

## U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1975, Shipmate Column NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2021

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Dear 'mates, As 2021 draws to a close, our Reunion 45+1 is in the rear-view mirror and we are starting to think seriously about the Big 5-0 in 2025. (Deadline for this issue was pre-reunion, so I should have some good photos for the January *Shipmate*.) All classmates should have received information on the class legacy gift we will be giving to USNA as part of our 50th festivities. If you want a fresh copy of the gouge, just shoot me a text or email.

Condolences to the family of **Lee Davis** (8<sup>th</sup> Company) who passed away on 1 August. He struggled with throat cancer for the last couple of years. Lee was cremated, and his desire was to be buried at sea. Thanks to **Mike Thumm** for keeping us all informed. Condolences also to the family of **Donald Van Osdol** who died of a rare cancer called cordoma. Cancer Sucks!

Once again, the class congratulates our recent Distinguished Graduate — Admiral **Kirk Donald**. During the course of the DGA festivities, Kirk had the opportunity to speak with quite a few mids, staff, and faculty. He reports that it was a great few days and that he came away from it very proud of the Academy and all they and the Alumni Association are doing to make it better. Kirk had a chance to deliver some remarks at the Distinguished Graduate Award ceremony.

“One of the things I tried to get across to the Brigade (most were there and seemingly awake!) was the significance of the bond among classmates, my appreciation for that bond, and my pride in being one of the Flower Children and all that implies. I hope their experience is similar.”

Kirk sent President Chick a nice email (forwarded to the class email list) summarizing some of the current issues at the Academy. He welcomes anyone who has additional questions to contact him.

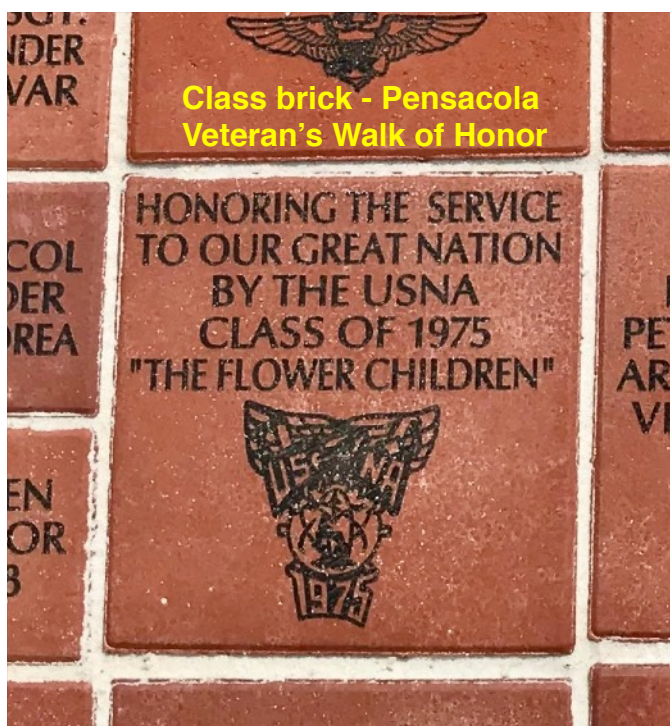
**Carl “CJ” Willis** is deeply involved with the planning for the 2022 Leadership Forum on Diversity and Inclusion event that will be held 28 April - 1 May 2022 at USNA's Alumni Hall. The main components of the forum are: (1) a Diversity and Inclusion Forum / Symposium

“Engage, listen, learn, and leave ready to lead,” (2) An Alumni Career Fair and networking session: “Highlight your talent and network with top employers, and (3) The Alumni Gala Dinner featuring recognition of achievements, camaraderie with alumni, and a STEM scholarship donation. CJ's goal is to spread the news as far as possible with our classmates and have as many attend this impactful event as possible.

