

Seasons Greetings

from the entire Arnold Family

Dear Friends,

You may have noticed you didn't get a Christmas letter from us last year, we apologize, but it was seemingly unavoidable. This year by the Grace of God, you will get this one!

Last year on the way to the Guard after the San Francisco Marine Underwriters' dinner, at about 0152L on 7 December 1996, Hap and the Baron lost both engines on a missed approach at March Field. He was trapped in the aircraft for about five hours, then taken to Riverside Veterinary Hospital. There it took them three days to figure out he had two burst fractures (L-1 and T-12, for you medical types), several other vertebrae fractures and to miss the six broken ribs. They did find a minor ACL tear in the right knee, which has more or less resolved on its own. After "emergency surgery" on 10 December 1996, which planted two nice 18 inch titanium rods, Hap was transferred to the VA Medical Center in La Jolla, the week before Christmas. If it hadn't been for Dru and friend Judy Fair, Hap would probably still be in Riverside Veterinary Hospital with a knee problem.

For those of you who envision a VA Hospital as a two story brick building with racks where they store veterans until they have the good sense to die (That was Hap's vision). THINK AGAIN - If La Jolla is any indication, you are way off. The Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Center there is world class - The La Jolla SCI is one of the top three in the country! All said the people there were really super, still we recommend Christmas at home.

27 December 1996 was Hap's birthday and his first day out of bed in a wheelchair, out and about the hospital with Putt and Susan Richards. Hap was to stay in the hospital for three months or so. 15 January 1997 was his first day on forearm canes and the day he got out of the hospital. There were two kinds of people there, people glad to see him go and people darn glad to see him go! Bernie Coogan dropped in two days before he got out of the VA unannounced, what a surprise. It has been a long road for Hap, even longer for Dru, William and Jack, who have to put up with him. Hap got his Kevlar vest off in June and uses a cane only for large steps with no handrails now.

Hap retired officially 17 June 1997, after 30 years and two weeks military service, the goat rope was held at August Drill. Quite a nice ceremony and party, the retirement ceremony was the first since Hap joined the unit twenty years ago. It was Putt's idea and held in the Ops Group building, the whole thing was first rate and the unit really deserves credit for it. The almost the entire family made it to the ceremony, including Uncle Jack, Jackson's namesake, the Naval Aviator and four star who swore Hap in to the Navy Reserve in June 1967. We were all proud to have been there. Hap seems to be acclimating fairly well to not spending every free minute and a few more with the Guard.

Hap and Dru made it to the Organization of Flying Adjusters (OFA) annual meeting in October 1997, flying a Cherokee Six from Chicago to Dayton, courtesy of Bill and Lynn Hall. He has gone down in history as the President of OFA who has done the absolute least in history.

Things are going pretty darn well for Hap now, though he tires more easily than before (hard to believe, huh?). There is still nerve damage to the calf muscles (no toe standing) and the bowels and bladder, but it is livable; the rest of the family is getting used to him being home and around more.

The Arnolds have been in our new house now for 2 1/2 years. The more we live here, the more we like it. Dru gets all the credit for house implementation. We have a guest room in the main house and a cottage out back (the 27' house trailer we bought to live in while we built the house - but never slept in once in because Jack wouldn't sleep at night). If you are really adventurous, come stay in the Alamo (our well house) and ride the slide for life cable to the main house!

Young Jackson, now just over five and wears a size eight. The big news is that he began to talk last year just before his birthday and hasn't stopped since. He taught himself to read phonetically. If it is printed, he can read it. He is really amazing! He still loves airplanes. He is sad the Baron is gone, but everything crashes now, "just like the Baron." Jack is doing great! Though he is still different, in many ways he is so amazing! To the

teacher at school reading aloud to the class, "That does not say snake, it says boa constrictor." There is no end of Jack stories.

William is in his second year of High School and is doing pretty darn well. His grades are all right, sports kind of went away when he hurt his knee in Lacrosse. William is still serving as an acolyte in our small Anglican Church. Even though he is at times a teenager, most of the time, he is still the "Rodo." Joan Jeffery still brings the English comics, he still stays up too late reading them. So far at least, Mom and Dad haven't gotten dumb yet. He and Hap (mostly the Rodo) have put together a nice shooting range at the house where he can now practice regularly at home with his air rifle and pistol, as well as CB Caps. Good thing, because it will be sometime before Hap can make it to Monarch Flats where we shoot our real guns with live ammo.

