



A LINK IN THE CHAIN

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 major events important to the junior class. For example, the Class of 1950 initiated a program to personally present gold ensign and second 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 "A Link in the Chain" (ALITC). 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.

This year, the Class of 1972 will participate in many of the events that mark your transition from civilian to midshipman. The Plebe Summer Induction Day, 28 June, includes an expo and picnic for the families while the new midshipmen are checking in and participation with the Class of 2022 at the Swearing-In Ceremony in T-Court. The Plebe Summer Reaffirmation Ceremony, 16 July, will provide a chance for the two classes to reflect on the commitment they have made, to be marked by the presentation of an Honor Coin, designed by the Class of 1972 for the Class of 2022. The final event of the summer is one of the Plebe Summer Formal Parade, 3 August. At the end of plebe year, the Class of 2022 will participate in Sea Trials, a test of the skills they have learned during the year, followed by the climbing of Herndon Monument, marking the end of Plebe Year (No Mo' Plebes). The Class of 1972 will be there to cheer you on.

Other opportunities will occur during the four year, culminating in the presentation of bars to the Class of 2022. One of the most inspiring of these events occurs in the spring of Third Class year. The midshipmen class officers accept donations of personal Naval Academy rings and Naval Academy ring miniatures of the senior ALITC class in a solemn "Bonds of Gold" Ceremony in Memorial Hall. The donated rings are then melted down and added to the gold that will be used to forge the midshipmen's rings, creating a life-long physical bond between the two classes.

A little history about the Class of 1972 (which you will see again in your Reef Points)

The Class of 1972 entered the Naval Academy on 26 June 1968, during a time of political unrest, dissidence and upheaval. Dr. Martin Luther King and Senator Robert Kennedy were assassinated. It was the summer of the Chicago Eight and violence at the Democratic National Convention. It was not a popular time to be in the military...but nearly 1400 of us took the oath in T-Court that hot summer afternoon to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. Arming us with fresh haircuts, white works and alpha codes, the Academy undertook the task of turning us into officers fit to serve in the United States Navy and Marine Corps.

We rapidly acquired new and useful skills under the tutelage of the Classes of '69, '70 and '71. Memory skills were honed; time and distance computations (how fast one could do the Melville Mile—between Bancroft and what is now Alumni Hall—without running); learning never to guess ("I'll find out,

Sir!"); to keep one's eyes in the boat, and how to march. Words like "honor", "commitment", "courage", "loyalty" had new meaning. "Classmate": a comrade who stood by you, shared your pain, challenged you to do better. Valuable advice: like "Expect what you inspect." A sign posted in the wrestling loft: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."

If there was one constant during our years at the Academy, it was change. Chauvenet and Michelson Halls were dedicated. Maury and Sampson Halls were gutted and renovated. The laundry smokestack, located where Nimitz Library now stands, was adorned with graffiti ("If the stack goes, we go with it...") before being razed. The academic program was revised and '72 became the first class required to complete a major. In 1969, we marched in President Nixon's inaugural parade. That July, Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, fulfilling a promise we remembered President Kennedy making fewer than seven years earlier. Most of us missed Woodstock but, the following April, we watched the Apollo 13 astronauts avert disaster and return safely to earth. Compulsory chapel attendance ended. As the number of POWs and MIAs grew, two Classmates led a successful public letter writing campaign to urge fair treatment for those captured by the North Vietnamese. Meanwhile, Mrs. Marshall, the Social Director, tried to instill some level of civility in us with dance lessons and Plebe Tea Dances with local colleges. Over the course of the next few years, the first female professor and staff officer arrived. In September 1971, Senator Jacob Javits began to push open the door of the service academies to women. In May 1972, at the invitation of Superintendent VADM James Calvert, Gloria Steinem and Dorothy Pitman Hughes addressed the Brigade. Within four years, women were admitted to USNA. We won only one Army-Navy football game during our tenure, however, after nearly fifty years, the Class of 1972 still holds the record time for climbing Herndon Monument!

Nine hundred and five of us threw our caps in the air on a beautiful summer morning at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium on 7 June 1972. Our service selections and assignments called us all over the world, often in harm's way. But the leadership, knowledge, skills and friendships we forged at USNA stood the test of time. Our years of service covered the Cold War, to the fall of the Berlin Wall and establishment of new European democracies. During that time, the United States was called upon to support allies and intervene in crises around the world. From Operations Eagle Pull/Frequent Wind, through Desert Storm, 9/11, Iraqi Freedom, and numerous humanitarian operations, we provided leadership in the ranks of the military, in government and as civilians. Technology changed, and changed again. We witnessed the A-1 Skyraider and a 600-ship Fleet. We saw the recommissioning and second retirement of Iowa-class battleships, the transition from steam to gas turbine propulsion. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, we watched the size of the fleet decrease. Computer miniaturization, replacement of over-the-horizon HF communications with SATCOM, and the Internet happened on our watch. Eighteen classmates attained flag or general rank; one served with NASA as an astronaut. The last member of the Class of 1972 retired from active duty in May 2014, after nearly 42 years of service. Many of us still continue to serve in government, education, and industry.

The Class has always maintained a close bond with the Academy. Many members have served on the faculty and in leadership positions. We sponsor a Distinguished Military Professor for Character Development, and present every graduating midshipman a pocket-sized copy of the Constitution, as a reminder of exactly what it is that we took an oath to protect and defend with our lives. As you, Class of 2022, embark upon your career, you will live through more change and challenge than ever before. Your class will have its share of admirals and generals and one of you may walk on Mars. The strong and lasting relationships you will form and the bond of service to our country that is built in a few short years will last you a lifetime. The common experience of all midshipmen, the acceptance of responsibility and accountability, is the trademark of a Naval Academy graduate. Our link in the chain was forged here. Your link will now be joined to the unbroken tradition of service. Welcome aboard, Shipmates

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