

## U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1975, Shipmate Column MARCH 2020

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Dear 'mates, *[Let's check the USNA.com website to see what the **Shipmate** deadline is for the March issue. Hmmm... You're kidding me, right? December 26th? I know, I know. I could have checked it earlier and done my homework in advance ... BUT ...]*

There is a lot to be said for sitting by a Christmas tree, drinking good coffee, with grandchildren playing with new gifts, looking forward to a couple of bowl games coming up later. Good times! As we have tickets to the last **Star Wars** movie this afternoon, I better get my cut-and-paste action going. Thanks to classmates who are doing interesting things—and sharing their after-action reports.

Firstly, heartiest congratulations to **Kirk Donald** on his selection as a Distinguished Graduate. Bravo Zulu to **Jon Greenert** and the selection panel that he chairs.

**Dean Lahren** provided a superb eulogy for one of the Flower Children.

**"I'm sad to report the passing of our classmate and my close friend William Howard "Bill" Dixon, Jr.** Bill arrived along with the rest of us at USNA in the summer of 1971, anxious and wondering what lay ahead. For the next four years he proceeded to entertain and educate both his company mates and the rest of his classmates. Once we learned what language he was speaking that became much easier. Turns out it was English—spoken with as deep a southern drawl as could be imagined (but still requiring periodic translation). He kept the upper classes happy for the most part during plebe year with that folksy wisdom only he could provide. We learned early on that he was a character, the best kind of character. He acquired the nickname of "Hogman" early on, basically from his behavior at the training tables. Table manners or lack thereof may have been the origination of this moniker. Harley Davidson motorcycles were another area of interest, acquiring one a year or two before graduation. (Of course this was the era of AMF and Harley Davidson so I'm not sure if the Harleys of this era even count.) It kept him happy. We learned a lot from Dix and I don't think many knew that much about Richard Petty before we met Bill. Turns out Bill was from Richard Petty's hometown. Hank Williams and country music were also important to him. The thing that may have influenced the most people was Red Man Chewing tobacco. He got several of us to try it and its use by some may have continued beyond graduation. Bill Dixon made our lives better and we were blessed and lucky to have him as a part of our lives, intimately for four years and intermittently after that. He will be missed by his company mates and the rest of his classmates. Rest in Peace."

And now we turn the column over to **Peter Damisch**.

<photo 75#1: "Polar bear watch">



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"I love my job! Just returned home from hiking in Panama's Darien Jungle with remote Embera indigenous population as well as in Colombia's Utria rainforest. Earlier this year we had the opportunity to work in multiple villages in Bangladesh and Madagascar that had never encountered any tourism. There was also a ground level encounter from fifteen feet away with a tiger eating a Bluebull antelope in India.

#### <photo 75#2: "Calving glacier on Severnaya Zemlya">

In between, I operated with a team making a first voyage from Alaska to Norway across the top of Russian Siberia, completing a circumnavigation of the Arctic Ocean / North Pole. Our small rifle group went ashore first, hiking inland and climbing mountains to "clear the area" checking for polar bears. We also visited tiny aboriginal villages (with bowls of semi-fresh walrus) and stopped by abandoned Soviet meteorological

stations well north of the Arctic Circle. There we had to make "armed, no knock, hard entry" clearances of buildings vacant for 30+ years, looking for hidden polar bears in the dark while establishing a perimeter and sniper overwatch. Fortunately we "won" all potential confrontations — except one where we were driven off by a combination of polar bears and dense fog. Some additional expedition entertainment was provided by bad weather, calving glaciers, heavy sea ice, landing in near frozen waves up to our waist and driving zodiacs in 75+ knot winds.

One additional highlight was landing on incredibly remote Ostrov Bennetta which was discovered in 1881 by G.W. DeLong (USNA 1865) and very rarely visited since. We also operated at many other deserted places including Wrangel Island, Severnaya Zemlya, Novaya Zemlya, and Franz Josef Land. Most sites had unknown water depths followed by long, difficult hikes past pingos, up glacial river valleys, or over sharp angular rocks at places such as Chetyrekhtolbovoy Island (great name). It was fantastic to observe dozens of bears and thousands of walrus at many locations — plus working with a great team across the top of the world!"

Dan "Rudy" Elins provided a photo and quick note from 18th company's annual "Kick off the Holidays" gathering at Diana and Don Jensen's home in Fuquay-Varina, NC. Attendees in the photo are (from left to right) 1st row: Don Jensen, **Randy Avers**, "Rudy" Elins. 2nd row: **Larry Kloth**, Joy Young. 3rd row: Charlyn Cassady, Ruth Walsh, **Bob Young**. 4th row: Diana Jensen, Dawn Crowley (wife of Jim).



#### <photo 75#3: "18th Kicks off the Holidays">



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**Gary Miller** provided a “belated” report on a wonderful trip he and Cindy took to New Mexico last summer. [Never too late for your classmates, Gary.] The National Senior Games were held in Albuquerque. Over 13,000 senior athletes representing all 50 states competed in 20 different sports. Gary finished fourth in his age group at 800m, which was run on the University of New Mexico’s state-of-the-art track. Gary was happy with that considering the quality of the competition and the fact that he was seeded 8th coming in. Gary was thrilled to learn that one of his boyhood athletic idols, Peter Snell, was also competing. Peter won the 800m in the 1960 Rome Olympics and returned four years later to win gold in Tokyo at both 800m and 1500m — an awesome feat. Gary got to meet Peter and hang out with this great guy for the better part of an afternoon. Peter was impressed and pleased that Gary had brought a 54-year-old first printing of his autobiography, which he kindly autographed.



<photo 75#4: “Peter Snell with Gary”>

Though participating in the Games was immensely satisfying, Gary and Cindy had as much or more fun visiting the filming locations for several of their favorite Netflix series, (Longmire, Breaking Bad and Better Call Saul). Though Longmire was supposedly set in Wyoming, it was actually filmed in New Mexico. The infamous “Red Pony” bar and restaurant, often featured in the series, is actually a place called The Mineshaft Tavern in the charming small town of Madrid, NM. For the last few years Gary had eagerly anticipated someday having a Rainier beer (Sheriff Walt Longmire’s favorite) at the Red Pony. Incredibly, the real bar doesn’t serve Rainier! Talk about disappointment. The Millers also ventured up to the Valles Caldera National Preserve, where scenes featuring Longmire’s cabin were filmed. A number of movies and other television shows, mostly westerns, have been filmed there as well. Spectacular scenery.

<photo 75#5: “The Red Pony”>

Another fun filming location they visited was Twisters restaurant, which served as the fictional “Los Pollos Hermanos,” the front for fictional meth kingpin Gus Fring’s drug operation in Breaking Bad and its prequel, Better Call Saul. Again, great food that was alone worth the visit. And unlike The Mineshaft, Twisters really hyped their connection to the television series with show memorabilia all over the place. Gary and Cindy ran out of time to visit all the sights in the area. They plan more New Mexico trips in the future.



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<photo 75#6: “Longmire’s cabin”>



It sure felt great to watch the “Men of Ken” crush Army this year. Liberty Bowl is coming up in a few days. Beat Kansas State to cap off an outstanding season! Speaking of football ... aviators might remember the University Of West Florida—that little school tucked away in the pines north of I-10 in Pensacola. Well, the Argonauts are the NCAA Div II National Champions! In only their fourth year of playing football, they knocked off four undefeated teams in four consecutive weeks to win it all! Go NAVY! Go ARGOS!

'75 Sir! Larry