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Quick, Timely Reads
On the Waterfront

'Book 'Em, Danno'
*A Familiar Neighborhood Face
Appears on 'Hawaii Five-0'*

By David Frew
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Dr. David Frew, a prolific writer, author, and speaker grew up on Erie's lower west side as a proud "Bay Rat," joining neighborhood kids playing and marauding along the west bayfront. He has written for years about his beloved Presque Isle and his adventures on the Great Lakes. In this series, the JES Scholar-in-Residence takes note of life in and around the water.



I am a sucker for old television shows, especially 1960s and 1970s crime dramas. This attraction is probably explained by excessive time listening to “exciting” radio dramas as a kid. Crime thrillers like “The Shadow,” as well as classic TV detectives shows, including Mickey Spillane’s “Mike Hammer.”

Surfing television streaming services a few weeks ago, I encountered “Hawaii Five-o,” a police drama set in Honolulu during the late 1960s (and later revived). Jack Lord played state police chief Steve McGarrett in an overly simplistic drama that featured ham-handed script-lines and crazy 1960s stereotypes. Lord’s character was a straight-arrow, cop type who tooted around the island in a black, four-door Mercury, and always drove way to fast. It was Joe Friday and “Dragnet,” but in Hawaii. McGarrett would screech up to a crime scene, leap out of his car and race into every situation, seeming bigger than life. And always wearing a traditional suit, white shirt, and tie.



Steve McGarrett's four-door Mercury was totally cool

I was watching the show and chuckling at the lines when I was suddenly struck by a familiar face. Steve and his partner, Danno, were at the crime lab where a “forensic specialist” was establishing a cause of death. Classic cop stuff. As McGarrett chatted with “Doc,” the laboratory doctor turned toward the camera to explain things to Steve and I recognized him. Not just the face, but his voice. Doc was a typical white-coated scientist type, explaining exactly why the morgue subject must have been murdered but I somehow knew him. Why? I abandoned the program, fast forwarded to the credits and saw the name “Newell Tarrant.”

Levi Newell Tarrant (1911-2000) was director of the Erie Playhouse from 1946 to 1962, and he distinguished himself as a talented administrator, highly successful fundraiser, skilled stage director, and community leader. He lived near St. Andrew School, during the time that I was a grade school student and episodically visited classes to recruit and to promote for the playhouse. In those days, the Erie Playhouse was housed in a brick building on the north side of West Seventh Street and adjacent to Gannon College. When the playhouse moved, Gannon purchased the building and used it for student productions until the building was demolished as a part of a campus expansion in the 1980s.



Newell Tarrant as "Doc" in "Hawaii Five-o"

My familiarity with Mr. Tarrant was connected to his son, who was my age. Yancey Newell Tarrant, was the shortstop on my Boys Baseball team and I knew his dad from being a loud and vociferous supporter of the team, even though we were not very good (a generous understatement). Mr. Tarrant came to almost every game to cheer and often provided post-game snacks and picnics.

Newell Tarrant left Erie for Hawaii to take the position of director of "The Honolulu Community (now Diamond Head) Theater." He continued to direct that theater and act, himself, until he moved to the mainland. His connection with Jack Lord began almost as soon as "Hawaii Five-o" began production in Honolulu.

Jack Lord (1920-1998) was born in Brooklyn and seemed directed toward a career in commercial shipping, following in his father's footsteps. Lord (born: John "Jack" Joseph Ryan) graduated from the Merchant Marine Academy and went to sea as a young man but returned to his home and entered NYU on a football scholarship. After earning a degree in fine arts, he joined the Navy during World War II and became a training officer. His interest in acting evolved as he was producing training films for the United States Navy. After the war, he returned to New York and began acting. He started in theater, appearing on Broadway and then taking film roles. Lord was the original "Felix" in James Bond movies.

When Jack Lord agreed to take the role of Steve McGarrett in "Hawaii Five-o," he approached the opportunity as a long-term commitment in which he intended to celebrate local culture and history. His determination to promote Hawaiian culture and integrate locals into the television series is what led him to the Community Theater and Newell Tarrant. Jack Lord continued to play that part from 1968 until 1980 and became an owner-producer of the series. When "Hawaii Five-o" finally ended, it was to be replaced on CBS and in Honolulu by "Magnum P.I.," starring Tom Sellick, a show that ran for eight years. Lord was to have a recurring role in that show but failing health prevented him from doing so.