Dru has been fully employed as a nurse for Hap and taking care of Jack, she kind of dropped out of the PACU at Balboa Naval Hospital San Diego. She is now in her second year as the Editor of Jack's PTA Newspaper. Being in charge of all our medical care, she has become quite a Web-Geek. You can't hide much in the way of information from her.

No baby rats anymore at our home, they have all passed on. We don't seem to be able to bring others into our lives yet. Their spirit lives on in the Gang of Many whose names you see at the end of the letter. These are various and assorted fabric based life-forms who in outward appearance vaguely resemble different species, but are all rodents at heart, as in pigrat, sharkrat, tigerrat and even the occasional rat-rat.

Hap's Mom, Delna, is doing very well. Not too many trips this year, too much time worrying about Hap. She did make it to Hawaii, where she fell in love with a condo. Guess she will be spending some time there. She is back in to horses, bought a new trailer and is looking for a nice trail horse. Anyone with a nice stable trail horse they would like to sell? Must go when told to go and even more important, stop when told to stop.

Dru's, Ginny Propps, was staying with us for a few months. She has moved back to the Rancho Cucamonga area and is living near her old house. Ginny decided she would rather live on her own than with us. She gets down to see us about once a month now.

The big news for Brother Bruce and wife Lorena is Lorena has started a pewter importing business, Ante Gifts, which appears to be up and running. Their daughter, Megan, is walking and talking up a storm. Once again we had Thanksgiving at their home, not as many people there as the last couple of years, but Bruce's gravy was great as usual.

Brother Tuck, wife Robie and daughter Alison seem to have a handle on their avocado forest which has sprouted back well after grafting. Robie's job teaching Art at Valhalla High School has been going very well. Ali seems to be really enjoying school. The entire family is in to horses now. Tuck has been accepted by the Los Senderos riding group, no small honor, and is having a great time.

Despite predictions of doom and gloom, sister Jacquie and her radio station in Oakland are still doing well. She and her friend Becky are due down at Christmas this year.

For the seventh year in a row in October, and for a change not on Hap's drill (but while we were off to OFA) as always, our excellent friends from the RAF, Bob and Kay Denton, came to visit from the UK. Each year they say it their last trip, each year we welcome them back. This time they spent more time in San Diego than before, though we never seem to see enough of them. Finally, Dru got Kay to show us the secrets of curry. It was great to visit with them, they are the absolute best guests and tourists.

The Aviation and Marine insurance and accident investigation business is doing well, we now have six offices, San Diego, Long Beach, Phoenix, San Francisco, Honolulu and Pago Pago, American Samoa. Office travel has been very light for Hap, one trip to San Francisco in February and another in December and the annual OFA meeting, this time in Dayton, Ohio. He is finally a Past President of the Organized Flying Adjusters, the office to which he has been aspiring for some time.

The Guard is a dot! After just over 30 years, Hap is finally retired. It was a great time and he misses it; but it is nice to be home weekends, even if it is hard to move. If you want more on that, ask.

The Baron is deceased, Hap is alive. He is waiting for his medical back from Oklahoma City and looking for a Skymaster, either a 336 or a T337 - ideas?

Each year, we say we know how lucky we are - Well, this year more than ever. We are keenly aware of just how lucky we are to be healthy in soul, mind and body. Those of our family here on earth are all healthy and extremely happy. Once again, we are reminded just how kind God has been to us this year. As we look over our Christmas list, we think of our friends, some we have seen, most whom we have not. We think of years gone by, time spent together. We wish we could have spent more time together. We wish you all a very happy and joyous holiday season. May God be with you as we feel he is with us.

Best wishes and Love, Dru, Hap/Bill, William & Jackson and the Gang of Many, Rat, Zaxxon, Rex, Roy, Sabie, Horsy, Bunny, Archie, Hand Rat, Jack Brown, Eugene Rat, Snort, Oinks, Crunch, Stewy, Goldie & Tylor

PS: We now have an e-mail server at the office. If you would like to communicate via e-mail with us:

Dru - dru@arnoldoffice.com or momrat@arnoldoffice.com - These forward to her Compuserve Account

Hap / Bill - bill@arnoldoffice.com or hap@arnoldoffice.com, or for the more adventurous - kingrat@arnoldoffice.com