand of trees downed by weather the previous winter that we could use. We used a crosscut saw to cut them to the right length and then haul them to the site – not an insignificant task. That saw always seemed to have been sharpened each time we drew it from the camp’s Quartermaster to work on the retaining wall. I often wondered if Bob Holfelder had something to do with this. Hauling rocks to the site to serve as the base and partial fill of that retaining wall was equally challenging. But we got some extra credit with Troop 1 by clearing some of the rocks that needed to be removed from two of the patrol campsites near Troop 1’s cabin. Ralph DeCamp gave us a strong up-check on that project.

I spent a good part of the summer of 1958 at Philmont in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains near Cimarron, New Mexico as part of the Eagle Rock Council’s expedition to that storied place. There were twenty three of us who made that memorable trek. It afforded us the opportunity for some truly unforgettable backpacking in wilderness country punctuated by a “close encounter” one night with a rather large black bear that, for some reason, chose to sit on me in my sleeping bag. Several of us bought Stetson cowboy hats in La Junta, CO and put them to good use on the trek around Philmont. I still have that hat. But more importantly, the expedition to Philmont enabled me to get to know a number of folks who would serve as members of the Camp’s staff with me in 1959 and 1960. These included Marty Suydam, Jim Bunting, John Gist, Ralph Najarian and George Delatush from Troop 12 in Montclair; Don Polderman from Troop 5 in Montclair; and, John Leuzader from Troop 4 in Verona. On return from Philmont, I joined my troop at Glen Gray and was astonished at the final campfire of that camping period to be presented with a second Tulip Leaf award.

During the summer of 1959, I returned to Camp as a member of its staff serving as the Steward in the Mess Hall. Once again, I lived in ‘Stumbleup.’ In case anyone who is reading this piece hasn’t noticed, there seemed to be a real pattern of me living in ‘Stumbleup’. I was fortunate to have a great kitchen crew working with me that included David Rosenberg of Montclair, Aaron Young of Montclair, and Dennis Crosby from Caldwell. This position also afforded me the opportunity to get to know the late George Marshall who had served as Glen Gray’s cook since the very early 1940s. George was a near-legendary Club Steward at the Cap and Gown eating club at Princeton University. Though I did not realize it until years later, the things that George taught me about managing a food service operation as the Mess Hall’s Steward and the importance of accountability in such a position served me well while serving as the commanding officer of the three commands I was privileged to have while in the Navy. George was also most gracious to me and to my teammates on the Seton Hall Prep swimming team when we would visit Princeton for the state championships each March. Somehow, several bags of fresh oranges would magically appear where we were staying before the preliminary heats and the finals of each event.
There were exceptionally heavy rains in the summer of 1959 and they had an impact on the lake and the spillway. In early August, a portion of that spillway began to show signs of cracking. The repair called for the replacement of two spillway boards. Bob Holfelder prepared them and then the question of who was going to do the job came up. I remember the late Jud Leonard looking at me as the job was being discussed with the staff in the Mess Hall. Somehow, and I’m not certain how it happened, there was a consensus that I was the right person for the job because I was a strong swimmer. I’m still not sure what that skill had to do with the task at hand. But, I agreed to volunteer as long as Bob Holfelder was in charge of tending the safety line that I insisted on. Luckily, the boards that needed replacement were side-by-side in the spillway so that I could at least minimize the on-rush of water from the lake when I removed a board. I was able to replace the first board relatively easy but the second one proved more of a challenge. Soaking wet and a bit cold, I was relieved when I finally got back on “dry land” on the bridge above the spillway.

During the final campfire of that season, I was overwhelmed to hear my name called four times from the cardinal points of the compass around Lake Vreeland as part of the traditional *Calling of the Old Guard* ceremony. Sitting in that council ring that night as the fire burned low and listening to the eleven other new members’ names, most of whom were old friends, being called first by an Old Guard member in the north, and then other members in the east, the south and, finally, the west was a profound experience for me.

