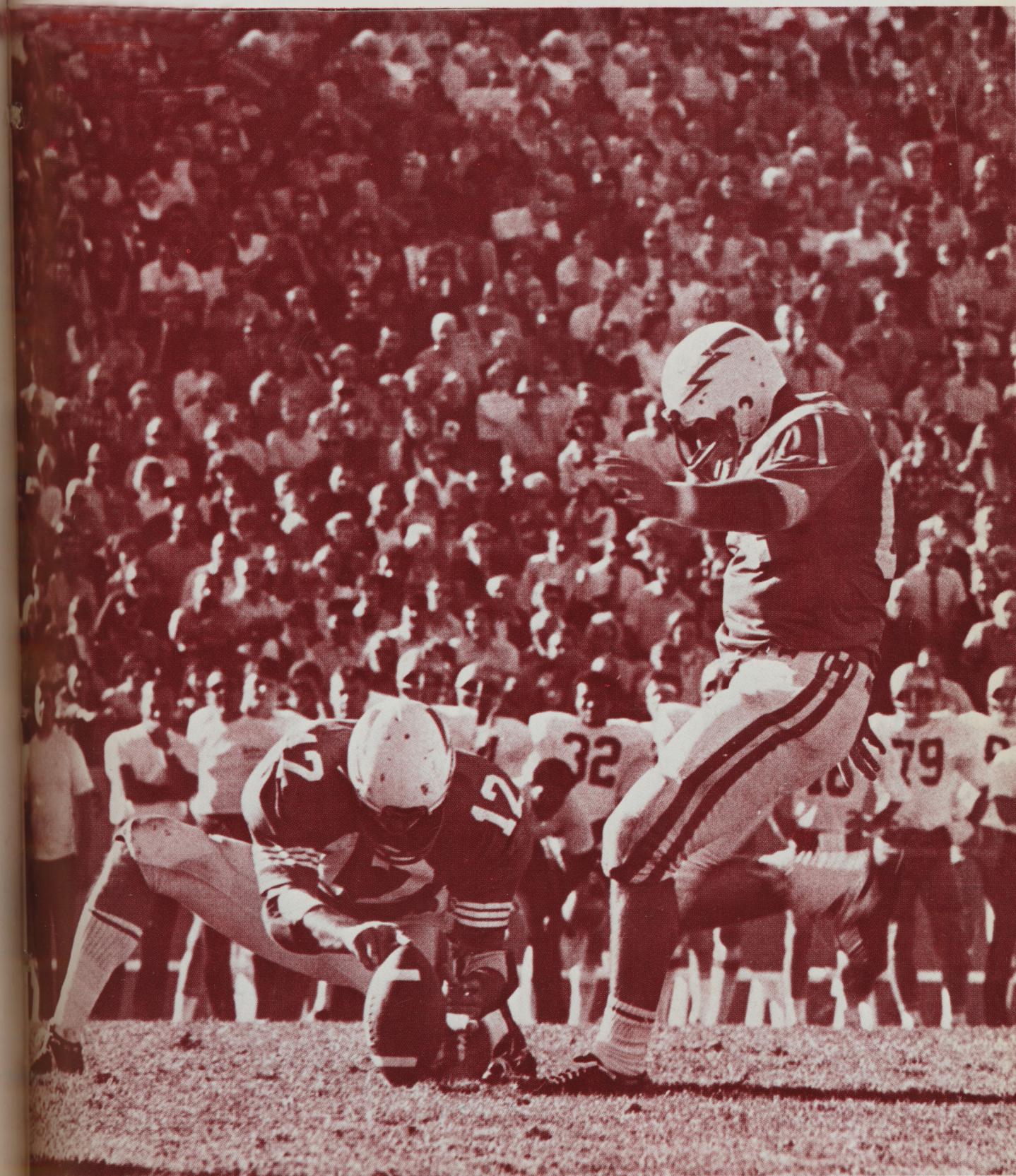




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TERRY

AND THE PIRATES

by GEORGE WUNDER

THE FORMAL RITUAL OF INTERCOLLEGIATE FOOTBALL IS SADLY DISRUPTED BY BEDCHECK CHARLIE'S APPEARANCE ON THE GRIDIRON.

