

ALITC – Passing of the Sword Ceremony - CAPT David Hull, CEC, USN to ENS Chris Porter

Thank Uncle Joel for hosting this event in this beautiful surrounding.

Congratulate Alan & Stanna. Parenting is a dicey business without clear guidance. Their success is evident in Chris' achievements culminating in his graduation from our selective and prestigious Naval Academy. To use a Navy expression: Bravo Zulu. Well done.

Congratulate Chris & Taylor on their engagement. Ruthie & I married graduation day, June 5 1963, and celebrated our Golden Anniversary just two weeks ago. We wish them as many years of happiness and love as we have enjoyed.

I thank you all for coming, and I welcome you to what we call the **"Another Link in the Chain"** ceremony. A chain has important significance in the Navy, e.g. ...

- the chain that stabilizes the ship when anchored off shore
- the chain gripes that secure heavy equipment to the decks and hold in heavy seas.

As plebes at the Naval Academy we were required to memorize the "'Laws of the Navy' ...unwritten and varied they be; and he who is wise will observe them, going down in his ship to the sea". Several verses later it continues:

*"On the strength of one link in the cable, dependent
the might of the chain. Who knows when thou may'st be
tested? So live that thou bearest the strain!"*

We are all tested in life – some more than others. In the military, battle testing is an obvious possibility. While I served with the Seabees, a MOBILE CONSTRUCTION BATTALION, along the Vietnam DMZ, what I have considered my most strenuous test didn't occur until a few years later in an entirely different venue.

In 1971 I began the first of many tours of duty in support of the Trident program, building the infrastructure to support our emerging ballistic missile submarines. At that time we were building the Very Low Frequency (VLF) communication and navigation systems around the world to communicate with and guide them under the sea. VLF radio waves penetrate seawater, allowing submarines to communicate without surfacing by trailing a submerged antenna.

The week before I reported for duty at the Navy's Shore Electronics Project Office in Washington DC, they energized the first antenna at Annapolis MD, across the Severn River from the Naval Academy. It was a quarter mile high tower weighing 2.2 million pounds sitting atop a 10 foot stack of porcelain to insulate it from the ground. The tower had a "top hat" of highly polished aluminum coated of bridge strand cables, each cable attached to one of nine towers in a radius circling the main tower. When they energized the tower, it drew a brilliant arc of man-made lightning across the base insulator assembly. The porcelain very visibly cracked – but did not fail. But, they had no idea why the arc. As a newly minted Master of Electrical Engineering from the University of Michigan, I was tasked to lead an investigation to find out why and fix it. VLF communications were on the critical path for the launch of the Trident submarines. And the Trident submarine was critical to our success in winning the cold war. I was to be severely tested.

The Annapolis tower base was quickly shored up and construction continued on both tower and valley span antennas around the globe. In the course of my two year tour, we found out why and eventually procured new tower base insulators from the French and Germans who were making their insulators by iso-statically pressing them in molds, rather than extruding them as was done in the US. The pressure of responsibility was so intense that at one point I took a week's leave, normally intended for rest and recreation, so I could escape the anxious demands for progress reports and completion forecasts and focus on the technical issues. After exhaustive testing of the first new base insulator assembly, I personally "baby sat" this precious cargo on a journey from the US to Buenos Aires, and then followed it in a jeep nearly 1,000 miles south to Trelew Argentina where we jacked a tower, similar to the one at Annapolis, off its dummy base and replaced it with the new one – and it worked.

Today a formal "[Another link in the Chain](#)" program links the members of an incoming class to the alumni from the class that proceeded then by 50 years. I am a member of the Class of 1963, preceding by 50 years Chris' Class of 2013. The program has evolved and expanded since it began 13 years ago to where my class has participated in many of Chris' class milestone events, including his Induction Day on 1 July 2009, the Ring Dance, and his graduation just last month. And, although Chris doesn't know it, there is probably a trace of gold from my class crest pin that Ruthie wore, in the ring he now proudly wears.

Our class has also formally added another symbolic event to the "[Another Link in the Chain](#)" program: the transferring of our officer dress swords to members of the graduating class. I am proud and honored to be a part of this new tradition. Chris will be tested, for sure, in ways that we can't yet know. But I view this transfer of my sword as a visible symbol of my commitment to be there for support in any way I can. Chris... my sword is now yours. I congratulate you on your Naval Academy achievements and wish you Fair Winds and Following Seas in the career that awaits you.