

# USNA Class of 1969 Class History

*2024 Revision*

*Compiled by Todd Creekman and Pat Stroop*

## **Preamble**

This history, authorized by the Class of 1969 Foundation, contains information gathered in preparation for our 40th reunion and updated periodically thereafter. A paper copy, with endnotes and reference documents supporting much of the data below, has been donated to the USNA Nimitz Library's Special Collections and Archives Department to facilitate future research about our class.

We mention names where appropriate and leave them out where privacy is appropriate. We have purposely not attempted to document extensive classmate accomplishments or tell individual sea stories. The "Legacy of the Class of 1969" project, or LOC69, was debuted at our 50<sup>th</sup> reunion and provided each classmate an online opportunity to tell his story with accompanying images. That project is described later in this history.

Comments or feedback on this Class History are welcome to Todd Creekman (ccreekman@verizon.net) and Pat Stroop (pstroop@hotmail.com).

<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
<b>The Beginning</b>	3
<b>Four Years by Severn Shore</b>	3
- <u>Plebe Summer</u>	3
- <u>Plebe Year</u>	4
- <u>Third Class Year</u>	5
- <u>Second Class Year</u>	5
- <u>First Class Year</u>	6
<b>The Payoff</b>	8
<b>Combat Service and Operational Loss</b>	9
<b>Notable Classmate Accomplishments</b>	10

	<b><u>Page</u></b>
<b>Class Organization and Projects</b>	11
- <u>Class Crest</u>	11
- <u>Class Policy Proposal</u>	12
- <u>Class Organization</u>	12
- <u>DC-Metro Lunch Bunch</u>	13
- <u>Michelson Lecture</u>	13
- <u>9<sup>th</sup> Company</u>	14
- <u>USS <i>Constitution</i> Gavel and Sounding Board Project</u>	14
- <u>Stadium Tent and Tailgate</u>	14
- <u>Tidewater Bash</u>	15
- <u>Passing the Torch</u>	15
- <u>Capstone</u>	15
- <u>Class Legacy Project—the Chapel</u>	15
- <u>50<sup>th</sup> Reunion Class Gift—Alumni Mentoring Program (AMP)</u>	16
- <u>USNA Class of 1969 Foundation Scholarship</u>	18
- <u>Brigade Activities Center Project</u>	18
- <u>A Link in the Chain</u>	19
- <u>Legacy of the Class of 1969 (LOC69)</u>	22
- <u>Alumni Memorial Fund</u>	22
- <u>“Honorary Classmates”</u>	23
- <u>50<sup>th</sup> Reunion</u>	23
- <u>Popular Music Concerts</u>	24
- <u>55<sup>th</sup> Reunion Project—Fluegel Alumni Center</u>	24

## The Beginning

The United States Naval Academy Class of 1969 took the midshipman oath of office in Tecumseh Court on 30 June 1965. Our youngest classmate on that date was Peter W. Krause at 16 years old, one day shy of his 17th birthday. Our oldest classmate was Dione B. Mohammad from the Philippines at 21 years old. 92% of us were in the top 40% of our high school class, and 46% were president or a senior officer of our class. Our combined SAT scores (1266) were the highest of any class from the time that data was required for admission consideration until 1984. 72% of us were varsity athletes, 33% were members of service clubs, and 11% were Eagle Scouts. 19% of us had some college preparation work. Every state, the District of Columbia and six foreign countries (Chile, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, Philippines, and Venezuela) were represented in our class. 92 of us were sons of USNA graduates. Of 5,718 applicants, 1,297 had been selected for our class. But our class consisted of 1,321 men that summer: 1,297 new admissions (including 81 who reported between 1 and 9 July), 17 men who turned back from 1968, and 7 ex-midshipmen who were re-admitted into our class. We added 9 more men who were turned back during our time at the Academy, and two of the ex-midshipmen re-admitted to our class were advanced to the classes of 1967 and 1968. Thus, our maximum possible class size was 1,328.

## Four Years by Severn Shore

### - Plebe Summer:

The summer of 1965 found many of our contemporaries headed for college, where co-ed student bodies, Vietnam War protests, long hair, and all sorts of personal and academic freedom would contrast sharply with what we were about to experience. We were soon to find out that we were not headed for a college, but an academy—with a mission to produce officers ready for combat. On that memorable 30 June induction day, we sent home everything we wore on reporting to USNA, and were outfitted with white works jumpers and trousers (at \$4.20 a set), 95 cent blue rim hats (our "Dixie cups"), \$9.95 chukka boots (fondly known as "boondockers") and were bravely equipped with \$12.25 slide rules, a copy of *Reef Points* and the *Navy Song Book*. Before we donned our new uniforms we had already been "issued" our regulation haircuts, raised our right hands for the oath administered by commandant and World War II combat veteran Captain Sheldon H. Kinney (Class of 1941), and listened to new superintendent and also World War II combat veteran Rear Admiral Draper L. Kauffman (Class of 1933) as he welcomed us aboard with the admonition that "It is vitally important that you be given the opportunity to prove under pressure that you are men in the best and most comprehensive meaning of that word, and that you are capable of leading your fellow men in time of war." War would indeed follow in our future, but it wasn't long before our Class of 1967 plebe detail leaders began applying that pressure the superintendent mentioned. Knowledge of plebe rates became essential, and "No excuse, Sir" and "I'll find out, Sir" became the catch phrases of our daily survival ordeal. "Table Salt" from our omnipresent *Reef Points* gave us the confidence to describe how long we had been in the Navy, bring a full rigged ship about, report on the condition of the cow, explain why we might have neglected to say "sir" to an upperclassman, and determine the correct time with respect to the "great sidereal movement." We recited the twenty-seven verses of "The Laws of the Navy," where we:

- a. Yearned "for leave for the good of the service, as much and as oft as may be,"
- b. Learned "the hull and the deck and keel and the truck of the law is—OBEY."

With reveille at 0600 and taps at 2200 and much to learn in between—marching, sailing, boxing, rifle and pistol qualifications along with an accelerated introduction to our new military lifestyle—we made it to the late-August Parents' Weekend somewhat diminished in size (individually and as a class) and proud to show off before our families but secretly dreading the Brigade's return in September.

- Plebe Year:

Fears confirmed, our Academy education was broadened over the next nine months as we learned to come around, shove out, hang around, make chow calls, perform uniform races, drop for 69 push-ups repeatedly, and close upper classmen's windows in the middle of the night without being noticed so that they would be more comfortable upon awakening. Their comfort, not ours, was clearly a major objective of our plebe year. The fall also brought a challenging academic program, our first exposure to the excitement of a Navy football season, and the realization that our transformations into midshipmen were mirrored by our girlfriends' and dates' transformations into "drags." Guided by Mrs. M's (Mrs. Mary A. Marshall) *Drag's Handbook*, we experienced the charms of Drag House accommodations and rode on Drag Bus adventures to football games. Despite our best spirit efforts at many "spontaneous" plebe pep rallies, including some "over the wall" ventures into Annapolis, the football team went 4-4-2. We beat arch-rival Maryland for the last time and hoped that victory in our first experience with the legendary Army-Navy game would give us a chance for a winning season. Alas, we only tied Army 7-7, and had to settle for a traded cadet cuff link as our only solace as we made the miserable three plus hour bus trip back to Annapolis—with no chance for "carry-on" until Christmas that a win would normally entitle plebes to enjoy. However, the football team captain did convince the brigade commander to give us one week's worth of carry-on in recognition of our spirit and support of the team. Besides Navy sports, our other source of excitement was the prospect of female social contact. Whether we had a regular drag or not, we all got to experience the charms of Plebe Tea Dances ("Tea Fights") in Dahlgren Hall, wondering who or what would step out from behind the curtain, and surging ahead or astern in line depending on the upperclassmen's hand signals from the balcony above.

