

70th REUNION REPORT

Dear Classmates,

Now only the savor of our 70th Reunion remains. The participants have returned to their homes and the Committee is closing the books and paying the bills! It was a fine gathering by general consensus despite its comparatively small size. With some 570 graduates of our Class now departed, this perhaps final Reunion drew 54 participants (55 if I count the young paratrooper Captain, grandson of Miller Andress, who showed up for our final Banquet!) back to the Academy, the largest 70th Reunion group to date I believe. Included in that number were 15 Classmates and 8 widows of Classmates, the remainder being family members accompanying.

Our gathering began with an informal Welcome Reception at 1800 in the Queen Anne Ballroom of our host hotel, the Crown of Plaza of Annapolis out in Parole. With adequate seating and rounds of passed hors-d'oeuvres as well as a plentiful buffet it was a welcome start to our gathering. Most participants arrived in a rush in the last couple of hours before the event to receive their pre-packaged name tags, meal reservations, schedules of events and peripheral information.

Friday morning began with a breakfast at the hotel (included with the room) followed by boarding the bus to transport the group to the Naval Academy Yard and Chapel for our 1030 Memorial Service, where we were joined by a number of locals coming for the day, including several widows with family groups. On entering the Chapel, Class widows were each presented with a white rose symbolic of their loss. The Chapel organist played selections from "God of Our Fathers" as guests were being seated.

With Church Call our service began. Our Class President, Bob Fountain, led off with Reflections on our initial assembly as a Class from diverse sources, all reduced to a common denominator on entry, the small 5-mile arc from the Chapel dome which had defined our Midshipman lives, which upon graduation had grown to encompass the entire world of our professional lives. All the while the Naval Academy Chapel dome had been our beacon, John Paul Jones' Crypt beneath our inspiration. Of the 1102 who had reported for induction 742 had graduated, of whom 570 had now passed on. Remarkably, only 5 of these had been lost to enemy action, though others were lost by tragic accident, in training or subsequent operations. Now time was beginning to take its toll of the remainder. The names of all 570 of those lost to date were recorded in our programs, whom we had gathered

this morning to remember. Upon conclusion of his remarks Chaplain Vanessa Platek was called upon to offer a moving invocation for our Memorial Service. (Interestingly, a Chaplain is now assigned to minister to each of the Midshipman Battalions, in addition to the present Chapel staff of four Chaplains.)

After the congregational singing of the first two verses of 'God of our Fathers' Classmate Jerry Holland was called upon to offer a Meditation. He began with three well-chosen Scriptural selections followed by a moving Meditation based upon "The Meeting", by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. On completion, our Class Secretary, Tom Stallman, read off the names of the 60 Classmates who have passed away since our last Reunion. On completion a Naval Academy bugler played a haunting rendition of "Taps" and the congregation sang the first and fourth verses of "Eternal Father Strong to Save" to the accompaniment of Monte Maxwell's grand organ rendition. Upon Jerry Holland's concluding Benediction the congregation was dismissed to Monte's soaring improvisation on "God Bless America."

Due to the steady rain outside the customary Reunion photographs on the Chapel steps were moved inside to the Chancel steps where pictures of the returning graduates and graduates plus widows, as well as other family groups were taken, (Please send copies of the best of these to our Class Secretary Tom Stallman for sharing more broadly with the Class as a whole!)

While some Classmates and groups took advantage of the time and inside elevator to visit the John Paul Jones Crypt below the Chapel (Refurbished by our Class incident to our 50th Reunion) others braved the rain to hurry on over to the Naval Academy Club to take advantage of facilities and the open bar. Most gladly boarded the bus for the short drive over to the Club to avoid the continuing rain! The Club graciously opened its doors early to those seeking refreshment. When all were seated the Club's attendants very efficiently served a delicious luncheon as requested at Registration by each attendee.

As the luncheon neared its end Mr. Jeff Webb,'95 was introduced as the President and CEO of the Naval Academy Alumni Association and Foundation. Jeff is a former Navy SEAL and UVa Business School MBA married to a USNA graduate and former EOD officer. Jeff spoke briefly to the assembly on behalf of the

Association before the arrival of the Superintendent. VADM Yvette Davids USN was introduced by the Class President who recounted the amusing circumstance of their first meeting. VADM Davids is a Surface Warfare Officer with an extensive record of sea-going experience, having commanded a destroyer, a cruiser and a Carrier Battle Group, and for a short period of time while awaiting confirmation commanded all US Naval Surface Forces. VADM Davids assumed command as Superintendent of the Naval Academy in January 2024. She grew up in Texas as an Army daughter before attending the Academy and graduating with the Class of 1989. While at the Academy she was twice honored as a Sailing All-American. VADM Davids is married to a retired Navy SEAL RADM and together they have twin teenaged sons who are resident with them now in Farragut House.

