

U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1975, Shipmate Column SEPTEMBER 2021

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Dear 'mates, As I write, the Class of 2025 — our Another Link in the Chain class — is preparing for their arrival in Annapolis and induction into the Brigade. Appropriately, I-Day on 30 June was exactly 50 years after ours. As you read, Parents Weekend has come and gone and the Brigade has returned. Our ALITC brothers and sisters are learning to balance the academic, military, and physical demands of being midshipmen. In their now well-worn Reef Points, they found a message from '75. It isn't so much a class history as it is a letter to '25. (A LINK-letter if you will. Yet another reference that means absolutely nothing to them. Kids say the darnedest things.)

“It was a cold, damp evening in the winter of 1974 — not unusual weather for the “Dark Ages” in Annapolis. The Commandant of Midshipmen had summoned the class of 1975 to Mahan Hall for a little session of constructive criticism. The 'Dant was not pleased with our grooming, uniform standards, or our general attitude. His frustration culminated with his pronouncement that *“The Class of '75 are the Flower Children of the Brigade.”* (Google “flower child” to get the proper historical perspective.) We immediately adopted the name as a badge of honor, and to this day, we proudly wear it on ball caps and football jerseys. We are THE FLOWER CHILDREN OF THE BRIGADE.

Now, in 2021, the Flower Children have become mentors. At every major event during 2025's four years together by the Bay, you will be able to look around and see some rather older dudes smiling encouragingly. To us, you are **“Another Link in the Chain.”**

On Wednesday 30 June 1971, nearly 1,350 young men reported to Bancroft Hall to form our class. Women would not arrive until exactly five years later, when the class of 1980 joined the chain. Except for NAPSters and prior enlisted men, we were in our civilian clothes when we recited the oath of office and were inducted as midshipmen late that afternoon. (Those civvies were shipped back to our homes in short order.)

Plebe summer — indeed, much of our time at USNA — was punctuated with the background “Pa-CHUNK-a” sound of pile drivers filling in the Severn River to create the added land that the Academy needed for the Nimitz Library and Rickover Hall, and eventually, for Alumni Hall. In addition to Nimitz and Rickover, the Robert Crown Sailing Center was added to the growing footprint of the Naval Academy before we graduated.

On Sunday mornings during plebe year we mustered for mandatory attendance at religious services. We had our choice of Catholic or Protestant services in the Chapel, Jewish services elsewhere in the Yard, or we could join a “church party” to attend a church of our choice in Annapolis. During our Youngster Cruise in 1972, the courts ruled that mandatory chapel attendance at the military academies was unconstitutional. Some slept in for the next three years, but most of us continued to attend services in the stunning USNA Chapel.

When June Week arrived in 1972, the Flower Children set our first standard as a class. Using strategy, teamwork, and raw brute strength, we climbed Herndon Monument in twenty minutes. That record (for a greased Herndon) stands to this day. Records are made to be broken. We really wouldn't mind if 2025 was to become the class that moved our time to second place!

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Youngster year saw the first women arrive as faculty members at the Academy. Female officers and civilians in the front of the classrooms helped prepare the way for female midshipmen in 1976.

In the early 1970s, Navy football was not very competitive. Navy had not been to a bowl game since the Roger Staubach era. We beat Virginia in the very first game of 1971, but won only two more games that year. Navy's records during our time in Annapolis were 3-8, 4-7, 4-7, and 4-7. We did experience a few highlights, including a victory over 8th-ranked Penn State in Happy Valley, two wins over Air Force, and two over Army (by a record score of 51-0 in 1973). Navy won the Commander-in-Chief's trophy for the first time in 1973.

The Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal dominated the news during our time as midshipmen. Memorial Hall was more solemn than ever as names of recent graduates were routinely added to the lists of those killed in action in Southeast Asia. The break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington's Watergate hotel in 1972 haunted the Nixon Administration until his resignation shortly before our 1st class year began.

Growing public disapproval of the Vietnam War led to strong opposition for and mistrust of the military throughout the country. Long hair, "Make Love Not War" chants, a growing drug culture, coupled with social unrest resulted in many of us being ostracized and disrespected by our college-age peers. Being spit upon and ridiculed when traveling in uniform was not uncommon. Notably, while on our Youngster Cruise in 1972, some of our Classmates were the last midshipmen to earn the Vietnam Service Medal. USS VANCOUVER (LPD-2) and USS DUBUQUE (LPD-8) operated in the war zone conducting a two-day support operation during the penultimate U.S. campaign of the Vietnam War.

Vietnam, an anti-military atmosphere, and the fact that the draft ended during our Youngster year led to the Class of 75's second USNA record. Our attrition rate (>39%) is the highest of the modern era. This is a record that we do NOT want 2025 to even approach!