Yancey Newell Tarrant

Apparently, the proximity of a United States Naval Base to the Tarrant home in Hawaii as well as the influence of Jack Lord, whose adventures often involved the base and ships, must have had an impact on Newell Tarrant's son, my little league colleague. Yancey Newell Tarrant became a naval pilot, flew more than 200 missions during the Vietnam War era and won a distinguished flying cross. And, apparently, Mr. Tarrant's playhouse influence also had an impact on his son. After he retired, Yancey Newell Tarrant became an actor, notably appearing in "Star Trek IV: The Long Journey Home" and several additional roles.

One reason that he was added to the Star Trek cast was his experience as both a pilot and an officer aboard the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise. He was called upon on the set of "Star Trek" to provide advice regarding the complex operations aboard a naval ship. The context of "Star Trek" was based upon ocean going ships in which the captain and his command officers (James Kirk and Spock) were stationed at the front of the vessel where they could see ahead, while the engineering and engine crew (Scotty) were located in the rear.



Naval ship USS Enterprise



Commander Yancey Newell Tarrant



Starship USS Enterprise

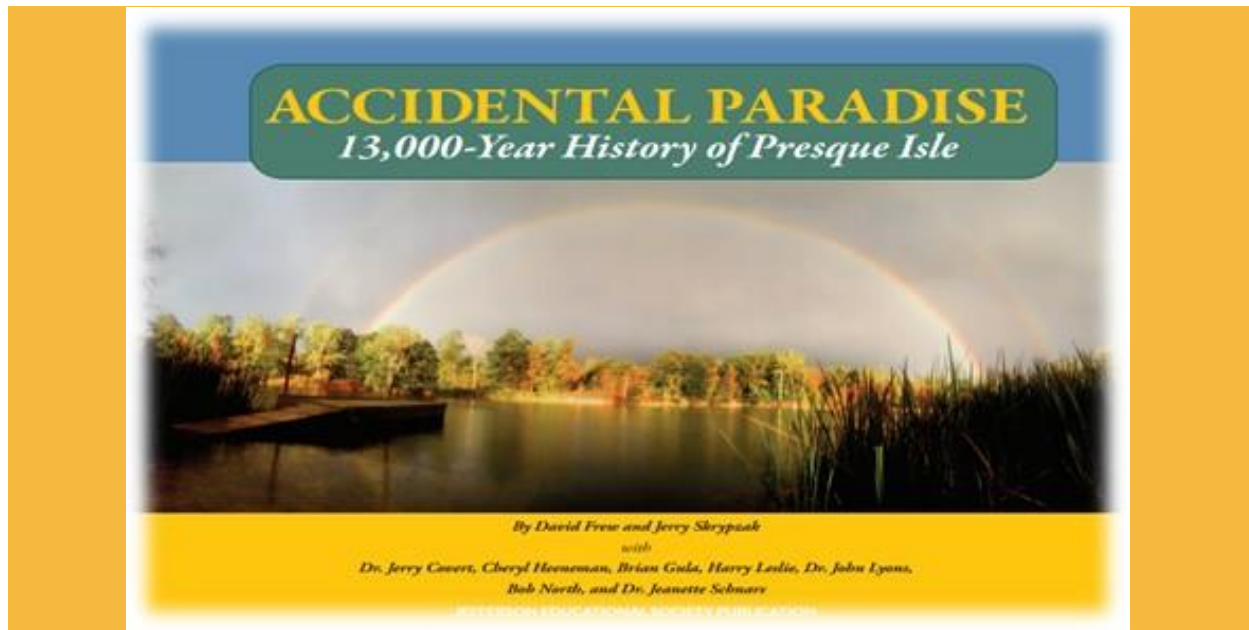
Yancey Newell Tarrant, who graduated from Strong Vincent High School in 1960 and grew up on the northwest side of Erie, currently lives in Arizona. In addition to working as an actor, he is currently an author. Yancey Newell Tarrant's father left Hawaii for North Carolina, where he became the director of the Raleigh Little Theater. He passed away in 2000.

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Accidental Paradise
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To watch "Accidental Paradise: Stories Behind The Stories" click [here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Historian and author David Frew, Ph.D., is a Scholar-in-Residence at the JES. An emeritus professor at Gannon University, he held a variety of administrative positions during a 33-year career. He is also emeritus director of the Erie County Historical Society/Hagen History Center and is president of his own management consulting business. Frew has written or co-written 35 books and more than 100 articles, cases, and papers.



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