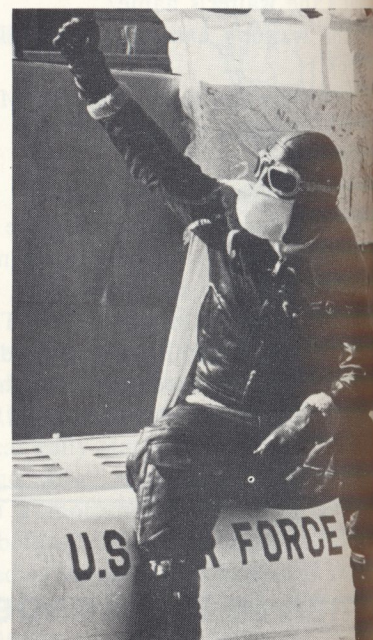
He stands resolutely, silhouetted against the fall sky as the Wing marches past his Mitchell Hall vantage point. While the wind tugs at his flowing white scarf, he observes his charges below through begoggled eyes. Who is this timeless flyer, this anachronism from the days of iron men and wooden wings, who watches over the spirit of the future generation of aces below? This apparition you have seen is Bedcheck Charlie, perhaps the most misunderstood ghost of all times, and yet probably the most interesting and colorful figure in the Academy's history.

You have undoubtedly seen Bedcheck at one time or other. It might have been at a Noon Meal Formation as he reviewed the troops before a football game — checking to make sure the Wing's spirit was high. Perhaps it was at a pep rally or team send-off, with his

spirit and enthusiasm oozing through the crowd. He must always make sure the Wing's spirit is at its peak.

At football games, Bedcheck really gets to do his thing. The lonely and mysterious figure appears right before the opening kickoff and calmly leans against the goal post, letting his compatriots both on and off the field know that he is ready for victory. Throughout the rest of the game, Bedcheck can be seen rushing up and down the Air Force sideline, or pacing to and fro, full of overflowing spirit — encouraging the men on the field and the fans in the stands to obtain victory. At half time he finds the prettiest girl, in the tradition of all fighter pilots, and presents her before the Wing for their approval. Though he speaks no words, his very actions and mannerisms are spirit personified — or more correctly,

Story by Walt Hern '77





— Craig Murra Photo

Bedcheck reviews the team from his F-4 fantage point

ghostified.

Bedcheck is easily recognized: the fleece lined boots, pants and jacket, essentials for challenging the numbing cold of high altitudes in an open cockpit; the tinted goggles, protecting his eyes from the searing slipstream as he watched for "the Hun in the sun"; and the ever present white scarf, to keep his uniform from chafing his neck as he scanned the skies over Europe, and always handy for wiping the drops of oil blown back from the engine off of his goggles. He fully represents a comrade

of Spaatz, Rickenbacker and Mitchell. Of course, his mere appearance makes this representation apparent, but even more are his ardor and enthusiasm which were characteristics of our early flyers. It is almost as if one of our comrades from the past has rejoined us in order to cheer the Falcons on to victory.

Now that we know a little more about Bedcheck, it will prove interesting to see where he originated. Despite certain rumors that link him with World War I or II figures, or with a figure from the Korean Conflict, our

