

## SEA TRIALS

The purpose of Sea Trials is two-fold. Sea Trials challenges the fourth class morally, mentally and physically and provides these Midshipmen with personal feedback on their own Plebe year experience. Sea Trials also provides the upper classmen with an opportunity to enhance and strengthen their leadership capabilities. Although no material reward exists for those who participate and successfully complete Sea Trials, satisfaction comes from knowing that with the help of shipmates, motivation, and determination, any challenge or obstacle can be overcome. The USNA Sea Trials is a "capstone" event for the 4th Class, similar to the Marine Corps' Crucible and the Navy's Battle Stations Program.



Approximately 1100 plebes participate in Sea Trials each year. In five rotating phases that last for a 14-hour period, Plebes are tested in various challenges, all based on simulated situations that exist in the fleet. Each company is directed in each phase by one 1st class (senior), two 2nd class (junior) and four 3rd class (sophomores, or "youngsters"). The second semester company commander remains with the plebes throughout the entire day. Additionally, more than 200 upperclass work as staff.

At the end of Sea Trials, each Plebe is awarded their Gold Anchor marking the end of the Plebe year as a class.

## HERNDON

The Herndon Monument is a gray, granite obelisk 21 feet high (48" square at bottom) with a matching gray, granite base, 71" square. It was commissioned by the Officers of the U.S. Navy as a tribute to Commander William Lewis Herndon (1813-1857) after his loss in the Pacific Mail Steamer "Central America" during a hurricane off Georgia in 1857. Herndon had followed the longtime custom of the sea that a ship's captain is the last person to depart his ship in peril. The monument was erected in its current location on June 16, 1860 and has never been moved even though the Academy was completely rebuilt between 1899 and 1908.

Beginning with graduation exercises in the late 1920s, Plebes began a custom of climbing various monuments in the yard and placing their hats on top. Over the years the Herndon Monument Climb became the only challenge and the only monument used in the ritual.

The legend developed that the first student who got his cover on the pinnacle of the obelisk would become the first Admiral of his class. Although records have only been kept in recent years, the legend has not proved true. Beginning in the mid-1970s it became a tradition that the Midshipman who first reached the top is carried by his classmates to the Superintendent, who observes the ceremony from the Chapel steps, where the triumphant Midshipman is given a pair of Admiral shoulder boards.

Beginning in the 1950s, the upper classes decided to make the task more difficult and started coating the granite shaft with lard and cooking fat and digging a mud pit around its base. The latter custom has been discontinued, but the greasing continues. At some point, too, it became a custom to glue and/or tape a Plebe's "dixie cup" hat to the top of the monument so that it had to be removed before their standard visored cover could be put in its place.

The monument climb is timed and a salute cannon is fired to signal the beginning of the ceremony and to mark every fifteen minutes during the climb. The unconfirmed new record time of 1 hour 14 minutes and 38 seconds was set by the class of 2012. The longest recorded climb was recorded when the Class of 1998 took four hours, five minutes and seventeen seconds.

### PLEBES NO MORE !!

With the completion of Herndon, the Plebe Year "officially" comes to an end and the cheer, "Plebes no More!!!" rings out loud and clear across the Yard. Later that day, in a Plebe Recognition Ceremony, the Plebes are recognized as Third Classmen (a.k.a. Youngsters), and change their shoulder boards to reflect their new status. Congratulations to all Plebe Parents! Your Mids are **Plebes No More!!!**



## SUMMER BLOCKS

Although Mids cease being known as Plebes after the Herndon Monument Climb, some say that the 4<sup>th</sup> Class do not officially become 3<sup>rd</sup> Class "Youngsters" until they sight the Chapel Dome upon returning from their Youngster Cruise. The following is a little information about the 3<sup>rd</sup> Class summer blocks.

Summer months at USNA are divided into four 3-week periods, known as "blocks." "Zero block" actually begins during the end of the previous Spring semester. Third block ends just before the Brigade re-forms for the fall semester at the end of Plebe Summer.

During the summer between Plebe and 3<sup>rd</sup> Class year, your Midshipman will spend about three weeks onboard a ship. This duty period is usually called the "gray hull cruise." About 30% of the 3/C will be employed on the yard for the Summer Seminars; the rest will rotate through one of 13 CSNTS (Command, Seamanship, Navigation Training Squadron) trips. The craft used for these training cruises are 44 foot sailing vessels. They travel to various east coast ports on two week cruises, teaching their crew command, seamanship, and navigation skills. Your Mid may also have the opportunity to apply for summer block training aboard an active-duty vessel — a submarine, carrier, destroyer, or frigate.

Your Mid may not know his or her schedule in specific detail until quite late in the spring.