Rev. Billy Graham delivered a Christmas sermon at mandatory Chapel worship on Sunday, 12 December 1965 and the following Friday we had our first USNA Christmas dinner complete with "Chateau Imperial" fake champagne as a proper send off for our first real leave away from Mother Bancroft since June 30th. Back in the days when semester exams didn't occur until after return from Christmas leave, we endured the January "dark ages" punctuated by an end of term leave lengthened two days by a major snowstorm that paralyzed traffic in the mid-Atlantic region. For being on active duty during the Vietnam War we were entitled to wear the National Defense Service Medal (affectionately known as the "I Was Alive in '65 Medal" and also the "Ritchie Highway Defense Medal!"). Despite the irreverence, it was proof of our service to the nation that we were proud to wear along with pistol and rifle qualification ribbons and medals. We saw Ricketts Hall completed to house the USNA enlisted personnel and eliminate the need for an APL berthing barge moored along the quay wall. (Ricketts Hall later became the Naval Academy Athletic Association offices).



Our grueling plebe indoctrination left us eager for the 28 February "Hundredth Night" where we turned the tables on our soon-to-graduate first class leaders, cheerfully ignoring the brigade commander's exhortation that the "fourth class are reminded to abide by the Golden Rule"—a philosophy that we seemed rarely to experience in reverse from the Class of 1966.

During June Week 1966, our firsties inaugurated the practice of Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium outdoor graduations. Earlier in the week we celebrated "no more plebes!" with a 90-minute climb of the thoughtfully and thoroughly greased Herndon Monument. After classmate Gerald T. Witowski placed the cap atop the monument, we knew in our hearts (and other miscellaneous aching body parts) that we had definitely had a plebe year—probably the last REAL plebe year. With that assurance, our roughly 1,126 remaining classmates set off on world-wide summer cruise odysseys with LANT- and PACMIDTRARONS, and the evocatively named LANTMIDHUKCRU. Wearing dungarees with our blue-rimmed "Dixie cups," we experienced the toil of enlisted men in the fleet, carefully accomplishing such daunting practical factors tasks as "Locate and Grease Boiler Feet." Summer leave set us free for our first extended opportunity to reflect on what exactly we had gotten ourselves into!

- Third Class Year:

Returning to USNA in the fall of 1966, we became, by tradition, full-fledged youngsters when we sighted the Chapel dome. During our third-class year, we watched (and listened) to the melodious tones of the "pachooka machine" (pile driver) as the diggers and fillers worked on the construction of Michelson and Chauvenet Halls where tennis courts had been. The football team went 4 and 6, and we lost to Army. On the bright side of Navy sports, the squash team won the national championship and Navy lacrosse, after 7 straight national championships, ended the season in a three-way tie for that title with Maryland and Johns Hopkins. We watched the Class of 1970 not have a plebe year (compared to ours) but were happy it was them getting all the attention and not us! During June Week we danced to the Glenn Miller Band at the Youngster Hop, after greeting our Class Officer Representative Lieutenant Commander Matthew "Matt the Hat" (Class of 1951) and Mrs. Breen in the receiving line. Second Class summer found us enjoying the far-flung and exotic training locales of Pensacola, Florida for aviation, New London, Connecticut for submarines, and Little Creek, Virginia for a unique (and generally wet) Marine Corps experience. A select few of us had the privilege of introducing the Class of 1971 to the mysteries of plebe summer, but it became clear that despite our best efforts, they weren't likely to experience a real plebe year like we did.

- Second Class Year:

Second class year was notable for many things. During the decade of the 1960s and beyond, the Academy administration dealt with the composition of the 36 companies of midshipmen in different ways. For our class, our company integrity stayed intact, but we were required to shift companies as a unit at the end of our youngster year. For example, First Company '69ers became Twenty-Fifth Company '69ers. So as new second classmen, we found ourselves in a new wing of Bancroft Hall with different company officers, upper classmen and lower classmen. It probably built character, somehow. More important, once we started the academic year, we were officially committed to the Navy, with no more chances to resign and go

off to another college free of financial or Navy service requirements. So we all had important decisions to make as our futures became more inevitable.

With all that as an undertone, we started the year with an exciting 1967 football season (5-4-1), as we beat Penn State, Michigan and Syracuse—and lost to William and Mary at homecoming! Nonetheless, all was forgiven by a rousing win over Army (the only N Star varsity football win during our sojourn at the Academy). Dodo, the Brigade's improbable mutt mascot, was rumored to have brought the gridiron luck that Bill the Goat seemed to lack that year. Dodo died in March 1971 and was memorialized in the Congressional Record! The dark ages of 1968's winter were made more severe by the February expulsion of 13 midshipmen (including 11 of our classmates), caught smoking pot in Bancroft Hall.

In April, our Class Policy Committee assembled and submitted a proposal for modifications to many of the Academy policies we would soon be helping to implement as first class midshipman and brigade leaders. We received plenty of attention (or more accurately, grief) for our efforts, but saw no substantive changes during our remaining time at the Academy (see Class Policy section following for an in-depth treatment of the proposal).

We received our first intimation of graduation when we ordered our very own class rings. Those rings, which set us back \$99 for a 14K gold ring and synthetic stone in 1968, cost nearly twenty-five times as much to replace 50 years later! The rings arrived well before the scheduled June Week Ring Dance, but we were prohibited from wearing them until that dance, under threat of being "fried" and earning demerits. Nonetheless, we enthusiastically and surreptitiously slipped them on to accumulate at least 69 illegal hours of wear, proudly tabulating our accomplishments on company charts designed to challenge our leaders. So, it was with a great deal of pride that we finally finished up the academic year with our drags dipping those class rings in the waters of the seven seas at the Ring Dance.

#### - First Class Year:

As new firsties we set off for our summer 1968 cruises as junior officers in training, embarked in combatant ships operating around the world. These cruise assignments included ships in combat during the Vietnam War—off the coast of South Vietnam and at Yankee Station in the Tonkin Gulf. A number of classmates, possibly as many as 130, returned to Annapolis eligible to wear the Vietnam Service Medal. This unusual wartime service opportunity was documented in Gordon Peterson '68's *Midshipmen at War: Vietnam—An Untold Story*, a two-part series featured in the January-February and the March-April 2023 issues of *Shipmate Magazine*.

Meanwhile, leadership changes were occurring from top to bottom back at the Academy. At the top, Rear Admiral Lawrence Heyworth, Jr. (Class of 1943) who had assumed commandant duties as a Captain in 1967, briefly became superintendent between Rear Admiral Kauffman's June 1968 departure and the arrival in July of new superintendent Rear Admiral James F. Calvert (also Class of 1943). Rear Admiral Heyworth remained commandant through our graduation the next year. Near the bottom of the chain of command, Navy's mascot Bill XVI died in July 1968 apparently from having eaten grass sprayed with weed killer too close to his pen.

Returning as brigade leaders in September 1968, we "enjoyed" marching to fall P-grades and began putting the Class of 1972 through their paces as plebes, although we knew in our hearts that they couldn't possibly have a plebe year like we did. One thing they did have was the requirement for all of them to complete a major to graduate—the first class to do so since the academic major program was introduced. Our class had to complete a minor in one of 26 academic fields by the time we graduated, and many of us completed a major by meeting extra academic requirements. It's hard to recall how primitive our information technology situation was back then, as we worked out logarithms on our slide rules. Computers, as we were introduced to them in Ward Hall, tended to be IBM giants that depended on our accurate production of stacks of punch cards from our programming efforts, which were then dropped off at the computer center to be run and picked up later when the computations were complete—or more likely incomplete requiring a rework of our programming effort and more cards! A new bit of freedom was the ability to cut a class if an "A" grade was maintained. We all enjoyed increased evening and weekend liberty as first classmen, and that leisure time encouraged some of the more enterprising of our classmates to go into business cutting hair or making food runs to Chris' Submarine Base, Buzzy's Pizza, or other local eateries.

