



NAPS Class of 1967 - Reunion 2012 After Action Report

What can we say but WOW ... what a remarkable and memorable weekend!

It all started Friday evening. Upon arrival at the Clarion Hotel, it was not hard to spot the hand-drawn poster in the lobby that read, "Welcome NAPS Class of '67." The impact of the poster alone was immediate as it signaled to all that the much anticipated reunion was at hand. It is safe to say everyone experienced at least a slight measure of apprehension on approach to the Crystal Ballroom and the reunion registration desk therein. We were excited to be sure though somewhat reserved as **we** thought, "*Will I feel welcomed? ... Will my wife feel out of place? ... Am I going to recognize anyone? ... Will anyone recognize me?*" One step into the ballroom was all it took to erase all doubts and fears. They were replaced by friendly smiles, firm handshakes, brotherly hugs, and slaps on the back to be treasured. And that was only the beginning! Ninety-four NAPSters, staff members, and others in attendance spent the next four hours getting reacquainted, introducing lifelong partners, and simply catching-up. There was no mention of rank or rate, no boasting of personal connections, professional achievements, or one's station in life. This was not a time to compare but remember. Better still, the next few hours were devoid of politics or pretense; but oh, the flow of fond memories as we flipped through pages of "*the Cruise*," shared yellowing Kodachromes and Polaroids, and resurrected tales from yesteryear. Some stories may have even been true ... but all improved with age! It may sound a bit over the top, but there is no other way to describe the atmosphere except to say the air was electric upon the arrival of our Commanding Officer, Arlis Simmons; Company 2 Officer, Don Christy; Assistant Academic Director, Bob Antonio and his wife Gloria; English Instructor and wrestling Coach, Bob Fash and his wife Marilou; Physics Instructor, Dale Reece; and Mary Kuszewski, widow of English Instructor, Frank Fisher, and her new husband, Jim. We were honored by their presence and pleased to thank them for their kind, caring, and unselfish role in our academic and professional development.

Anticipating our *Return to NAPS*, we were all kids again ... and it felt great! There was excitement in the air the Saturday morning as we made our way to the site of the former Naval Training Center, Bainbridge. It was a beautiful fall morning made evermore striking by the changing leaves and the colorful picture they painted along the banks of

the Susquehanna River. The air was cool and crisp, the sky stunningly blue, the weather made to order. We could not have hoped for a better day as the stage was now set for a momentous occasion. Having seen the pictures we knew what to expect, but as we drove down Tome Road and the familiar campus came into view, we were taken aback none-the-less. It was no longer the well-groomed, tidy place we had left forty-five years prior, though in the mind's eye it was strangely the same. Proceeding in silence, reflecting upon days gone by, the feelings were bittersweet as we passed the football field, its vine-covered stands now hidden from view, the once manicured turf overgrown. The gauntlet continued as vandalized cottages, a poorly treated Harrison House, and a once vibrant, now crudely boarded Officer's Club bracketed our path to the far side of field. We would park in columns alongside the road in front of the long-abandoned Madison House then walk the final yards. As the tent came into view, festive military music filled the air. Memorial Hall may have looked a bit tired and surely worse for wear; but on this day the building was alive, its arms wide open, its granite steps strong, ready, and welcoming. With Tome Memorial Hall towering over us, her bell removed but her heart still beating, we knew we were home and the celebration was on!

By 1030, all 104 attendees were on site and ready to begin. As guests assembled beneath the tent, Companies 1 & 2 mustered in front of Tome Inn and Harrison House, respectively. There was much joking and kidding as the companies were called into ranks. It appeared for a time the march-on would not be taken seriously, until John Condon, Bob Capra and Paul Cuddy barked the appropriate commands, and Mic Murphy and Waverly Jackson raised the company guidons. In an instant, the jovial atmosphere turned serious, each unit stepped forward, and the aging brotherhood marched with a sense of purpose in remarkable unison. We were a sight to behold! A bunch of old guys locking into a called cadence, then catching the drumbeat, walking tall, feeling proud, and trying our best to 'look as good as we could' for each other, our spouses, and guests. It is worthy to record, even our column left at the approach end to Memorial Hall, though not of 8th & I quality, clearly warranted a passing grade before the commanders called, "Company, halt!. Left Face!" and the *Star Spangled Banner* played. We were an impressive lot to say the least!

Serving as master of ceremonies, John Condon did a magnificent job managing the agenda and delivering a touching remembrance of our time at NAPS. Representing Cecil County, Maryland Delegate David Rudolph spoke of the rich history of the Tome School, the importance of preserving the buildings and grounds, and of local and state efforts to redevelop the property. Commander Arlis Simmons and Colonel Don Christy followed with inspirational and informative speeches. Moreover, they spoke from the heart as they told similar stories of their rich and rewarding days at NAPS, their delight in learning of the life-altering influence their leadership had upon our young lives, and the honor they felt upon receipt of an invitation to our reunion. Their presence alone would have been a tremendous gift; but their words freely shared put a bright bow on the package.