VADM Davids spoke at length and informatively about the Naval Academy today and answered extensive questions from our Reunion group. In response to a question about recent publicity regarding the removal of certain titles from the new Nimitz Library she said the Academy attempted to follow current Administration policy in such matters. Among other things she had cleverly arranged to display in the background a set of the Midshipman pictures of all the members of our Class in attendance. The scheduled Midshipman Parade our group had hoped to attend having been cancelled by the rain, Admiral Davids very graciously extended her time with us for photographs with various of the attendees and family groups. Afterwards there were many approving and enthusiastic comments as our group was very much taken with her.

The Parade having been cancelled, most of our group elected to return by bus to the Crowne Plaza hotel after the luncheon. However, several did take advantage of the opportunity to visit the recently renovated Naval Academy Museum which contains a series of exhibits from the Revolution through Wars to Space as well as the famous wooden ship model collection upstairs, returning by a later bus. While our Hospitality Room, equipped and replenished with ice, soft drinks and coffee, as well as with Class-supported wine and beer, was open whenever our Reunion group was available, most took advantage of the off time for a short nap!

Many spoke enthusiastically of our trip to the Yard on return. The evening was left open for dinners in town or local area visits, but most remained at the hotel for dinner.

Saturday morning after breakfast we held our Class meeting and Constitutionally-required election of officers for the new (and final?) term at 0900. No new nominations having been submitted per the Call for Reunion, the current Class officers were reelected with one change. Our current Class Vice-President and Treasurer Robin Pirie, who was unable to attend the Reunion for medical reasons, had suggested that it would be desirable to combine the office of Vice-President with that of the Secretary in that Tom Stallman, the Secretary and a Washington-area resident, could more easily attend Alumni meetings in the President's absence than he, who has moved to Eastern Oregon since the last election of officers. This suggestion was accepted and the following Class Officers were elected/reelected:

President - Bob Fountain
VP/Sec'y - Tom Stallman
Treasurer - Robin Pirie

At 1000 our invited speakers arrived in the Ballroom and the assembled Classmates were joined by other members of their parties, While each of our speakers had been invited to speak for an hour, including questions, our Speakers, Academy Provost and Academic Dean Dr. Samara Firebaugh, and Dr. Murhaf Jouejati, Distinguished Visiting Professor of Mid Eastern Studies and occupant for the past 5 years of the Class of 1955 Endowed Chair of Middle Eastern Studies, had agreed to share the time. Dr. Jouejati has a distinguished resume as a teacher of International Relations and Middle East Studies at the Emirates Diplomatic Academy in Abu Dhabi, at the National Defense University Center for Strategic Studies and at George Washington and American Universities. He has served as Presidential Envoy to the Syrian-Israeli Peace Talks and as Political Advisor to the European Commission Delegation in Damascus. He is currently completing a manuscript on the Evolution of Authoritarian Government in Syria. Dr. Jouejati is retiring this year from his role at the Naval Academy. He spoke of his role in both the Political Science and History Departments at the Academy and of mentoring Midshipmen in Middle Eastern Studies.

Dr. Firebaugh, who has taught at the Naval Academy since 2001 in Micro Electronic Systems and Micro Robotics, is the daughter of a retired Submarine Engineering Duty Officer and Chief Engineer of the Navy. She graduated from Princeton summa cum laude in Electrical Engineering and earned her Doctorate in Electrical Engineering and Micro Electronics from MIT. She was appointed

Academic Dean and Provost of the Naval Academy in 2023. A most engaging and animated speaker, Dr. Firebaugh talked at length to and with our group, remaining overtime to answer our questions. As our President observed, Electrical Engineering today is a far cry from our day when if you could hook up a motor-generator set without causing the lights to go out in Isherwood Hall, you passed!

We then used the free afternoon to rest and prepare for our culminating Banquet that evening. Some took the opportunity to visit the Midshipman Store and other independent activities. A full slate of Spring sports was in progress but the rain dampened all but the indoor activities.

That evening our Reunion group assembled one last time in the Queen Anne Ballroom for cocktails and our concluding Banquet. After a period of conversation and table selection we sat down to a served dinner of steak or chicken. It was a most enjoyable evening of departure-taking among old friends. Regrettably we lacked a competent song leader so we dispensed with the singing of "Navy Blue and Gold" or other appropriate songs of departure. Our Reunion ended with a few bitter-enders closing the well-situated Hospitality Room, so generously provided to us throughout the reunion by the hotel.

Sunday morning it was evident that the thoughts of all had shifted to the return trip home. Some checked out to attend church services at the Chapel but mostly there were the final goodbyes and the roll of suitcases upon the Lobby floor as cars were loaded and pulled away. Many spoke of the pleasures experienced in one last visit with friends and the Academy.

Until we meet again,
Bob Fountain, Class President and Reunion Chairman.

You Can't Exceed '55