The 1968 football season was admittedly disappointing. While we did beat Georgia Tech convincingly, we went 2-8-0 overall, losing to Army and Air Force. The Air Force game was doubly agonizing because many of us took busses or trains from Annapolis to Chicago. Then we had to contemplate our defeat while dealing with the somewhat uneven female companionship opportunities at the post-game parties followed by the interminable ride home. Coach Bill Elias ended his (and our) four football years at USNA by being fired after Army-Navy. He was replaced by Coach Rick Forzano. Again the broad expanse of Navy sports helped redeem our first class year; with '69 generally in charge as team captains, Soccer, 150 Pound Football, Wrestling, Rifle, Pistol, Indoor Track, Squash, Fencing, Lacrosse, Tennis, Baseball, Golf and Sailing all had winning seasons.

At the end of our four years which included only three years of intercollegiate varsity eligibility, 168 of us had earned a varsity "N," including two as plebes for Brigade Boxing Championships. Eighteen classmates were inducted into the Naval Academy Athletics Hall of Fame and their names are displayed in Lejeune Hall. In 2021, those eighteen plus eight additional classmates (total of 26) were designated '69 Legendary Athletes as part of a display at the Center for Student Athletes in Ricketts Hall.

Our eagerly anticipated, last Christmas leave period was preceded by an unexpected visit to USNA in early December by the Amir of Kuwait, who revived a long-standing tradition of awarding amnesty to all classes for minor offenses, cancelling extra duty and restriction, and restoring class rates. Our all-male choir combined with Hood College's women to present "The Messiah" under the Chapel dome. The pace of our Academy lives quickened as 1969 dawned, and as we sang our unofficial anthem, the Animals' 1965 hit, "We Gotta Get Out Of This Place," it became pretty clear that we soon would! Some of us marched through downtown Washington, DC in President Nixon's inaugural parade in January and in former President Eisenhower's State Funeral in March. The Masqueraders staged "Becket" in February, and the Musical Clubs Show was "Once Upon a Mattress." The Naval Academy Foreign Affairs Conference (NAFAC)

studied "The Indian Ocean Area," and in May Michelson Hall was formally dedicated as the new Science Department home. Service Selection Night in February gave us all a sense of what was to come, and Hundredth Night reminded us of what we had endured to get there.

Our June Week from 29 May through 4 June was a glorious celebration of our four years along the Severn, typified by an ecstatic dip in full dress uniform in the Library Assembly Area pool after our last P-rade. On graduation day we heard words of wisdom from Secretary of the Navy John H. Chafee, received our diplomas (including the first ever designated engineering degrees at USNA), took our oaths as officers, tossed caps into the air, had shoulder boards and insignia installed by mothers and sweethearts, saluted, and enriched our Anchorman— and joined the ranks of Naval Academy alumni.

### **The Payoff**

During our four years at USNA, starting with that maximum of 1,328 men, we lost 449 classmates from our ranks. Philip B. Schwab and Edward D. Sharp died in July and October 1967 respectively and they are remembered with other midshipmen who died during their Academy days on a plaque in Smoke Hall. 163 of us were discharged for conduct, aptitude, academic deficiency or were physically disqualified; eight were turned back to the Class of 1970, and 276 resigned. That translates to a 33.8% attrition rate: slightly less than the Classes of 1966 and 1968, and slightly more than the average attrition rate of all the classes between 1960 and 1968. With a lifetime outlook embodied in our motto, "'69 is mighty fine!", we graduated 879 men during the summer of 1969, including 764 men who entered the Navy as ensigns and 105 new second lieutenants in the U.S. Marine Corps. Five foreign graduates returned to their countries for service and five men were not physically qualified for commissions. 865 of us graduated in Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium on 4 June 1969; one classmate graduated on 23 July, and 13 on 1 August. Of the new Navy ensigns, the surface Navy claimed 31%, while 18% went to nuclear power training (most to then serve in submarines) and naval aviators comprised about 49%. The remaining 2% were commissioned in the Supply Corps (8), Civil Engineer Corps (5), and the Restricted Line communities of Public Affairs Officer (4), Special Duty Officer (Cryptology) (2), and Engineering Duty Officer (1). Seven classmates went on to qualify as Navy SEALs. None of us asked to be commissioned in the Army, and two classmates who submitted letters to transfer to the Air Force were shown the error of their ways by heavy-handed chain of command pressure, and withdrew their requests! 106 of us were selected for various scholarship and fellowship programs, most leading to post-graduate degrees in the years following commissioning.

Anchorman--The Story Behind the Story: As alluded to in the paragraph above regarding June Week of our First Class Year, Richard P. Red was rewarded for being '69's Anchorman at graduation on 4 June 1969. However, the Class of 1969 was on the leading edge of a program called 'Delayed Graduation' which permitted midshipmen who had not met all the graduation requirements in eight semesters to do extra work during the summer and graduate late rather than 'turning back' to the next class. If those midshipmen, upon completion of assigned summer work, met all requirements for graduation, they graduated in a small ceremony in Memorial Hall attended by family and friends. In 1969, those graduates were inserted into the class with an Order of Merit (OOM) based on their final record over four years, one month, and one day. After

the August 1969 graduation, the results for the Class of 1969 showed that W. Craig McClain, Jr. edged Rich Red out and was in fact 1969's Anchorman!

### **Combat Service and Operational Loss**

- Many classmates served in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. A total of two Silver Star Medals and 11 Purple Heart Medals were awarded to classmates. One of those Purple Hearts accompanied a Silver Star awarded to a Navy helicopter pilot classmate. One of our wounded classmates (who left USNA in the fall of 1966) earned two Purple Hearts. Two classmates who were killed during the Vietnam War were awarded the Purple Heart posthumously.

a. Silver Star:

- (1) Jerry L. Creed, USMC.
- (2) Stephan A. Hanvey, USN.

b. Purple Heart:

- (1) Thomas F. Cleverdon, USN.
- (2) Maurice H. Docton, USN.
- (3) Stephan A. Hanvey, USN.
- (4) Scott D. Ketchie, USMC (posthumous).
- (5) William J. Kopp, USMC.
- (6) David D. Peppin, Jr., USMC (posthumous).
- (7) John W. Smith, II, USAR (two awards).
- (8) Edward J. Waitt, Jr., USN.
- (9) Edward B. Wild, USMC.
- (10) Richard M. Wright, Jr., USCG.

- Three classmates died in Southeast Asia:

- a. Navy UH-1B helicopter pilot LTJG Arnold W. Barden, Jr. of HA(L)-3 died in a helo crash on 20 September 1971 in Bien Hoa, South Vietnam. Arnie's remains were returned to the U.S. and his name is found on Panel 02W, line 20 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC.
- b. Marine Corps A-6A bombardier-navigator 1ST LT Scott D. Ketchie, of VMA(AW)-224, flying from USS *Coral Sea* (CVA-43), was lost on 9 April 1972 to AAA fire during a strike mission in Laos. Though the pilot survived and was rescued 4 days later, there was no indication that Scott ejected and survived, so he was declared Missing in Action. The Secretary of the Navy approved a presumptive finding of death on 5 March 1979. Scott's remains have never been recovered and his name is found on Panel 02W, line 134 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
- c. David D. Peppin, Jr., who left our class and USNA in November 1965, enlisted several years later in the Marine Corps. PFC Peppin's Vietnam tour of duty began in May 1969, and Dave was killed in ground combat on 10 July 1969 in Quang Nam, South Vietnam—just five weeks after the rest of us graduated. Dave's remains were returned to the U.S. and his name is found on Panel 21W, Line 94 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

The three can be found on the USNA Memorial Hall "Killed in Action" record of alumni who made the ultimate sacrifice in combat.