Over the years, I have reflected on that ‘Calling’. Institutions do indeed have customs and traditions and the Old Guard and the ‘Calling’ are certainly two of the abiding traditions of Glen Gray. Such customs tend to be rooted in the early or formative experiences of the institution and its members and the Old Guard is no exception. Indeed, the ‘Calling’ ceremony and the Old Guard are tangible ways to help link generations of previous Old Guard members with present Glen Gray campers and their future counterparts. But, they are more than traditions. In short, the Old Guard is in many respects Glen Gray’s “anchor to windward”, if you will permit me to use a nautical analogy, that has helped keep Glen Gray headed fair along the course established by Frank Fellows Gray.

During the summer of 1960 I served as the camp’s Rangemaster at what was then a new rifle range near Troop 1’s cabin. Oftentimes I think I can still smell the creosote that we used to preserve the firing platform and the target holder. John Hickey, another old friend from Cedar Grove, and I lived in tent platform number one in the long-since gone area of Lower Bluntville. Marty Suydam, John Watson, George Delatush and the late Adam Forbes also lived in Lower Bluntville with us. It was, to say the least, quite a crew. There were times when I wondered if other members of the staff were comfortable with visiting us there. I recall Jim Bunting coming up into Lower Bluntville from the Waterfront lean-to to see Marty Suydam or George Delatush and remarking to me quite candidly that he “wondered whether (he) was permitted to enter into this rather special place.”
Almost the entire camp was, at one time or another, involved with the late retired Sergeant Major John Buffington from Troop 4 of Verona in building a monkey bridge across the lake. Because Marty Suydam has written an excellent piece on that ambitious project, there is no need to delve into it any further here. That summer also witnessed the case of the mysterious afloat Volkswagen that somehow magically appeared on the swimming float in the middle of the lake one morning. My abiding respect for the importance of “sources and methods” prevents me from discussing this clandestine, or perhaps covert, operation any further.

I was always impressed over my years at camp with the exceptionally close association between the members of the Order of the Arrow’s Oleleu Lodge and Glen Gray. Having been elected to membership in the Oleleu Lodge, I completed the Ordeal at Glen Gray in May of 1960 and reaffirmed my commitment to the OA in the Brotherhood ceremony at Glen Gray in May 1961. Being in the Navy and spending a significant amount of time at sea didn’t give me much opportunity to be active as an adult in Scouting. But I usually tried to affiliate with a local OA lodge wherever I was stationed. My experiences with those lodges enable me to say without hesitation that the relationship that I witnessed among the Oleleu lodge, its members and Glen Gray was significantly stronger than any other such relationship between a lodge and a council’s camp that I observed in Japan, Italy, Hawaii, Washington State, California, Texas, Massachusetts, Idaho, Rhode Island and Virginia.

After entering the Naval Academy, my visits to camp grew fewer and fewer. In December 1962 while on leave from the Academy, I spent several days there with Marty Suydam, John Hickey, John Watson and George Delatush. I last attended a ‘Calling’ ceremony in August 1964 just prior to reporting back to the Academy. My last trip to camp was an overnight in the Old Guard cabin in early May 1974 while I was home on leave from Japan. I envy the ability of those Old Guard members who have lived close enough to Glen Gray to continue to support it and to attend Old Guard events. I sincerely wish I had been able to do so.

Frank Fellows Gray achieved his purpose beyond all of his expectations. Very few people can say that in life. Most of us remember the adventures we shared in camp, the fun that we had and the practical things that we learned there. But my experiences at camp also taught me the importance of individual initiative coupled with teamwork and the confidence to use the knowledge and experience that I had gained. They also highlighted my conviction that goals and standards are good things, not things to be shunned. I am convinced that the enduring value that I derived from being part of Camp Glen Gray was an abiding sense of the importance of trust and confidence in each other and in the institution that was Camp Glen Gray. I am grateful that Glen Gray gave me the opportunity to realize and internalize these values.