

Memorial Service Remarks

27 October 2013

This is the last event of a full reunion weekend. We have looked forward to this time together and have enjoyed every hour of it, but it is almost over. Soon, we'll return to our homes. What will we take with us besides a lot of digital photos and a bag full of Mid Store purchases?

We will carry many happy memories from this reunion and some resolutions and good intentions of maintaining our connections with classmates, and perhaps forging some new relationships. Let's be sure to do that.

We will carry a renewed sense of the contributions of the Naval Academy to our nation across the years since its founding in 1845. Seeing the names of leaders, heroes, and battles across the Academy and at the stadium has reminded us of the traditions and core values taught and carefully observed during our Midshipman days. Fidelity to those values is still a large part of who we are. During our quiet visits to Memorial Hall this weekend we saw once again the names of our classmates and many others whose lives were lost in the service of our nation and in the cause of freedom. We remember and honor their sacrifice.

We are sure to return home from this reunion with a sharpened memory of our Midshipman days. Just being here in The Yard has done that for us. These buildings and monuments, the Severn, and even the feel of the air can catch hold of you and transport you 50 years into the past. You may suddenly have a vivid memory of being a 19-year old rushing to class on a sunny spring morning, or enjoying a cool fall afternoon of athletics on Hospital Point.

But more than that, we remember clearly the grand experience of living three to a room in Bancroft Hall. Living in such close quarters and sharing responsibility and accountability required us not only to develop trust in each other but also to provide encouragement and help through the trials of Academy life. Many of the bonds forged among roommates have endured across the years as we have gained life experience and have maintained contact with each other. In many cases it is no exaggeration to say that our relationships with our roommates

and other classmates are based not only on shared experiences and mutual respect but on an enduring love.

Of course, not all of our close classmate friendships involved roommates. We formed many lasting bonds among companymates and teammates, and in our extracurricular and social pursuits.

The making and strengthening of these connections has continued through the years. Many of today's close friendships among our classmates are between men who did not know each other well, or at all, during our days as Midshipmen. We are drawn together by our common history and by our shared struggles, successes, and sacrifices. The old bonds that have endured and the new ones that have formed are not simply because of our common past but because of the satisfaction, inspiration, and strength that we draw from each other.

In the Field House on graduation day we took our oaths and became officers in the Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Army. We had indescribable feelings of accomplishment and relief as we went forth with new freedoms and responsibilities. Driving our new cars and making a base pay of \$222.30 per month, we were eager to get on with our lives. How little we knew or could imagine the trials, joys, sorrows, and satisfactions that were waiting for us!

Reporting to our ships and training commands soon after graduation, we joined the vanguard of the Vietnam Generation. The imperatives of our commissioning oath and the Code of Conduct for Members of the Armed Forces soon became very personal.

Nobody wanted to die for our country or the cause of freedom but we were willing to face that possibility and take the risks. We were true to our pledges and promises; we did our duty. The young man's sense of invulnerability soon gave way to an acute awareness that we were actually very vulnerable. Nevertheless, we pressed on, remaining true to our obligations.

We upheld our fidelity to country, fidelity to unit, and fidelity to shipmates as we served honorably and well.

We lost 13 classmates in combat in Vietnam, the first only two years and five days after our graduation. One of us was killed in action aboard LIBERTY in the Mediterranean. Fifteen of us died in line of duty accidents, including three in the loss of the SCORPION, and several more in aircraft incidents.

When we speak of the lives lost in combat, we must also remember our classmates who survived enemy action but suffered physical wounds and other trauma. Some of those scars and infirmities are still carried today. They are not spoken of, so we too often overlook them.

We have great respect for our two classmates who endured unspeakable hardships during their years as prisoners of war. Their steadfast courage and fidelity are inspirations for all who learn of their experiences and heroic conduct.

As the years passed, we began to lose men who had returned to civilian life. Several of our classmates died in accidents. Physical infirmity claimed the first life in 1975, and many more since then. We admire the courage and determination of those who fought valiantly against the ravages of disease. Some of us are waging that fight today. We will stand with them through whatever may come.

Today, the number of classmates who have gone before us stands at 170 of the 876 who graduated. These men were our brothers. The families to whom they were husbands and fathers became our families while they were living, and remain so today.