- They are also honored, along with 13 additional classmates, on a Memorial Hall class "Operational Loss" panel. This panel is one in a series listing alumni killed while performing

military operations while forward deployed, in training, or preparing to deploy. Those 13 classmates are:

LTJG Gerald J. Anderson, Jr., USN	July 1970
1 <sup>ST</sup> LT William C. Rogers, USMC	September 1973
LT George A. Wildridge, Jr., USN	October 1973
LT William F. Sigler, USN	November 1973
CAPT Richard H. Briggs, USMC	June 1974
LT James L. Feeney, USN	July 1974
LT David M. Lumsden, USN	November 1974
LT Nile R. Kraft, USN	February 1977
CAPT Thomas D. Pasquale, USMC	July 1979
LCDR Gerald W. Jenkins, USN	March 1981
MAJ Thomas W. Tyler, USMC	June 1981
MAJ David G. Buell, USMC	November 1983
LT Robert L. Ledbetter III, CHC, USNR	October 1985

- We had classmates who served during the 1991 Gulf War as well as the Global War on Terrorism that began in response to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, DC. Kevin P. Connors, a senior vice president of a brokerage firm with offices in New York City's World Trade Center, died as a result of that attack.

- James R. Hannemann was our last classmate in active combat, flying the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter with the Illinois Army National Guard in 2004 in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

### **Notable Classmate Accomplishments**

- J. Michael Lounge received his astronaut wings in 1981 and flew three NASA space shuttle missions between 1985 and 1990, logging over 482 hours in space.

- James F. McGovern was Acting Secretary of the Air Force from December 1998 to April 1999.

- Venezuelan Tito M. Rincon was Minister of Defense in his country from July 1997 to February 1999 after completing his naval career as a Vice Admiral.

- Eight classmates were selected for flag rank in the U. S. Navy:

- Admiral James O. Ellis was the highest-ranking Navy officer, serving in his last tour as Commander, U.S. Strategic Command.
- Vice Admiral Albert T. Church.
- Rear Admirals Stanley W. Bryant, Ronald L. Christenson, Richard G. Kirkland, Roland B. Knapp, John B. Padgett, and Robert G. Sprigg.

- Three classmates became U. S. Marine Corps general officers:

- Lieutenant General Michael A. Hough was the highest-ranking Marine Corps officer, serving his last tour as Deputy Commandant for Aviation.
- Major General David M. Mize.
- Brigadier General Edward R. Langston.

- Gerald L. "Jerry" Gallagher was our last classmate to fly military jets, following his fleet operations with nearly four decades as a flight instructor at the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School at Patuxent River, Maryland—first on active duty, and later as a contractor, retiring in December 2013.

- Tom Church was the Class's last active-duty Navy officer, retiring in August 2005. Mike Hough was the Class's last active duty Marine Corps officer, retiring in November 2005. In addition, Mike was the longest continuously serving active duty classmate, having enlisted in the Navy in 1963. But CW3 Jim Hannemann has the distinction of being the last classmate to retire from the military in May 2007, having flown F-4 Phantoms in the Marine Corps, and helicopters in the Army National Guard.

- Jim Ellis, in March 2015, became our first classmate to receive the Alumni Association's Distinguished Graduate Award for his commitment to a lifetime of service and his significant contributions to the U.S. Naval Academy, the Navy, and the nation.

### **Class Organization and Projects**

- Class Crest: Our first project as a class was the selection of a class crest, an emblem that would grace our rings, the pins of our sweethearts and mothers, and the miniatures of our fiancés and wives, and become a unique symbol of our identity. A competition between companies during plebe summer culminating in a class-wide vote yielded a winner in the design proposed by classmate Christopher J. Carlson. To the elements of anchor, eagle and flag Chris added two words—"non sibi"—from the motto *non sibi sed patriae*; "not for self but for country." Chris described those words as "the most important thing I learned during that hot summer of 1965." That winning design went to ring vendor Herff Jones; Chris recalled that they flipped his dynamic eagle from facing to the eagle's right to facing left to show the right profile of the eagle's head—and that became the final design. But the eagle was only one element of the crest design's message. Our ring dance program from 1 June 1968 spoke of allegiances: "In keeping with these allegiances we have the dynamic American eagle and flag occupying the center of the crest. The eagle and flag extend to every corner of the crest. Behind the eagle is the anchor of a wooden sailing ship representing the second highest allegiance—the Navy and its tradition. A symbol of the third institution to which we owe allegiance is the letters USNA at the bottom of the crest. Our class numerals—the fourth order of allegiance—occupy the upper corners of the crest. The class is symbolized not only by the numerals but also by the six claws of the eagle and the nine links of the anchor chain. All the symbols of the crest are bound together by the chain—duty, honor, and loyalty."

Chris reported that he adjusted the anchor chain proportions to depict six links above and nine below the eagle's wing, though a close look at the crest design on our rings appears to show more like four and ten links. Nonetheless, the large bronze crest dedicated at our 35<sup>th</sup> reunion in

2004 and proudly unveiled in Alumni Hall faithfully depicts the six and nine link segments of the original design concept.

Two of our fallen classmates' rings occupy places of honor at the Academy in displays that describe the evolution of the class ring. Scott Ketchie's ring was donated by his widow and is part of the ring collection on display at the Naval Academy Alumni Association's Fluegel Alumni Center. Bill Sigler's ring was donated by his parents and is part of the ring collection on display at the Naval Academy Museum in Preble Hall.

- Class Policy Proposal: During the second semester of our second-class year, our class president, William H. Newton, III, chaired a committee of classmates to review policies in place at the time affecting the Brigade and make recommendations for changes in those policies directly to the superintendent and commandant. The committee wrote that the purpose of the Class of 1969 policy proposal was "an assemblage of the thoughts and feelings of the Class of 1969 and our solutions to the problems which exist at the Academy today."

After administering an initial survey in March 1968 and analyzing the results, the committee outlined the problems that they felt existed. The committee then worked to develop a system which every midshipman could believe in and uphold while alleviating the problems mentioned, and while still maintaining and enhancing a military environment. Once the policy was formulated and written, it was submitted to the class for comments and concurrence. This was done in another survey to the class, and the results of the second survey showed overwhelming support for the class policy.

The review by the Class Policy Committee of the administration of the Brigade of Midshipmen was candid and critical. Morale, discipline, professional attitude, conduct system, honor concept, class distinction, and recruiting of future midshipmen were all addressed in the introduction of the report of the committee, and specific recommendations for policy changes were made regarding the squad system, plebe indoctrination system, car privileges, weekend liberty, meal formation responsibilities, civilian clothing privileges, leave after mid-term and final exams, and restriction. The report of the Class Policy Committee stated that class reaction was that "the policy would be avidly supported in hopes that modernization of the academic facilities would not be the only thing undergoing change at the Academy".

The reforms were briefed to the superintendent and commandant, were likely viewed as presumptuous, and were universally rejected. However, it must be noted that over the years, most of the recommendations have been implemented in varying degrees – for example, now midshipmen regardless of class may depart on leave after their last final examination at the end of each semester.

- Class Organization: Throughout our four years at the Academy, and for almost 30 years following graduation, Bill Newton served as our class president. At graduation we had incorporated as "USNA Class of 1969" in the state of Maryland. We gathered as a class for reunions every five years beginning with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, coinciding with home football games in Annapolis. The earlier reunions were held at a hotel near Baltimore-Washington



International Airport, but with the 35<sup>th</sup> we decided to locate in an Annapolis hotel more convenient to Naval Academy events.

When it became clear that the "USNA Class of 1969" structure had ceased to exist legally in 1979, Stephen A. Ward III worked with the Maryland Corporate Charter Division and determined that, while the corporate entity might have been resurrected with multiple caveats, it would have been severely dated, which confirmed the need for a contemporary organization. With our original corporation remaining dormant, Steve Ward and Stephen W. Comiskey collaborated to incorporate the "USNA Class of 1969 Foundation" in the Commonwealth of Virginia on March 20, 1998. Those two classmates served as the initial board of directors. Subsequently, an intrepid band of classmates gathered in the Yard to create the Foundation's bylaws. Once those bylaws were adopted, officers and directors were elected in July 1998, with David O. Rose serving as the Foundation's first president. The first '69 Leadership Conference was convened in the fall of 1999, during our 30<sup>th</sup> reunion, where Edwin S. Potts was elected to serve as the second president. Steve was succeeded on December 1, 2003, by Frederick H. "Mike" Michaelis, Jr. Mike's term was extended through the 40<sup>th</sup> reunion in 2009. Foundation bylaws were changed such that subsequent presidents' terms coincide with the major five-year reunions. An additional amendment was approved to permit presidents to be re-elected to successive five-year terms. Steve Comiskey served as president from that 2009 reunion through our November 2014 45<sup>th</sup> reunion. He was succeeded by Mike Michaelis for his second term as class president, through our 2019 50<sup>th</sup> reunion. Steve Comiskey then returned as president through our 2024 55<sup>th</sup> reunion.

