

## U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1975, Shipmate Column JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2025

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President: **Chris Cikanovich**

Sec'y: **CAPT Larry Warrenfeltz, USN (Ret.)**

5732 Tamarack Drive, Pace FL 32571

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

([chicke975@gmail.com](mailto:chicke975@gmail.com))

([usna75scribe@hotmail.com](mailto:usna75scribe@hotmail.com))

850-525-8727

Dear 'mates, Once again, we are blessed with a bounty of good stuff for our column. Without further ado ...

As they did in 2023, **Bob Giuda** and **Dave Corley** made a summer sojourn down the east coast to see classmates (mostly from 25th company).



**In Annapolis - Dave Corley, Denis Powers, Tom Kelley, Chuck Louie, Bob Giuda, and George Melnychenko**

This is the year of the Great 50th Reunion of the Flower Children! By now, we should have a reunion website in place and your company reps should soon provide you with the gouge on getting registered. The Gulf-to-Goat charity bike ride has its own web page. Search for "USNA Gulf to Goat" and check out the [gulftogoat.navy](http://gulftogoat.navy) page. This month's charity is the PKD Foundation — the only organization in the U.S. solely dedicated to finding treatments and a cure for polycystic kidney disease (PKD) and to improving the lives of those it affects. It is near and dear to webmaster **Andy Howard**'s heart.

**Dick Arnold** is organizing a west coast June commemoration of our 50th. On 4 Jun 2025 in San Diego, there is going to be a USNA '75 50th graduation celebration. If you are interested in attending, please contact Dick Arnold at [480arnolds@gmail.com](mailto:480arnolds@gmail.com) or at (619) 962- 5254 so Dick can determine the size of the venue to book.

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**Churchill downs - Wassels, Grays, and Cihlars**



If you like Bourbon, Kentucky is the place to visit. Mary Lou and **Ray Wassel**, Denise and **Tom Cihlar**, and Mary and **Dave Gray** headed to the Bluegrass State to wander the Bourbon Trail and sample as much as they could handle

(somewhat less than 40+ years ago). The Wassels live in Providence Forge, VA, just outside of Richmond. The Cihlars are in Ponte Vedra, FL and the Grays are in Clifton, VA. They all met in Louisville and spent the next four days exploring and sampling. A tour of Churchill Downs included the stables, watching the riders exercise horses, the movie and museum—finishing with the mandatory Mint Julep. They were able to get reservations at Jim Beam, Buffalo Trace, and Woodford Reserve distilleries where they enjoyed the tours, learned how Bourbon whiskey is made, and participated in obligatory tastings. They learned to sip whiskey correctly. (Apparently, we've been doing it all wrong—exhaling is important!) After a day in Bardstown, the capital of the Bourbon Trail, it was back to Louisville, where they enjoyed hearing the history of the area, learned how F. Scott Fitzgerald came



**A little take home sampler**

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to write "The Great Gatsby" while at the Sealbeck Hotel, and squeezed in four more bourbon tastings. The very interesting Louisville Slugger bat factory capped off a great trip.



**Belly up to the bar!**

18th Company held a "Kick Off the Holidays" get together at **Bill Weyand** and Dawn Crowley's home in Lakewood Ranch, FL from 7-10 November. Attendees included Jan and **Deke Ahle**, **Randy Avers** and Charlyn Cassady, **Jim Bobenage**, **Dan Elins** and Ruth Hasten, Diana and

**Don Jensen**, **Larry Kloth** and Deb Parker, Bill Weyand and Dawn Crowley, and Joy and **Bob Young**, as well as classmate Bob Clark. The main event was on Saturday was the Navy-USF football game (enjoyed on the big screen in the comfort of the house). The party started around 1000 and ended sometime after 2200. Great food and drink all day, with a sea story or two thrown in. Several stayed through Sunday and nine of them went on a sunset dinner cruise around Sarasota Bay Sunday evening.



**The women of 18th**

Here's another fascinating adventure from **Peter Damisch**.

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“Working as a remote area expedition guide never gets old. I’m alone on a 19-foot rubber zodiac flying across Arafura Sea. The support ship is ten miles away and my nearest shipmates are in similar high speed craft about a mile ahead and astern. This is a highly anticipated return to very rarely visited Per Village, Asmat Regency, Papua, New Guinea. We were met on arrival by more than forty wooden, dugout war canoes filled with Asmat tribal warriors. They were paddling, chanting and occasionally shrieking while pounding on boat gunwales like swords striking shields. Some carried and feinted with spears. Each had face, body and wild hair painted in a wide variety of styles meant to be (and were) intimidating.

Temporarily parking my zodiac on the muddy riverbank, I watched war canoes approaching to within just a few feet while shouting and gesturing. They continued to thump

their canoes while splashing water and tossing white powder into the air. It looked like bone dust. (There is a long tradition of cannibalism in the area.)

The rainforest village has no road, air or harbor access — nor electricity or running water. Just in front of me, I looked across a narrow river through a swarm of fearsome paddlers to see women, older men and children dancing on shore. Most were heavily adorned with paint while wearing clothing made from jungle fibers topped by bird feather headdresses. Several men, women, and virtually all the children were partially or fully naked.

After the wooden canoes completed their challenge, our team crossed the river and landed on a muddy field which held the village population, including one nude man with a 7-foot high shield and similar sized spear. We watched as everyone worked together to erect multiple 30-foot high, intricately carved, artistic wooden bisj poles. These are established with great ceremony, reverence and effort to commemorate deceased ancestors and ease their transition to the afterlife. Otherwise their spirits may otherwise affect the village ... especially if their heads had been ‘hunted’.

Once the official ceremonies were complete, I walked to the end of the small village. The location is on a river flood plain where elevated, old wooden walkways serve as paths. However, once you depart the common area, the boardwalk is often broken or splintered. It requires careful balancing to cross thin, loose, unconnected strips of wood only 1 inch wide. This longer hike provided me with further, wonderful insights regarding their style of living in this remote tropical rainforest location.



**Asmat warrior**

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I stayed as long as possible and only reluctantly said goodbye to the village elders and local Indonesia guide before heading back to my zodiac. I had become close friends with the guide several days before when I discovered ancient rock art on a small uninhabited island within the Misool archipelago. This art could be tens of thousands of years old. It was previously unknown to our guide, who is an expert on the area's history.

The long, rough solo ride back to our ship gave me a great, peaceful time to appreciate, respect and savor this inspiring experience with a completely different society, whose customs and culture dates back 65,000+ years.”

Nancy and I enjoyed seeing a whole boatload of classmates at the Tulane game in November. Our son (Tulane '04) and his family drove from PA to meet us in Annapolis. Lousy game, but great time with our family and our Navy family.



**Steve Ferguson** was one of many classmates who attended 2025's service assignment night in November. Fergie says it was an absolutely *great* evening wandering through the memories in Dahlgren! It was especially fun that the subject of discussion was often our 'Tea Fight' experiences and Mrs. Marshall's deft guidance/development of our social graces. (Did any of us end up marrying our Tea Fight girl?) Photos of Service Assignment coming in the March-April *Shipmate*. 75 Sir! Larry