We know of the loss and pain endured by each of these families, and we mourn with them for the absence of their husband and father, and for all the days and events that have

passed without his loving presence. They are assured that the Class of 1963 will continue to enfold and support them.

Military life can be hard on families, and civilian life in modern America brings challenges as well. We owe a large debt to our wives and children who moved with us to new duty stations or jobs and endured loneliness and many other hardships over the years. We have depended on them in so many ways and can never adequately compensate them for their sacrifices. Their love and influence made us better men than we ever could have been without them.

As we remember our departed classmates today, we also note and mourn the loss of several beloved Class of 1963 wives, children, and grandchildren.

Looking back over our 54 years together, we can't avoid thinking about our legacy as a class and as individuals. What will we leave behind as evidence of our having been here? Will our wake simply dissipate, leaving no trace, or will something more permanent remain?

What is the legacy of the Class of 1963? It is far too early to say. We are still busy in our professional and volunteer pursuits. We are still contributing to society, still making a difference. Many good things are yet to come.

Though our record is incomplete, there are several things that will be remembered when '63's legacy is determined:

-- First, our dedicated and distinguished service to our nation, our communities, and our fellow citizens.

-- Next, our concern for those who come after us, demonstrated by the Class of 1963 Foundation. Among its many good works, the Foundation provided substantial financial assistance for the education of 95 children of our deceased classmates. Our sponsorship of the Class of 1963 Center for Academic Excellence was spearheaded by the Foundation and by our class leadership, with broad participation by members of our class.

-- Third, our mentorship of the Class of 2013 now and through the years ahead

-- Finally, and of great importance, are the many positive influences we have had on the lives of others while on active duty and afterward.

All that is better because we passed through this life is the direct result of our service to our nation, to our communities, to our fellow man, and to our creator. Look at our classmates' biographies and obituaries on our web site and you will be impressed by the variety and impact of the service they have rendered while on active duty and afterward.

What does all this have to do with those men whom we memorialize today? How will we honor those who have already crossed the bar into the safe harbor of eternal life?

We will honor them by remaining true to the values and ideals we shared with them, and for which some of them died.

We will honor them by continuing to set examples of dedication, fidelity, and service, not only for those who follow our path through the Academy but for the many people in our lives who have no connection to the Naval Academy except through us. We have no corner on these values but we do have a special awareness and fidelity to them because of the promises we made and the trials we have been through.

We will honor our lost men by remembering the quality of the lives they led, their fidelity to their responsibilities, and the hardships they faced and surmounted. We can amplify that honor by telling their stories and by remaining grateful that we were blessed to share such a close brotherhood with them.

Lastly, we will honor them by embracing the joy of life and remembering that they once shared it with us. We will be sure to raise a glass to their memory from time to time and make a toast celebrating them for making our lives richer in so many ways.

Our four years as Midshipmen established our deep connections with our classmates, and the years since have shown the value of sustaining, expanding, and deepening those ties. It takes only a small effort to stay in contact. Reach out to your classmates. Don't put off making a phone call, just to chat. Make time for lunch together. Detour from your planned vacation route to visit with a friend for a few hours. Don't ever have to say, "I wish I had called him."

As we approach the evening twilight of our lives on this earth, our focus on life is in most ways keen and sharp. We have established the pattern of our lives and have applied our accumulated wisdom to decide what things are truly important to us.

Our future service will be more individual than collective, but we will always be known as members of a truly remarkable group of men who began their adult life's voyage here by the Severn, and then served their nation and their communities faithfully and honorably. What was true of our classmates who have gone before us -- that they were upright and courageous men with profound love for their country, their families, and their fellow man -- can be true of each of us as well.

We have been given many gifts in this life. We have experienced God's grace again and again. We are profoundly grateful for the central and defining influence that the Naval

Academy has had on our lives. We have been privileged to be part of an incomparable assembly of men -- the United States Naval Academy Class of 1963. Our lives have been enriched by our years together as Midshipmen and by our continuing connections with each other.

In the years that remain for each of us, we will continue to strive to be true to our ideals and always to be worthy to "stand unashamed and unafraid before our shipmates, our loved ones, and our God." We will remember and honor our classmates who depart this life before us, and we will comfort and support their loved ones.

May God continue to bless and protect the United States of America, the Naval Academy, and the Class of 1963.