Steve Ward, as Foundation Treasurer, applied for an IRS 501(c)(3) classification for non-profit, tax-exempt status which was approved on April 13, 2004.

- DC-Metro Lunch Bunch: As classmates both in and out of the service found themselves in the Washington, DC area, the idea of periodic social gatherings took root under the direction of Eric C. Honour, who was succeeded in the mid-1980s by Steve Ward. The luncheons, originally about six per year, were held at DC-area venues like the Army-Navy Country Club and the Fort Myer Officers' Club, with annual forays to the Annapolis area. Several evening events were held so that spouses could be included. In the 1990s, military retirements and relocations led to fewer classmates in the DC area, so the luncheons were scaled back to four per year with a less formal format in local restaurants. These lunches ceased about the time of our 40th Reunion.

- Michelson Lecture: The Michelson Memorial Lecture Series commemorates the achievements of Albert A. Michelson, USNA Class of 1873. As an Academy physics instructor in the late 1870s, he performed experiments to measure the velocity of light. Those experiments, fundamental to the development by Albert Einstein of the Theory of Relativity, resulted in Michelson becoming in 1907 the first American scientist to receive a Nobel Prize. Each year since 1981, a distinguished scientist (representing a variety of academic disciplines, including chemistry, physics, mathematics, oceanography, and computer science) has come to the Naval Academy to present the Michelson Lecture. It was Howard J. "Tim" Halliday, Jr.'s suggestion, while Math and Science Division Director, that our class become the sponsor for this lecture series. Starting with a fundraising campaign in 1999, our commitment has grown to the point where class funds sufficient to endow this project in perpetuity are on hand at the USNA

Foundation. Details on over 40 years of lectures can be found at the USNA website at [usna.edu/MathSci/Michelson-lecture.php](http://usna.edu/MathSci/Michelson-lecture.php).

- 9<sup>th</sup> Company: Our class has sponsored the 9<sup>th</sup> Company and in particular the outfitting of its wardroom, since the mid-1990s. The Class of 1939 had been that company's sponsor over the years and "passed the baton" to '69 to carry on this direct support to midshipmen. During the 1996 academic year, Joseph B. Chopek and his son Midshipman 2/C Joseph P. Chopek, Class of 1997 who was in 9<sup>th</sup> Company, coordinated the formalization of the Class of 1969/9<sup>th</sup> Company sponsorship with our class leadership including Steve Potts and Steve Ward. 9<sup>th</sup> Company has invited our class to its annual social events which include a Dining Out and an end-of-year casual get together to farewell the firsties and recognize the plebes. Each May, witnessed by the entire 9<sup>th</sup> company along with the company officer and senior enlisted advisor, '69 class representatives present a Class of 1969 Coin to each 9<sup>th</sup> company graduating first class midshipman as a reminder of our bond during their time at the Academy.

- USS Constitution Gavel and Sounding Board Project: Continuing a tradition inherited from the Class of 1939, the Class of 1969 since 1994 has presented the president of each USNA graduating class with a gavel and sounding board made of wood from USS *Constitution*, the oldest commissioned warship afloat in the world. '69 classmates obtained that wood, removed during routine repair and drydock periods, from the Navy command that maintains "Old Ironsides." A '69 classmate fashioned that reclaimed wood into gavels and sounding boards with engraved tags for each class presentation. For many years these gavel and sounding board sets were presented at an Alumni Association-sponsored annual luncheon. Now, however, the presentation to the graduating class president is made in front of the entire graduating class, and since 2014 that ceremony has included the graduating class's senior "A Link in the Chain" (ALITC) class. This project has established a fifty-year closed loop of presentations, where each year a USS *Constitution* gavel and sounding board set is passed from a senior ALITC class to its junior graduating ALITC class. Then 50 years later, that same set will be passed on the next "link in the chain" class--in perpetuity. Guy Higgins described the history of our involvement in this project and its evolution through the years in "Ties to Our Naval Heritage" published in our class column in the October 2022 *Shipmate* magazine.

- Stadium Tent and Tailgate: Beginning with modest roots in the early 1980s, many classmates congregate each fall in the parking lot area of Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium near Farragut Road for football celebrations and commiserations. In 1996, Steve Ward led a group of DC metro-area classmates in providing a class rendezvous and refreshment venue at every home game at the stadium. When our class began its 9<sup>th</sup> Company sponsorship that same year, that cross-generational relationship spilled over to the stadium events, increasing the scale of participation at tailgates from a small cadre of 69ers to at times as many as two complete companies of midshipmen arriving for food and drink. The challenge was met by the DC metro and Virginia Beach stalwarts led by Stephen A. Beaulieu III by gradually acquiring tailgate paraphernalia such as a custom 40 foot by 20-foot tent, tent sides for inclement weather, a storage trailer, lighting, a portable generator, a 600-pound grill, tent heaters, class banners, cooking and serving utensils, a full bar complete with bartender, a satellite big-screen television, and multiple flag halyards. The result has been ample food and beverages in a comfortable environment with plenty of camaraderie. Prior to the game, a mini-reunion of classmates and

wives is held over a pot-luck buffet and, regulations permitting, after the game 9th Company midshipmen, our “A Link in the Chain” Class of 2019 graduates, plus friends and families also join the festivities. As an extension of our Annapolis game-day events, classmates sponsored a bus to the Army-Navy game for over a decade. After a particularly miserable (weather-wise) game in 2013, the decision was made to end the bus excursion, and classmates now either go to the Army-Navy game on their own or congregate in classmate homes or pubs to watch the annual event. In March 2019 the decision was made to hand over the Tent and Tailgate spot to the Class of 1984 at the end of the 2019 season. '84 now takes care of all the logistics including inventory, purchase, coordination with 9<sup>th</sup> Company, set up, execution, take down, and clean-up. 69ers make small contributions to continue to enjoy Saturday afternoon game-days under the tent in Annapolis.

-Tidewater Bash: In 2008 Robert W. Byles and Joseph M. Greene conceived the idea of annual spring get-togethers of classmates and wives living in the Tidewater area of Virginia. The first Bash was held in April 2008 at the Greenes' home in Virginia Beach and has subsequently been hosted by other classmates in the area in May of the following years. The Bash has been so successful that classmates from DC, Northern Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, and Florida make the trip to attend.

- Passing the Torch: Over 90 of us had fathers who were USNA alumni, and with great pride we saw over 50 of our sons and daughters enter the classes of 1990 through 2011. Six of us were such great cheerleaders that two offspring each were admitted! Epitomizing naval tradition, five of us were in the middle of a father to son to son or daughter three generation Academy family legacy. Several classmates have grandchildren in the class of 2023 and beyond.

- Capstone: Each academic year since 2002, the Character/Officer Development Division of the Naval Academy has conducted the Capstone Seminar Program for first class midshipmen, relying initially on faculty and staff volunteers who sometimes could participate for only a morning or afternoon. In 2007 '69 was one of the first classes to provide 6 classmates who agreed to facilitate a seminar all day. The goal of this seminar program is to support the mission of the Naval Academy by providing midshipmen the opportunity to discuss issues of leadership, character, and ethics in a focused, day-long setting centered on case studies. These discussions are one of the final opportunities available to the midshipmen in their preparation for assuming the mantle of leadership as commissioned officers. The seminar provides a continuing effort to underscore the core values of honor, courage, and commitment and the application of these values as commissioned officers in the profession of arms. As facilitators, our classmates enhanced the case study discussions by relating real life experiences from a multitude of positions of responsibility in the Fleet and civilian life. In December 2019 the Commandant reviewed the program and found that facilitating the Capstone Seminars had become so popular with alumni that he had to restrict participation to classes having graduated within 10 to 40 years. The Class of 1969, which led the way as one of the first classes to participate as facilitators, completed its final Capstone on 5 March 2020.