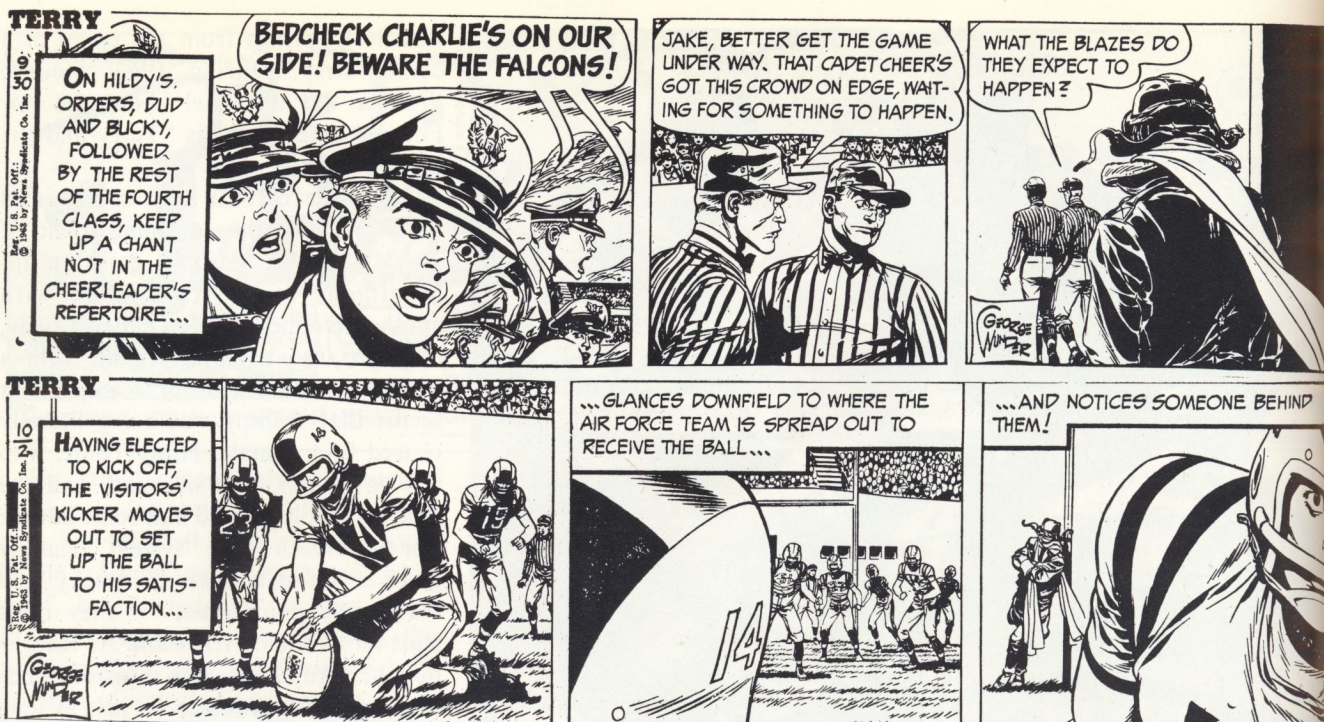
Bedcheck springs from the pages of a comic strip. During 1963, George Wunder did a sequel about the Air Force Academy in his "Terry and the Pirates" comic strip.

The melodramatic plot ran something like this: a young friend of Terry's, Bucky Warbow, gains an appointment to USAFA, then with another Doolie friend, Dudley Darby, they get into a bit of trouble with a Firstie — Cadet Major Rampart. It seems that Rampy was being literally chased by a female, Hildy Tome, who was in search of a husband, and the Doolies kindly offered him some advice. For this breach of the "system", Rampy gives a difficult task to Bucky and Dudley as punishment — they must start an Academy tradition. As Rampy puts it: "Anything your massive minds can concoct, gentlemen — just as long as it's one that generations of cadets yet unborn will cherish!"

Well, as things would have it, Hildy devises a scheme which not only aids the Doolies, but also gains her revenge over the Rock — Rampy. Bedcheck Charlie is born: the ghost of a World War I pilot who has returned to aid the Fourth Class with its bedtime inspections, giving advance warning of approaching upperclassmen. The whole affair almost backfires as the appearance of the ghost receives nationwide attention — even the Pentagon becomes concerned. An explanation has to be found in order to save the Academy, but Rampy will not put the two doolies in jeopardy. Instead, he will sacrifice his career in order to save them and USAFA.

It really looks bleak until Hildy shows up at the big football game, scares the hell out of the opponents, and the Falcons emerge victorious. Then the whole thing is exposed as a manifestation of spirit — thus saving face for





everyone. All is resolved, and a tradition is born.

Bedcheck did not appear on our campus, however, until 1966, when a venerable, bitter, and notorious '59 Grad decided that the Academy was in need of the friendly ghost. Consulting with the celestial sphere, he brought 'ol Bedcheck to our campus — symbol of spirit and truly one of our better traditions. Since then, Bedcheck has had numerous friends who have helped him along. This ghostly figure will always remain with the Wing, for he has indeed become a distinguished tradition at USAFA, and as long as there is something known as school spirit in our midst, it will be found in its highest form in the lonely yet ardent figure of Bedcheck Charlie.

Editors Note:

Comics reprinted by permission of the News Syndicate Co., Inc. Copyright 1963. All rights reserved. Our thanks to Captain Robert Gravelle (USAFA '64) for loaning TALON his collection of Terry and the Pirates comics. The entire story of Bedcheck Charlie will be placed on display in the Library during November.

