

U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1975, Shipmate Column JULY-AUGUST 2023

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President: **Chris Cikanovich**
Sec'y: **CAPT Larry Warrenfeltz, USN (Ret.)**
5732 Tamarack Drive, Pace FL 32571

(chicke975@gmail.com)
(usna75scribe@hotmail.com)
850-525-8727

Web Page: <http://1975.usnaclasses.net>

Dear 'mates, "Summer time, and the living's easy." Well, living might not be as easy as it once was, but the column-writing is simple enough when I have classmates like the Boys of '75. You've stocked the gouge locker for me. All I need to do is decide in what order to put it. How about we start with Gary Jones' report from Ron Nicol's Distinguished Graduate Award Ceremony.

"USNA '75 was well represented during Ron Nicol's DGA medal ceremony in Alumni Hall on 24 March. Ron was honored along with four other graduates as USNA Alumni Association 2023 DGA Recipients. The event was held in front of the Brigade and an assembly of Ron's classmates and First Company friends.



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2023 marked the 25th year honoring and celebrating the contributions of alumni like Ron for their unselfish commitment to a lifetime of service, personal character, and success in their respective vocations. As the DGA citation states, "...awardees are the embodiment of fulfilling the Academy's mission to develop leaders to assume the highest responsibilities of command, citizenship and government." Ron is the third member of our class to be recognized with a DGA, the others being Dr. **Carl June** in 2016 and ADM **Kirk Donald** in 2020. The attached picture shows those USNA '75 in attendance at the ceremony, with Ron and Liane in the front row. Fifteen of Ron's First Company Classmates traveled from across the country to attend the medal ceremony.



We gathered the next evening at the Annapolis home of Pat and **Jim Miller**. Thirteen First Company Classmates (and their brides) stayed the extra day to congratulate and celebrate with Ron and Liane. Diane and **Chris Cikanovich** joined in the celebration. In the back row: Dr. **Mike Maynard**, Tammy and **Gary Jones**, **Rick Gribble**, **Mike Matthews**, Gertie and **Mike Meier**, Tina and **Mike McDermott**, Jenny and **Bob Phillips**, Barb and **Jake Lawlor**, Diane and **Chris Cikanovich**, Linda and **Dennis Stone**. Front row: Patty and **Dan Murphy**, Nan and **Terry Blake**; Ron and Liane, Sherry and **Doug Ayars**, Pat and Jim Miller. **Jeff Bust** and **Dan Conway** were not able to remain in Annapolis to enjoy the Miller's gracious hospitality.

In Ron's closing remarks to end the night's celebration, he noted the unique, special bonds of friendship among '75 Classmates that has meant so much to him, and how that bond has flourished for over half a century. To this day, Ron remains an extraordinary humble, gracious classmate, always willing to help and assist a shipmate."

Several classmates who live in the vicinity of the Northern Neck of VA reported the story of a Chesapeake Bay rescue at sea in early April. A 50-foot Carver yacht was taking on water when they radioed for help. By the time the all-volunteer crew from the Smith Point Sea Rescue unit arrived, the boat had sunk and all eight people on board were in the cold water. **Pete Ortiz** is a volunteer with the SPSR and was part of the rescue team. [Thanks to **Bob Young**, **Mark Lambright**, and **Mark Disney** for forwarding articles from *The Rappahannock Record* and the *Chesapeake Bay Magazine*.]

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Fearsome Foursome at the Streamsong Golf Resort



Rod Repka sent a photo from a spring golf trip. He went with **Mark Milliken, Phil Troy,** and **Steve Laabs** to the Streamsong Golf Resort in Bowling Green, FL. They played three of the Top 100 courses in the U.S. in four days — and took no photos in Speedos.

After reading **Bob Guida's** book, [On Eagle's Wings](#), **Paul Viscovich** was inspired to write a review that I believe you all need to read:

“This dramatic true story shares the

riveting tale of a cherished wife, mother, and former Navy Nurse, stricken with a brain aneurysm that doctors expected would kill her, and the family that refused to lose hope. Bob captures the reader from the very first page with the life-or-death drama of the neurosurgeons' fight to keep Christine alive after her devastating brain injury.

The book has two parts. The gripping opening chapters capture the intensity of Christine's fight to survive and the family's day-to-day battle to believe she would, with vignettes of their courtship and married life skillfully woven into the day-by-day narrative of the battle to save her.