- Class Legacy Project—the Chapel: During our 35<sup>th</sup> Reunion in 2004, a number of classmates commented on the distinct lack of any '69 contribution to the physical attributes of the Yard. The class Board of Directors took this issue under advisement and appointed Ronald D. Gumbert, Jr.,

Tim Halliday, and Steven A. “Doc” Hudock as a committee to investigate the process of providing a major gift to the Academy. This Class Gift Committee, assisted in the search process by Louis J. Giannotti and Patrick A. Stroop, who both then worked at USNA, had several meetings over the next year with the USNAAAF to look for opportunities for a gift within the Naval Academy Strategic Plan. At the same time, the Committee solicited ideas from the class, including Norman F. Brown, who had served as the Deputy Command Chaplain at USNA. Norm told the committee that the interior of the Chapel was in need of repair to pews, wood floors, kneelers, stained glass windows, and the front doors and that this need was reflected in the USNA Strategic Plan. The cost of the necessary work was estimated at \$1,000,000. In June 2005, the Class Gift Committee recommended the Chapel Project to the class Board of Directors, and the project was unanimously approved.

The next objective was to get the gift plan formalized through the establishment of a ‘Gifting Agreement’ between the Naval Academy and the USNAAAF. This took Doc Hudock nearly one year to complete. Shortly after the agreement was in place, the solicitation of gifts from our class began. This solicitation was preceded by a personal letter from class president Mike Michaelis to each classmate outlining our desire to ‘give back’ to our alma mater in a substantial and personal way. Uniting our class gifting efforts, we could leave a Class of 1969 legacy with the Chapel for following classes to use, appreciate, and enjoy.

Over the next two years, led by Myles A. Fisher’s generous gift, our class was able to raise nearly \$800,000 required for the Chapel Project. In October 2008, the Naval Academy was able to arrange a repair contract with the objective of having as much of the work done to the interior of the Chapel as possible by October 2009 in time for our 40th reunion. The work was in fact completed for our reunion and in the summer of 2011 a plaque was mounted in the rear of the Main Chapel to acknowledge our efforts. Also, as a result of our generosity, we were able to dedicate four pew plaques—two in the last row of the old nave, and two in the last row of the new nave. Those plaques are:

- a. *In Honor of Our Families*, For their love and support, At home and abroad;
- b. *In Memory of Classmates*, Lost in the Line of Duty, Non Sibi;
- c. *In Honor of the Brigade*, Present, Past, and Future, Non Sibi.
- d. *In Gratitude to our Mentors*, Faculty, Staff & Coaches, During our Years Together.

There are additional pew plaques given by individual classmates, including several sponsored personally by Myles Fisher.

Subsequently, the Class was approached by the Naval Academy and USNAAAF about using the excess funds for a refurbishment of St. Andrews Chapel to include refinishing of pews and floors and resealing of the stained-glass windows. The Class Foundation Board of Directors approved the expenditure, and the work was completed in the summer of 2012. In June 2014 a small plaque reflecting our efforts was placed in the rear of St. Andrews Chapel.

- 50th Reunion Class Gift—Alumni Mentoring Program: In March 2009, President Mike Michaelis appointed Stephen J. Leaman as the 50th Reunion Class Gift Committee Chairman. Stephen was enjoined to gather appropriate participation on the Committee from interested classmates and begin the process of identifying worthy alternatives for this effort over the years

ahead, looking not only within the confines of USNA, but also at a broader scope of military related projects that would provide a legacy for the USNA Class of 1969. Routine progress reports were requested to be made to the Class Foundation Board of Directors.

A 50th Legacy Gift Leadership Team was formed, and numerous options were presented during a class meeting at the 40th Reunion in the fall of 2009. Feedback from that meeting provided direction to the team. A recommendation to investigate the creation of an Alumni Mentoring Program (AMP) was prepared, presented to and accepted by the Class Foundation Board in early 2010.

The goal was to provide a unique service, linking more experienced alumni to those who could benefit from the accumulated wisdom of others who had “been there and done that.” This connection needed to be “facilitated” as USNA alumni are spread world-wide and tend to be very busy. Certain career points seem obvious points of potential sharing: near the end of initial obligated service and facing the decision to stay in or get out; being transferred to new locations, changing designators or jobs; seeking counsel on civilian career opportunities and much more. AMP was designed as an offering by Alumni for Alumni.

Mentoring programs operating in the civilian and military arenas were identified and evaluated by the team. Interviews were conducted with program participants, potential users and active duty and retired Navy and Marine Corps officers. The USNA Alumni Association/Foundation (USNAAAF) and USNA officials were briefed and interviewed. After careful consideration, a recommendation was made to the Class Foundation Board to pursue a pilot with USNAAAF using the Mentor Resources Wisdom Share internet-enabled mentoring platform. In December 2011 the USNAAAF Board of Trustees approved a two-year Alumni Mentoring Program (AMP) pilot to begin in July 2012. A modest fundraising effort was initiated to cover the pilot.

By December 2012, the system was working, with over 300 alumni “participating” as mentors and/or protégés and \$350,000 having been raised from classmates. Participant growth continued and in May 2014 the USNAAAF Board of Trustees voted unanimously to move beyond the pilot phase and continue the program as an approved and continuing service of the USNAAAF. In June 2014, more than 800 had registered as mentors and/or protégés. Of those more than 500 had “matched” and were paired off in at least one mentor/protégé relationship—and close to \$900,000 had been raised.

We committed to the USNAAAF to provide AMP guidance, program management and the financial resources to operate the program well into the future. A 50th Reunion fundraising campaign to fund AMP was initiated in summer 2014 with the goal to pay for all AMP operations and, at the appropriate time, turn over the management of the program to the USNAAAF with sufficient funds to sustain AMP well into the future. By December 2014 over \$1.82 million had been raised (cash contributions and pledges), exceeding our AMP goal.

In fall 2015, AMP participation reached 1,000 with more than 630 alumni in active matches. AMP Leadership Team members approached the Superintendent seeking approval to introduce AMP to firsties in the Class of 2016. It was agreed that, pending the results

of a successful enrollment pilot, AMP would be introduced to the Class of 2016 in their last semester before graduation. Details were worked out with the Commandant and his team, and a successful pilot was held with one company in February 2016. AMP was introduced to the remaining firsties in voluntary enrollment sessions company by company in late March. 19 AMP volunteers introduced the program to 800 midshipmen in 29 separate meetings in Bancroft Hall. More than 400 enrolled and by graduation over 150 members of 2016 were in active matches.

Other classes responded to the need for mentors for 2016 and by July 2016 participation had grown to over 1700. Based on these results, the Superintendent gave his endorsement for enrolling members of the Class of 2017 and succeeding classes prior to their graduations. COVID caused significant disruption for AMP enrollment for the classes of 2020, 2021 and 2022. As the AMP team planned to restart the program post COVID in the fall of 2022, the Superintendent recommended making AMP a part of the Practicum curriculum for firsties in the spring of their first-class year. In mid-March over 700 members of the Class of 2023 were briefed simultaneously in seven different classrooms venues (grouped by warfare specialty) throughout the yard and nearly all had enrolled by the meetings' conclusions.

The Class of 2024 enrollment mirrored our 2023 success with more than 700 enrollments in March of 2024. As of May of 2024, more than 6200 alumni are in AMP.

More than 200 of our classmates contributed funds to build and sustain AMP. As of May of 2024, the program had more than \$2.2 million invested to support the program for many years.

Dozens of our classmates have been active in AMP's administration under the continuing leadership of Stephen Leaman and his Team (Stan Bryant, Doc Hudock, Ron Gumbert, Bob Ahrens and Bert Bennett). They have invested thousands of volunteer hours to make AMP a success.

