



Photos by Dr. James Pointer '78, a Blue & Gold Officer, from the training held earlier this year

Blue & Gold Officers: Volunteers in the Admissions Process

By Commander Frank Evans, USN (Ret.),
8-year Blue & Gold Officer

The Naval Academy's Blue & Gold Officers (BGOs) come from throughout the United States. They are lawyers, brokers, teachers, coaches, businessmen, retirees, former military members and a host of other occupations. Many BGOs return to Annapolis for a weeklong training session for BGOs sponsored by the Naval Academy's Candidate Guidance Office.

The 2,000 volunteer BGOs are a part of a select group who donate their time and effort because they believe in the Blue & Gold Officer Program. They support admissions by calling on prospective USNA candidates and advising high school students on the process for USNA admission.

Why do these volunteers do it? For some, it is because of their service in the fleet and loyalty to the Navy and the Naval Academy. Others have children who have attended or are attending the Naval Academy. For others still—those USNA Alumni—it is because they want to give something back to the alma mater that played such an important part in their lives.

Captain Doug Schlaefer '75, USNR (Ret.), joined the Navy because of his patriotism. Schlaefer flew F-4 Phantoms and

F-14s during his career. He also came from a Navy family—his father and three uncles enlisted in the Navy during World War II. The Navy tradition continues in his family as his son, Midshipman Doug Schlaefer '09, attends the Naval Academy.

“I heard about the Blue & Gold Officer Program from a Navy buddy in Virginia Beach,” said Schlaefer, a BGO since 2001. “When I retired from the Naval Reserve, I wanted to contribute something to the Navy. The Blue & Gold Officer Program filled that gap. It doesn't take much time and it's easy to fit in your schedule,” he added.

As a Blue & Gold Officer, Schlaefer and others often see young men and women who go above and beyond in their efforts to get selected for the Academy. Schlaefer recalls, “I had one candidate raised on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, near Wallops Island—a remote community. This student had to self-teach certain subjects in high school due to lack of teaching expertise. I pulled hard for him. He is now at NAPS.”

John Byington '90 is in his first year as a BGO. He enjoys helping young people find their path, especially when it is a path that leads them to Annapolis. Byington is proud to come from a family of pilots and of Naval Academy graduates. His father, Captain Melville Byington '54, USN (Ret.), and his grandfather, Commander Moses B. Byington Jr. 1918, USN, both attended USNA.

Byington chose to attend the Naval Academy to serve his country, lead Sailors, for the adventure, to test his abilities and for his love of the sea. He also credits his experience with the Blue & Gold Officer Program as a positive influence.

“I benefited from the Blue & Gold Officer Program while in high school,” he explained. “We had a very robust and

proactive program in the 1980s. My father was a BGO and from the ninth grade on, I set my sights on Annapolis.”

Byington served on active duty from 1990 to 2000 and among his assignments were two carrier deployments to the Med/Persian Gulf, flying helicopters off carriers. His father was also a naval aviator, as was his father-in-law and brother-in-law who flew for the Marines. Byington added, “My uncle was an Army Air Corps pilot, and my nephew is an NROTC midshipman.”

His involvement as a BGO has given him the opportunity to “give back” to the Academy and enables him to share with prospective students that “Annapolis is a special place, requiring due diligence and consideration.”

“I've been blessed with many connections with USNA,” Byington said. “I got to fly off carriers, graduate from Georgetown and Harvard Business School. My circle of friends is very special. The Academy is a national asset that needs stewardship, so if I can help, I will.”

“I probably spend a total of 20 hours a month working with and visiting USNA candidates,” said Lieutenant Davida Nelumn '90 of Greenville, SC, of her involvement as a BGO.

Nelumn, whose career has included serving aboard NIAGARA FALLS and aboard MCKEE during Desert Storm, was introduced to the Blue & Gold Officer Program when she was assigned to USNA's Candidate Guidance Office.

“I got involved with the BGO program to ensure information regarding the opportunity is shared with students who may not be familiar with the Naval Academy experience,” she said. “Particularly, minorities tend to have less exposure to this information than mainstream America.”

