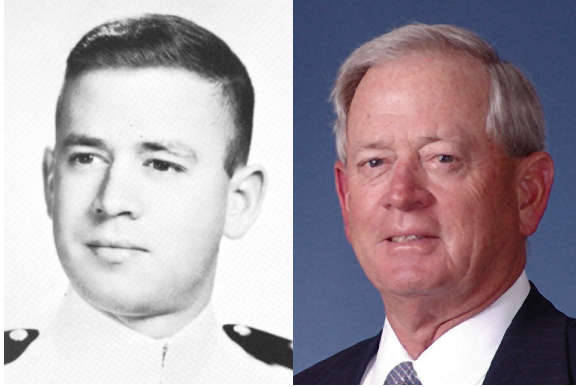


ADMIRAL LEIGHTON W. SMITH JR., USN (RET.)

Distinguished Graduate Award—2007



Class of 1962

Leighton W. Smith Jr., was born in Mobile, Alabama, on the eve of World War II and entered the U.S. Naval Academy at the height of the Cold War as a member of the Class of 1962. Admiral Smith struggled during plebe year, but in his words, he “got his act together,” realizing his future was up to him, thanks to the leadership of Captain William F. “Bush” Bringle ’37, Commandant of Midshipmen. Academic difficulties, almost resulting in dismissal, brought him before Captain Bringle, where he learned a key lesson which shaped his career and concept of leadership: “It’s all up to you!” This event was the turning point in his life.

The *Lucky Bag* described him as “a gentleman in every sense of the word...always ready with his generous smile and big laugh that was synonymous with Southern hospitality.” After graduation, Admiral Smith headed for flight school, earning his Wings in 1964 and eventually flying three combat tours over Vietnam and the Tonkin Gulf. On 6 October 1972, Lieutenant Commander Smith, now nicknamed “Snuffy,” led a four-plane strike against the famed Thanh Hoa Bridge.

Despite intense enemy anti-aircraft fire, the division delivered their 2,000 pound bombs precisely on target, knocking out the heavily defended and vital target. For their actions, Admiral Smith and the division were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

More responsibility followed: command of air wings and major sea commands, including USS Kalamazoo (AOR 6) and USS America (CV 66). Selected for Flag rank in 1986, Admiral Smith served as director of Tactical Readiness, led a battle group and served as director of Operations, U.S. European Command. The Cold War was ending, but the Gulf War loomed. Admiral Smith's work with European allies, notably Turkey, proved invaluable in that conflict.

Appointed Vice Admiral in 1991, Admiral Smith played a key role in shaping America's evolving naval policy in the post Cold War world. As deputy chief of Naval Operations for Plans, Policy and Operations, he became known for his ability to deal with rapidly changing and complex political and military issues at the highest levels of government. He received his fourth star in 1994, and served as commander in chief, Allied Forces Southern Europe and commander of the NATO Implementation Forces, Bosnia; leading troops from 34 different nations.

Admiral Smith has received two Defense Distinguished Service Medals, the Navy Distinguished Service Medal, three Legion of Merit, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Meritorious Service Medals and 29 air medals. His international leadership resulted in honors from four allied nations including his recognition as an Honorary Knight of the British Empire.

Retiring from active duty in 1996, Admiral Smith has remained active in business, advising major defense companies and consulting on emerging war fighting technologies. He remains a tireless advocate for his alma mater. He served for six years as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association and remains a member. He is a Trustee of the Naval Academy Foundation Athletic and Scholarship Program and serves on the Naval Academy Board of Visitors.

Admiral Smith and his wife, Dottie, have a wonderful family—three children and five grandchildren. To this day, his proudest accomplishment is the tenacity he showed in surviving plebe year. He's better for it—and so is his country! Admiral Smith—A consummate naval officer in times of war and peace—and an inspiration to all who have followed him.