But the heart of the book is its second section, where Bob shares the day-by-day updates he wrote to family and friends to keep them up to date on Christine's progress, his efforts to understand everything that was happening, and his search for the way forward. With folksy wisdom, he shares the critical importance of faith in dealing with tragedy made more difficult by the complexities of modern medicine. From exhilaration and hope to frustration and fear, you experience the spiritual and emotional roller coaster of helplessness as he watches his life partner fight to survive, including compelling life-and-death decisions Christine entrusted to him in her living will.

This second part of the book provides very germane daily readings for anyone dealing with personal tragedy, where faith is sorely tested but never broken. Bob's thoughts on spiritual resiliency in the midst of tragedy are deeply inspiring and instructive. The 141 posts, each including a passage from the Bible to underscore the day's insight, reflect the narrative arc of Christine's dreadfully slow progress and his spiritual growth over the years since she was stricken.

[On Eagle's Wings](#) is a compelling testimonial that provides remarkable insights to strengthen faith, sustain hope, and turn tragedy to serving God's purposes. Though Christine has yet to

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recover, my own faith has been strengthened by reading this book. I'm now re-reading one Post each day, in the company of my Lord.”

Bob Davis shared a note from 14th Company:



“With the postponement in 2020 of the class 45th reunion, and not knowing when we would be able to get together in person, 14th company decided to have a mini-reunion via Zoom. We have continued to do so once a quarter since then. It has been a great opportunity to catch up on moves, travels, new homes and boats, latest books read, health, weddings and grandchildren, and general comings and goings. Everyone in the company has participated and we have about half the company, or more, on any given call. We have several mates who live in or near Annapolis and maintain some level of contact with the Academy and the Navy, so we can keep up on some of the scuttlebutt. And it is a great opportunity to share Academy and sea stories from years ago that have remained hidden till now. The most recent call included **Mike Cecere, Bob Davis, Mark Harper, Nyles Christensen, Duke Snyder, Ken Hart, Scott Bauer, Tom Madre, Paul Reardon, John Ginn, and Dennis DiAntonio.**”

I received a nice email from Steve Duba (13th). He and his wife Marcella settled in Fernandina Beach (Amelia Island), FL after a career in the Navy, and a second career with the Army Corps

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of Engineers. Chuck Kondrack's story in the May issue about his rendezvous with Chris Nielsen in the Czech Republic caught Steve's eye. He and Marcella took a Viking River cruise from Paris to Prague in 2022. Steve's father's family is from the Czech Republic and they had heard that Prague was one of the most beautiful and historic cities in Europe, so they opted to tack on an extra three days to spend there. Having done some research before leaving home, they met a very helpful tour guide in Prague. The guide ultimately connected Steve with a Czech genealogist who confirmed what Steve already knew. He traced his family back to 1620. Most of them are dispersed throughout eastern Europe now, but Steve's great-great-grandfather and his young family immigrated to the U.S. in 1854 and settled in St. Louis, where Steve grew up. The historic family home is about an hour south of Prague in the small town of Kraselov. In fact, the home his great-great grandfather lived in is still occupied by distant Duba relatives. Hopefully, Steve, Chuck and Chris will connect and exchange some Czech sea stories.

Weddings and funerals tend to serve as family reunions. 19th Company "brothers" — along with wives, family members and guests — gathered at USNA on 9 May for the sad occasion of the inurnment of our beloved companymate and classmate, Phil English. Phil passed away in November in Seattle with his loving wife Kitty by his side. Phil was loved and respected by all



19th Company gathers for Phil English's inurnment

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who knew him, and thirteen members of the 19th Company gathered for the inurnment to pay their respects. Pictured are Bob Eichelberger, Jim Emery, Keven Hart, Mark Klett, Mike Lord, Roger McFarland, Gary Powers, DC Ray, Mark Satorius, Joe Sweeney, Randy Sweeney, Dan Wheeler, and Steve Wheeler. Phil's inurnment was a great reminder not to miss class reunions, while we still have a chance to enjoy each other's presence.

In April, a number of Flower Children met with representatives of our Links in the Chain for this year's "Bonds of Gold" ceremony. A selection of '75 class rings and pins were donated to the Class of '25 to be melted down and combined with the gold that will go in their class rings. The



talented Nancy Gough put together the photo composition showing our crest and that of our Links. Two things in 25's crest pay homage to us — the ship's hull number is 75, and (a bit more subtle) there are a row of flowers around the base of the chapel dome. Love it '25! Bravo Zulu!

75 Sir! Larry