**Bob Burns** provided an after-action report on **Mike Lipari's** retirement celebration. After 20+ years of teaching and coaching high school students, Mike decided to hang up his cleats. A retirement ceremony honoring his academic and coaching achievements was held at his house in

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June. The school faculty and staff were very appreciative — sharing many fond memories of Mike's exploits. Representing 10th Company along with Bob were **Steve Stanley**, and **Bruce Miller**. Many sea stories were swapped ... greatly entertaining the attendees. Mike told how he



received the highly coveted Black N. He (or was it his car?) was caught driving within the 7-mile limit during 1/C summer. According to Mike, he was on First Class cruise when the infraction occurred! But in the highest traditions of the Flower Children, Mike refused to bilge a classmate and took the punishment upon himself. As Mike's 1/C year roomie, **Zack Wilhoit** confirms that Mike took the demerits like a man. Also, he was very quiet when he got up for each morning's sunrise terrace drill session. Zack was ICOR for the whole year to provide protection from any further potential pap damage.

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On behalf of the class, **Butch Hansen** sponsored a brick in the Pensacola Veteran's Memorial Park Walk of Honor. Thank you classmate!



Celebrating Mike Langley's induction into the USNA Rugby Hall of Fame - Jon Greenert, Steve Ferguson, Doug Gibson, Chris Cikanovich, Mike Langley, Sam Dennis, Roy Hawkens

**Jon Greenert, Steve Ferguson, Doug Gibson, Chris Cikanovich, Sam Dennis, and Roy Hawkens** gathered at USNA in September to honor **Mike Langley** as he was inducted into the USNA Rugby Hall of Fame. Chick was standing in line for a drink with a 1/c female Mid rugby player. She asked, "Were you a rugby guy?" He answered, "No, I'm here for my classmate from '75." Her response: "*Whoa!*" But she meant it in a nice way.

**Deke Ahle** reports that our class USNA parachute rig is finally completed and ready for use by the Mids. The main canopy is gold with blue cells at both ends and a large blue N-star in the center. Many classes have supported the USNA parachute team by purchasing rigs. The team sponsor, **Bill Boniface '72**, has been actively fundraising for the team to make it a first class collegiate operation like the USAFA and USMA teams. Thanks Deke for making this happen!



1975 sponsored parachute

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Preparing for Another Link in the Chain events in Tampa prompted **Peter Damisch** to think about alumni that preceded us in the chain. Here's Peter's story:

“Just prior to COVID restrictions, our expedition team landed on the very remote Ostrov Bennetta in the Arctic Ocean about 250 nm north of Siberia. This barren, treeless polar desert island is almost never visited. It is not on any shipping or aviation route, but it does have a direct link to USNA.

Lieutenant Commander **George W. DeLong** 1865, was Captain of USS JEANNETTE in 1881. He was tasked to reach the North Pole by sea. Unfortunately the ship (only 570 tons) was crushed and sunk by thick pack ice. Thirty-three crew members crowded into three small boats. On 16 July, DeLong discovered and named Bennett Island after an expedition patron. However, sea ice kept the boats (just 14-25 feet long) offshore for almost two more weeks.

DeLong and crew were finally able to make the first landing on 29 July, claiming the island for the United States, along with the archipelago later named the DeLong Islands. (This claim was not pursued by the U.S., allowing Russia to assume sovereignty.) Despite a desperate survival situation, adverse weather and the need for rest forced the survivors to remain until 6 August 1881. They used that time productively to scientifically explore the 58-square mile island and to study and take samples of lichens, mosses and geology. Signs of polar bear, fox and birds were examined but none were seen.

Upon departure towards the Siberian mainland, the XO and smallest boat were lost in a storm. DeLong's boat made it ashore in an uninhabited area near the Lena River, but he and all of his crew members died of hypothermia and starvation. George Melville, Chief Engineer, led a third boat whose crew landed in a separate location. Melville rallied the survivors, searched 1,000 miles of frozen land, discovered the bodies of DeLong's group, recovered the logbooks and all scientific records, then returned to the U.S. with thirteen of the original 33 personnel.

Melville later served as Chief Engineer of the Navy from 1887-1903. Melville Hall housed engineering classes at USNA from 1937 until 1982. DeLong and his crew were memorialized in the Naval Academy Cemetery in 1890 with a monument which uniquely includes a cross dripping with icicles.

Our small polar bear team likely landed at the same beach as DeLong since the remainder of the Island is surrounded by sheer, icy cliffs. Given the ultra remote location, I have been unable to learn of the most recent landing prior to ours. Our team may have included the first USNA graduate to explore this starkly beautiful site since DeLong. It was a privilege and honor to visit this part of Naval Academy history.

Thanks for reading our column, Classmates! Type to you next year.

'75 Sir! Larry