- USNA Class of 1969 Foundation Scholarship: In spring 2014, classmates William J. Kopp and Daniel P. Kollay learned that the number one graduate of the Class of 2014, David F. Williams, had been offered a post-graduate opportunity at Cambridge University, UK, to pursue a Master of Philosophy degree in Latin American Studies; however, he needed scholarship funds to make that happen. Bill and Dan brought this to the attention of the Class Foundation Board of Directors which voted unanimously to provide 2ND LT Williams with the funds. He became the first recipient of a USNA Class of 1969 Foundation Scholarship. He graduated from Cambridge in July 2015 and reported to the Basic School to begin his Marine Corps career. He graduated from TBS in the top 5% of his class, and then was an honor graduate from his public affairs MOS school. His operational career began with the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines including time in Iraq. By the time of our October 2019 50<sup>th</sup> reunion, CAPT Dave Williams USMC was back at USNA teaching Political Science to a new generation of midshipmen.

- Brigade Activities Center Project: During spring 2014, Dennis Yatras began working on a tribute to former SEAL John E. Gantley, who died in 2011. Dennis' idea was to purchase and install some SEAL-developed Total Resistance Exercises (TRX) fitness training equipment in

the Brigade Sports Complex fitness studio along with a small plaque in his memory. This “SEAL Corner” would provide midshipmen with an excellent training capability. This gift was accepted by the superintendent in July 2014 and Dennis spearheaded the effort to raise the necessary funds from classmates for the purchase and installation of the equipment.

- A Link in the Chain: From USNAINST 1531.48B. “In recent years, classes of Alumni informally established a bond with the midshipmen class 50 years their junior by attending the annual Battalion Receptions at Alumni House and then events important to the junior class. For example, the Class of 1950 initiated a program to personally present gold Ensign and 2nd Lieutenant bars, inscribed ’50-’00 to the newly commissioned graduates of the Class of 2000. The overall program, continued by the Class of 1951 in 2001, has become known at USNA and the Alumni Association by the title ALITC – A Link in the Chain. In addition to the graduation day presentation, there have been other opportunities added that have fostered bonding and mutual respect between generations of USNA graduates. In response to acknowledging the importance of the ALITC Program this instruction formally established the program in 2002.”

Shortly after assuming duties as Class President in December 2014, Mike Michaelis appointed Ronald L. “Rabbit” Christenson as the ALITC Chairman for the Class of 1969. With the Class of 2019 due to report in June 2015, things started happening rapidly and the first requirement was the creation by C. Todd Creekman, Jr. of a short class history that appears on page 68 of the 2015-2016 edition of *Reef Points*, the plebe’s bible. In addition to some of the highlights of our 50 years of service, the theme of this short version of our class history was to give the plebes a hint of the strong life-long bonds they were about to form with their new classmates. The Class of 2019 chose to include that document, titled “Letter from the Class of 1969,” as the lead-in to the opening section of their 2019 *Lucky Bag*.

The next series of events were to provide an ALITC speaker at Joint Alumni/Parents' Clubs "pre-I-Day" send-off ceremonies around the country. John F. Ohlinger was appointed to coordinate speakers at these events with the assistance of over 135 classmates forming the "Legacy Plebe Detail." This classmate enthusiasm and interaction resulted in over seventy parties receiving the ALITC brief and ranged from Maryland to California and Maine to Florida. The majority of these speakers were classmate volunteers supplemented by alumni chapter presidents or USNA Admissions Area Coordinators/Blue and Gold Officers where no classmates were available. Our primary focus was to connect a maximum number of the Class of 2019 candidates and their parents with the Class of 1969 alumni in their hometowns. The ALITC remarks were very well received around the country.

Induction or “I-Day” for 2019 was 1 July 2015, 50 years and one day after we were inducted. The Alumni Association (with our class help) sponsored a Parents’ Picnic on Hospital Point and over 50 classmates and wives attended to welcome the parents to the Naval Academy. Rabbit organized a very interesting display of memorabilia (Lucky Bags, Logs, B-robies, sports

gear, pictures, etc.) and the Alumni Association provided an excellent lunch for all attendees. At 1800 the Class of 2019 took the Oath of Office during a ceremony in Tecumseh Court. 1969 classmates and their wives were invited to sit in the Superintendent's and Commandant's sections to observe the ceremony.

On 17 July 2015, our class was invited to observe the first formal parade by the Class of 2019 on historic Worden Field. Our classmate Stan Bryant, Rear Admiral, USN (Retired) was the reviewing official for this parade and approximately 20 classmates and wives sat in the reviewing stand.

On 20 July 2015, our class participated in the Plebe Honor Coin Ceremony in Alumni Hall at the Naval Academy. Our first and longtime class president, Bill Newton, gave the plebes a brief and very meaningful message on the importance of honor and integrity as a component of character and the role of character in an officer's make up and in combat. After Bill's remarks about 40 classmates and wives presented each plebe with an honor coin to give them a tangible reminder of the need to be always honorable. The '69-'19 Honor Coin was designed by classmate Geoffrey W. Pomroy.

On 14 August 2015, our class was invited to attend the briefings given to the parents of the Class of 2019 during the Parents' Weekend Forum. Both the Superintendent and the Commandant gave the Class of 1969 appropriate recognition in their remarks. Approximately 15 classmates and wives attended the forum.

On 17 May 2016, the Class of 2019 participated in Sea Trials, a grueling 14-hour physical and teamwork challenge patterned after the United States Marine Corps Crucible. Although it was a cool and rainy day, 12 classmates and wives made the rounds between the Naval Academy and the Naval Support Activity to cheer on the plebes in their various challenges. Of note, classmate Dennis Yatras was on Farragut Field at 0258 and participated with the plebes in the 'warm up' phase of Sea Trials. At noon all of the '69 observers were on the USNA Bridge over the Severn River as 2019 switched stations from USNA to NSA and vice versa. The entire Class of 2019 cheered us as we cheered for them. The day concluded at 1700 in Dahlgren Hall as each plebe got his or her own pizza and listened to congratulatory remarks from the Superintendent, our class president Mike Michaelis, and the Commandant of Midshipmen.

The Herndon Monument Climb for the Class of 2019 was held on 23 May 2016. Forty-two classmates and wives attended, and after a fun lunch in the Naval Academy Club, we went to our reserved section of front row seats by Herndon. Classmate Gerry Witowski who capped Herndon for us in June 1966 was given the honor of announcing the countdown to commence the climb. One hour 12 minutes and 34 seconds later Midshipman 4/C Christopher Bianchi of the 6th company placed a midshipman's combination cap on top of Herndon, signifying "No more plebes" for 2019. Midshipman Bianchi (son of a USNA '85 graduate who died in a Navy helo



crash in 2003) was presented a flag officer cover by Stan Bryant who was the first in our class to pin on the rank of admiral. This unusual story was documented in the 2020 Naval Institute Press book *The Herndon Climb: A History of the United States Naval Academy's Greatest Tradition*.

Commencing in fall 2016, 12 midshipmen from the Class of 2019 were invited to attend Class of 1969 tailgates before every home Navy football game at Navy Marine Corps Memorial Stadium. This social event gave the midshipmen the opportunity to socialize with their ALITC Class and continued for all three of their upper-class years.

On 24 April 2017, our class presented 21 USNA rings to the Class of 2019 at the “Bonds of Gold” ceremony in Memorial Hall. 26 of our classmates and guests attended the ceremony. Each donated ring was accompanied by a short biography of the donor. Nine of the donors were present and spoke to the Class of 2019 about events they and their rings experienced. The stories were inspiring, and heart felt and were well received by the 2019 midshipmen present. Mike Michaelis and Rabbit Christenson presented the biographies of the ring donors who were unable to attend. In addition to the 10 class rings and 7 miniatures of '69, we were able to include a 100-year legacy ring for Captain Arthur S. Adams, Class of 1919. Todd Creekman had researched Captain Adams' career and presented highlights—including the fact that “Beany” Adams had chaired his class's ring committee. Andrew S. Dowd donated his father's ring from the Class of 1947 and we had a special request from the Class of 1966 (our firsties) to include a 1945 Class ring and its miniature. By the May 2018 Ring Dance, the gold from all these rings and miniatures was incorporated into the Class of 2019 rings, further confirming the permanent bond between the USNA generations.