As the program rounded the final bend, it would not have been complete without remembering and honoring those who have gone before us. Fortunate to have four ministers among our number, Reverend Fred Sisson's invocation, Reverends Terry Davis

and Jerry Padgett's Scripture readings, and the singing of the Navy Hymn would set the tone for a fitting tribute to Captain John Prichard and the memorial service to follow. Though fellow NAPS'er, Corporal Frank Haak, could not be with us, it was he who would be last among us to serve with Captain Prichard and to see him only days before his death in combat. It was John Condon's honor to read Frank's heartfelt reflection upon Captain Prichard's last days and hours. Many a tear would flow as we remembered with great delight and respect the man, the coach, and our leader, Captain John Prichard, Officer of Marines.

The flags were then ordered to half-staff as in the distance the bagpiper sounded "Going Home." At the piper's first note, Ron Spratt began reading the names of our departed staff officers and fellow students. It was a sobering reminder, death respects no man. The piper played "Amazing Grace," the bugler sounded "Taps," and with Bishop Waverly Jackson's inspired benediction having touched us all, the service ended quietly.

Delegate David Rudolf then read aloud a declaration of the Maryland Legislature honoring the NAPS Class of 1967 before the committee acknowledged the unwavering cooperation of the Bainbridge Development Corporation and the tireless work behind the scenes on the part of Ms. Deborah Reidy in support of our reunion. A bag lunch was served as we picnicked beneath the warm October sun, a cool breeze notwithstanding. Before departing, we took time to stroll the grounds, pointing out to our spouses and guests those buildings and ball fields wherein and whereupon the many stories we tell took place. But the clock ticked and it was time to put the Tome School campus and NAPS in our rear-view mirrors as we had done some forty-five years earlier. Deep in personal thought, we wonder if we would ever see the place again; but we drove away secure in the knowledge we have our memories as long as they last ... precious memories, indeed.

Saturday night found us gathering at the VFW Post 8185 in Port Deposit for the evening social hour, dinner, and entertainment. We were honored to have as our guest and keynote speaker Captain Jim Cunha, Commanding Officer of the Naval Academy Preparatory School in Newport, Rhode Island. The school and the program have changed significantly; but change happens! We were comforted to learn the mission, purpose, and focus remain unchanged; and that under Captain Cunha's enthusiastic leadership we were quick to realize the school is in good hands. A question and answer session followed before awards and plaques were presented to various individuals and organizations that helped ensure a successful reunion. Of particular note, on behalf of the students and staff officers of the NAPS Class of 1967, a 1917 Navy cutlass was presented to the Naval Academy Preparatory School, Newport, Rhode Island. The relic was discovered in the attic of Memorial Hall during our days at NAPS, the sole remnant and dusty reminder of a time through the late 1950s when the cutlass was employed by Battalion and Company staff in close order drill. It had been given to then Captain Christy for safe keeping. News of our reunion reminded the Colonel of the aging cutlass in his possession. He released the cutlass to the reunion committee for appropriate disposition. It was carefully mounted, properly identified, and will be proudly and prominently displayed at NAPS in Newport.

The next event was the cake cutting ceremony in honor of the U.S. Navy's 237th birthday which just happened to coincide with our *Return to NAPS*. Cake-cutting honors were awarded to the oldest and youngest among us, Arlis Simmons and Bill Barasha, respectively. As it was his 65th birthday (and his Navy sword that would be used to cut the cake) Ken Marks took a swipe at it as well. We were then treated to the sights and sounds of fellow NAPster Mic Murphy and his lovely wife Gloria, both talented and professional entertainers, as they brought us their signature program, "*Not for Self but Country!*" ... a delightful season of music we all know and love, a splash of Mic Murphy humor we would all recall, and a salute to those who serve and the flag we cherish. The rest of the evening was devoted to mingling, talking, and dancing to music of the 1960s until well past midnight, and surely past our usual bedtimes.

The final event of the power-packed weekend was a delightful brunch cruise on the Susquehanna River. Though some had departed, about half remained to enjoy the drive to historic Havre de Grace to board the *Lantern Queen*. The trip up river offered a different view of Port Deposit, the headmaster's home atop the hill, and the Memorial Hall cupola standing tall and proud in its commanding view from the bluff high above the town below. The weather was picture perfect, the waters calm and peaceful. We could not have wished for a better day for the cruise. The blue sky, bright sunny day, light breeze, and seasonally pleasant temperature allowed everyone the opportunity to enjoy the exposed topside deck until brunch was later served on the enclosed main deck below. It was a fitting end to a most memorable reunion, and a time to be treasured.

As we stood on the pier to exchange our farewells, we could not say enough about the weekend or the range of feelings we had experienced. Though the committee received compliments without end, we were (and remain) of one accord ... it was a labor of love for which we simply provided structure. It was the assembly of those who shared the vision, and those unable to attend who wished us well, that made the reunion possible and memorable. While it was a *check off the old bucket list* for the guys, the greatest endorsement would come from the wives. For the most part they did not know one another, knew little of NAPS or its meaning to their husbands, and likely wondered from the start why they were being drug to an all but forgotten corner of rural Maryland to meet with total strangers. In the end, our wives caught a glimpse and embraced, however slight, an understanding of what makes their husbands tick. They all got along well, met and made new friends, and echoed a familiar refrain, "We would do this again next weekend!" It doesn't get any better than that.

Will there be a 50th? Time alone will tell.

The Committee:

Bob Capra John Condon Bob Gallagher Ken Marks Wally Poleshaj