She added, “When I have the chance to talk to junior and senior students about the rigors of Academy life, I tell them it's tough, but nothing in life worth having comes easy. Don't do it for your family, do it for yourself.”

For those students who are unsure about attending the Naval Academy, Nelumn's advice is to “visit all of the schools then make your final cut. Talk to as many students at these institutions as possible. Do your research and if you choose Navy—make sure you're prepared.”

Among many civilians who find time to serve as a BGO is Joseph Gerace. He was introduced to the program in 1990 when his daughter, Lieutenant

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—David Martin '70

Melissa Ashby '93, USN, went through the admissions and application process for USNA.

"I got involved so I could help other students to attend," Gerace said. "Being a part of the Academy and helping others to obtain their goals and dreams is what keeps me in the BGO Program. These young men and women who select USNA will come to realize how special Annapolis is years after graduation and fleet experience. It's then that they begin to see the impact this place has had on their lives and career choice."

Commander Wellington Williams, USN, got involved with the BGO program in 1980 following a call from the Naval Academy.

"They asked me to be the Minority Affairs BGO counselor," he said. "My interests have been involved with all the military academies. I wanted to inspire qualified minority students to focus on a military career for the opportunities the military can provide."

Williams seeks to make candidates aware of the challenges they would face if they attended the Naval Academy, as well as the rewards.

"Attending the Naval Academy will be a test of your spirit. Experience all the opportunities that can only be given to you by attending Annapolis. Your rewards will be many in terms of travel, diverse experiences and leadership. An education awaits you, especially in the fields of technology and science. The friendships made will give you a lifelong support system," William tells prospective applicants.

Looking back on his career, first as an enlisted Sailor and then as an officer, Williams said, "For a young man who grew up in the ghetto, I have experienced many blessings and worthwhile causes, friendships and education that I could

only achieve through my war preparation exercises, active duty assignments and recall to Desert Storm. Nothing in my life could have prepared me for my exciting journey with the Navy."

David Martin '70 first heard of BGOs when he was a Plebe and met the BGO from his area. He reacquainted himself with the BGO Program when his daughter, Lieutenant Shannon Martin '98, USN, was applying to the Naval Academy.

"I was attending a Parents' Club meeting and the area coordinator asked for help," he said. "I joined up the following week."

The nine-year BGO officer chose the Naval Academy for a quality education and the chance to serve his country. He served aboard NEWPORT (LST-1179) and BIGELOW (DD942) after leaving the Yard.

What keeps Martin in the program is the desire to make sure youth in his area have the opportunity to find out about the Naval Academy. "If I weren't there,

no one would be available." He goes to Parents' Club meetings, talks to prospective candidates and speaks to local organizations and school groups. He looks at the Blue & Gold Officer Program as a way he can continue to serve his country.

"The Naval Academy is a special place," he said. "There is no more challenging or rewarding opportunity for a young man or woman available today. Unique and talented individuals embark on a very special mission to become leaders of our nation." †

Commander Frank Evans is a graduate of Ohio State University and received his M.A. from the University of Northern Colorado. As a PAO, he served in Japan, Whidbey Island NAS, Washington, U.S. Southern Command, Panama, Trident Submarine Base, Georgia, and was recalled to active duty for the Gulf War and served on General Norman Schwarzkopf's staff.

Supporting Roles— Academy Awareness Representatives

Blue & Gold Officers depend on a network of people—Alumni, parents, professors, friends, officers and Academy Awareness Representatives. Academy Awareness Representatives are informed advocates of today's Naval Academy, meaning they work to promote the mission and the vision of USNA by seeking out opportunities to disseminate information about the USNA admissions process in the communities in which they live and serve. The representatives work directly with Blue & Gold Officers, local Chapters and the Alumni Association to coordinate information, as well as to identify local contacts and events that may further benefit the process.

To volunteer in the admission process as a Blue & Gold Officer or as an Academy Awareness Representative, visit www.usna.edu or contact Ron Casey at 410-295-4012 or ron.casey@usna.com.