On 17 May 2017, 12 classmates and guests from '69 attended the Youngster Luau, a celebration for 2019 of the end of their third-class year. Held in Smoke Park adjacent to the 5th wing of Bancroft Hall, it was well attended by '19. There were several "bouncy" stations which included a "ninja warrior" type course, a complicated obstacle course, a "bucking shark" and a dunk tank. There was lots of music and dancing but most of all there was great food, and midshipmen over 21 were provided beer if they wanted. It was great fun and a special opportunity to mix with our legacy class on a very casual basis.

On 22 August 2017, 73 representatives of the Class of 1969 (including 57 classmates) attended the Class of 2019 Commitment Dinner. After a group photo on the steps of Memorial Hall, we proceeded to Smoke Hall for the Class of 2019 reception, followed by dinner in King Hall, seated with the midshipmen. During the evening the Class of 2019 stood and repeated their midshipmen oath and pledged their commitment to graduate in 2019 and incur the follow-on career obligation. The keynote speaker was our own Stan Bryant who gave an inspiring address about commitment and service to our Navy and nation.

On 19 May 2018, we joined the Class of 2019 at their Ring Dance in Dahlgren Hall, recalling our own event by dipping our well-worn rings back in the water of the seven seas.

On 15 November 2018, 50 classmates and wives helped 2019 celebrate their Community Assignment Night (what we knew as Service Selection Night) at a King Hall Dinner where classmate John Padgett, Rear Admiral USN (Retired) and former Commandant of Midshipmen delivered an impressive keynote address on the importance of serving our country honorably as a Naval officer.

On 20 March 2019, our classmates donated and presented to the Class of 2019 20 Navy and Marine Corps swords. This years-long project was organized by Edward J. Lehre. After classmates Ed Lehre and James R. “Sandy” Sandberg gave a brief military history of the significance of Navy and Marine Corps swords, each classmate donor who was in attendance presented his sword to the respective recipient. For those donors not in attendance, Rabbit Christenson and Stephen Leaman presented the swords on the donor’s behalf. All swords were enthusiastically received. A copy of each donor’s *Lucky Bag* photograph and his contact information was provided to each sword recipient.

On 24 May 2019, we proudly participated in 2019’s graduation at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium with twelve ‘69ers led by classmate Douglas S. Bishop handing each of 1,052 graduates a special set of ensign/second lieutenant devices engraved “69-19” and a Class of 1969 coin. Four additional delayed graduations for 15 midshipmen were conducted in Memorial Hall and were attended by classmates who presented those graduates with the engraved devices and coins. 2019 had a graduation rate of 89.1%--contrasted with our own 66.2%, meaning many more graduates were ready to serve their country as commissioned officers.

-Legacy of the Class of 1969 (LOC69): Conceived as a way of permitting each classmate to tell his military and post-military career stories, celebrate family and friends, and pass on accumulated wisdom and lessons learned to succeeding generations, the digital, online LOC69 project received over 400 classmate inputs, including images, by the time of its launch at our 50<sup>th</sup> reunion in October 2019. This effort was funded by the class and by individual donations, and a hard copy of the LOC 69 content has been archived in the USNA Nimitz Library along with this class history.

- Alumni Memorial Fund: When a group of classmates visiting the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Virginia realized that there was no recognition plaque for USNA D-Day participation to match the ones for USMA, Virginia Tech and Virginia Military Institute, the Alumni Memorial Fund was born. After several years of fundraising led by Roger H. Henderson and close coordination by our ’69 classmates with the staff at the Memorial, a USNA plaque was dedicated before an appreciative audience of USNA grads and their families on 5 June 2019. The following day the Memorial and the nation celebrated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pivotal D-Day invasion

before thousands of guests, dozens of World War II and Normandy veterans, and with the appreciative words of Vice President Pence.

- “Honorary Classmates:” Several decades ago, class leaders recognized the need for a special category to honor worthy friends and associates who have contributed to our class success over the years, and particularly those who have become role models and mentors. While technically these individuals are voted by the Class Foundation to be honorary members of the Foundation, in practice we understand them to be “honorary classmates” in the finest sense of the term.

- On 17 November 2018, the Class Foundation members voted to honor Ms. Wendi Winters for her selfless courage in the face of a deranged gunman who had stormed the offices of the Annapolis *Capital Gazette* on 28 June 2018, killing Wendi and four of her co-workers. Wendi was well known to many classmates, had covered our events as a journalist and was often seen at our football tailgate tent. Her father was USNA Class of 1940, a classmate of some of our fathers. At the time we honored Wendi, two of her four children were serving in the U.S. Navy.

- On 26 October 2019, the Class Foundation members voted to honor recently retired Head Cross Country Coach Al Cantello. Coach Cantello was a special person to our classmates, who first met him as plebes when he was an assistant coach. We were the first class to graduate with him as Head Cross Country Coach and shared with him the accomplishment of beating Army in his first ever head coaching assignment in fall 1968.

- 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion: Our 50<sup>th</sup> reunion was held 24 to 27 October 2019 at The Graduate Annapolis Hotel (formerly Loews) and was a resounding success as the following numbers and program events description attest:

- Total classmates - 447
- Total classmate widows - 5
- Total other guests for all events - 411
- Total attendees for all events – 863 (doesn’t include tailgate only and dinner only guests)
- Total tailgate only guests - 33
- Total dinner only guests – 1

Anyone who was ever a member of the Class of 1969 (1328) was invited. At the time of the reunion, we were aware of 202 classmates who had died; thus, the maximum number of classmates who could have attended was 1126.

The 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion Coordinator was Doc Hudock, and he was assisted by 21 classmates who were designated as Reunion Activity Bosses. These classmates took on numerous chores such as technology, registration, Friday night dinner, tailgate, tours and memorial service to name only a few. Highlights of the schedule of events were:

- Cocktail reception at the hotel
- Company dinners and get togethers Thursday and Saturday nights
- Clay shooting
- Yard and city tours
- Crew shell christening

- Superintendent briefing and formal p-rade
- Class dinner
- Running of the goats
- Annual class meeting
- Tailgate in N\* Room and football victory over Tulane
- Brunch at the hotel
- Class Memorial Service

- Popular Music Concerts: Throughout our four years, the Brigade Popular Music Concert Committee arranged for entertainers to perform for the Brigade and our Drags in the Field House or Dahlgren Hall. As we approached our 45<sup>th</sup> Reunion in 2014, Walt Giraldi recommended that we add a list of those concerts to our Class History document. That triggered a six-year search through our collective memories, as well as scrapbooks, back issues of *The Log* magazine, the local Annapolis newspaper *The Capitol*, and the annual *Lucky Bags* to enable us to compile the most accurate list possible. And what great music groups they were! The Four Seasons, The Platters, The Lettermen, Roger Miller, The New Christy Minstrels, Jay and The Americans, Chad & Jeremy, Johnny Rivers, Neil Diamond, Dionne Warwick, The Cowsills, and Tommy James and the Shondells--and others. These groups defined the music of the 1960s as we came of age.

55<sup>th</sup> Reunion Project—Fluegel Alumni Center: In the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the USNA Alumni Association/Foundation launched a campaign to build a new state of the art alumni center to consolidate staff in one location and provide a venue for alumni events. By the time the Fluegel Alumni Center opened in fall 2023, '69 gifts and pledges totaled over \$800,000, earning our class the prominent display of our class crest in the North Garden Terrace and the designation of the East Event Patio as the Class of 1969 “Mighty Fine” Event Patio.

In addition, 45 classmates were honored as Alumni Center Plankowners on a display board in the Center’s main hallway for donating (or having donated on their behalf) \$12,500 apiece.