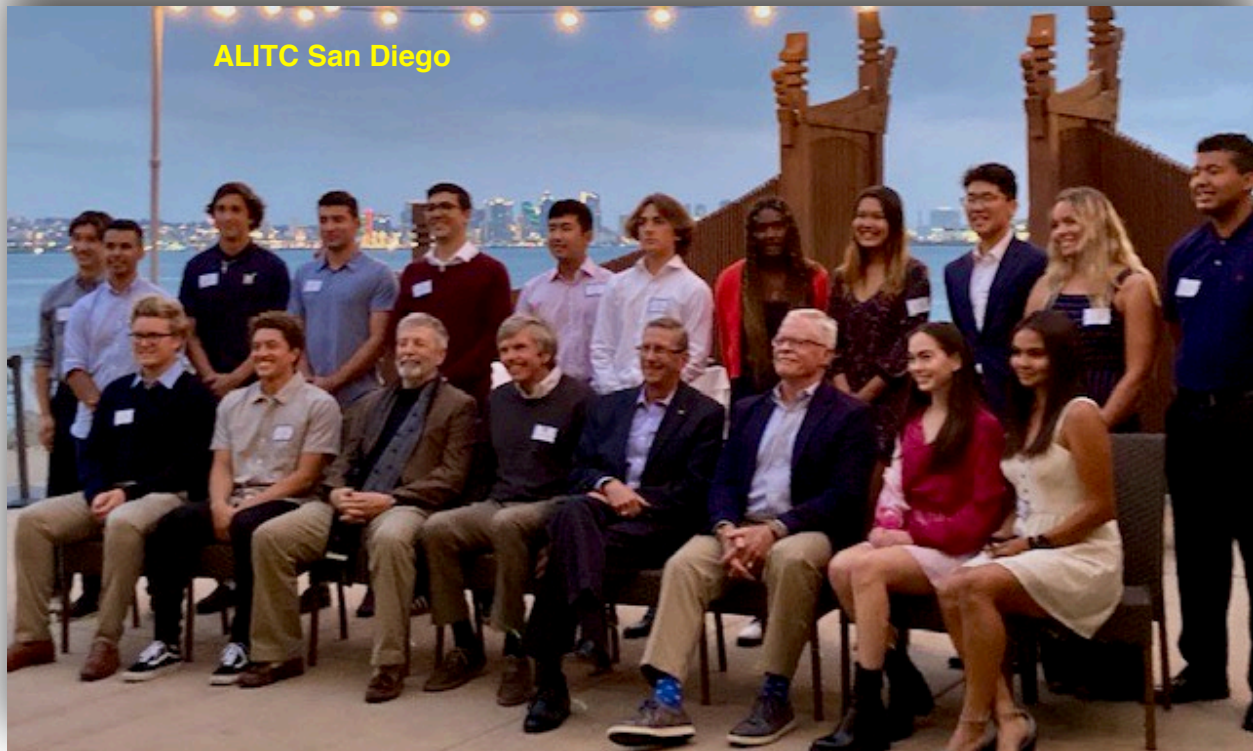
Despite the low expectations of our Commandant, the Class of 1975 has been extraordinarily successful. We entered the Fleet and Corps at the height of the Cold War, and proudly served with Honor, Courage and Commitment as we were taught at the Academy. Despite our small class size, we boast more than 20 flag and general officers, including a former Chief of Naval Operations and a Director of Naval Nuclear Propulsion. We claim a doctor who is curing cancer and leaders in business, industry, medicine, religion, and government.

As the *Laws of the Navy* poem cites "...on the strength of one link in the cable, dependeth the might of the chain..." The Class of 1975 welcomes the Class of 2025 and is committed to helping you "...bear the strain..." that binds us all into the proud and distinguished legacy of the Naval Academy." (*Webmaster's Note: Author, our scribe Larry Warrenfeltz - "with great assistance from the 75 Executive Committee."*)

Throughout the country, parent's clubs and alumni chapters sent the Class of '25 off to Crabtown with going-away dinners and picnics. In each case, volunteers from '75 were on hand to welcome the new plebes to the brotherhood/sisterhood. Here are just a few notes.

Dave Frost reports that the San Diego region was blessed with ~21 appointees for '25, plus a couple of NAPSters headed for the class of 2026. Nearly all attended a 1 June recognition event, along with their families. Kudos to the San Diego Flower Children and surviving spouses who underwrote ALL of the BALI HAI dinner costs for the special guests! **Larry Conrad, John McTighe, Speer Ezzard** and Frosty

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spoke about their demerits and such in impromptu fashion, as the dinner program ran VERY long. Our Country is in great hands with fine young Americans like the ones that Larry, Speer, John and Dave met as our first — yet NOT last — link across 50 years.

In San Francisco, **Steve Hall** and **Marc Siedband** did the honors. Steve says, “The parents were really happy that we were there. I’ve been attending the events for the past 12 years, and this one with us was the best ever. Marc stayed right on message with great words and advice. I, as a submariner with ADHD, ran off script at every opportunity ... which resulted in us getting kicked off the stage so they could stay on schedule. It was great to see Marc for the first time since we were at Prototype in Idaho.”

In central New York state, **Howard Gutzman** and **Dan Wheeler** helped welcome three new links in the chain — Alexis Smith (Fayetteville, NY), Michael Magee (Manlius, NY),



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and Hannah McCarthy (Deerfield, NY). Dan was the Blue & Gold Officer for Alexis and Hannah.
I hope to see you in Annapolis in November! '75 Sir! Larry

