

A Story Idea Each Day for a Month—Day 21

Scott Myers

This is the 13th year in a row I've run this series in April. Why a story idea each day for the month? Because the best way to come up with a great story idea is to come up with a **lot** of ideas. And the best way to come up with a lot of ideas is to be proactive in sourcing story ideas.

Today's story: [Army cadets steal wrong goat in prank gone wrong with Navy ahead of football game](#).

WEST POINT, N.Y. (AP) — West Point cadets attempting to nab the U.S. Naval Academy's mascot ahead of the annual Army-Navy football game ended up grabbing a different goat, according to a report.

U.S. Military Academy cadets traveled this weekend to a farm near Annapolis, Maryland, that is home to Navy mascot Bill, who belongs to a long line of goat mascots with the same name. Cadets gave chase to the spooked goats. And instead of grabbing Bill N°37, they came away Bill N°34, a one-horned, 14-year-old retiree, [according to The New York Times](#).

West Point officials would not confirm details of the incident Tuesday, but said the animal was returned safely and that they were investigating those

responsible.



Bill the Goat has a snack before the game

More background from the New York Times:

Under the cover of darkness over the weekend, Army cadets from the United States Military Academy at West Point crept into a secret compound, on a mission so dear to the cadet corps that it has survived generations of evolving warfare and official rebuke: stealing Bill the goat.

The goat is the mascot of the Naval Academy, the 37th in the line of goats of various breeds to hold that distinction. All 37 have been named Bill, and over the last 70 years, Army cadets have stolen Bill at least 10

times, [beginning in 1953](#) with a plan that involved a convertible and some chloroform.

Navy midshipmen once nabbed the Army's mule mascots as well. And Air Force Academy cadets have gotten a few heists in.

The pranks, euphemistically called spirit missions, are generally timed to precede the annual Army-Navy football game, where both sides' mascots are expected to appear.

Officially, mascot stealing is forbidden by a high-level [formal agreement](#) signed in 1992, after Navy midshipmen cut phone lines and zip-tied six Army employees while stealing West Point's mules. But the pranks are [so deeply ingrained in the lore of interservice rivalry](#) that leaders of the schools have never been able to stamp them out. And privately, the military leaders that forbid the missions at times have also chuckled with glee.

Sometimes the thefts are elaborate and dazzlingly executed, complete with commando teams with blackened faces and decoys sent to distract guards. One heist was so stealthy that it went unsolved until cadets ran [an ad in The New York Times](#) that read, "Hey Navy, do you know where your 'kid' is today? The Corps does."

Others were little more than ham-handed brawls,

including a melee in a stadium parking lot in 2015 that landed Bill N°35 in a veterinary clinic for a week.

This weekend's effort was more of a Bay of Pigs-style embarrassment. West Point raiders reconnoitered a private farm near Annapolis, Md., and tried to sneak up to the paddock where the current goat mascot, a young angora with curly white wool, was pastured with others, including at least one retired Bill.

The noisy assault team spooked the goats into a run, though, and when the fumbling cadets gave chase, they managed to grab only one goat — and not the right one. After a four-hour drive back to West Point, they unveiled not Bill N°37 but Bill N°34, an arthritic, 14-year-old retiree with only one horn, according to a joint statement released by the Army and Navy in response to questions from The New York Times.

I'd take this story conceit and widen the appeal by shifting it from the military academies to a mainstream college. In this iteration, a bunch of college students kidnap their rival's furry mascot. However, the rivals have switched critters, so the one the kidnappers take is an ornery, stubborn, and destructive beast.



I am not a mascot! I am a human being... check that... I am a goat!

The goat ... or cow ... or bull ... or whatever upends the kidnappers' lives creating havoc. Destruction of property. Personal injuries. The critter escapes. More hijinks and mayhem. Now the police are involved. The media picks up on the renegade beast. PETA protestors arrive.

In other words, a big ol' shitstorm happens.

Could one or more of the humans help to tame the beast?
Could the animal humanize the people? Could they bond in the end?

That depends upon what you want to do with my 24th story in this month's series. Other stories in this year's A Story Idea Each Day for a Month:

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Each day in April, I invite you to join me in comments to do some brainstorming. Take each day's story idea and see what it can become when we play around with it. These are valuable skills for a writer to develop.