

History of the NAPS Class of 1967

As the date of our upcoming reunion draws closer, each of us has undoubtedly turned back the clock and reminisced about our time spent together at the Naval Preparatory School or NAPS as we fondly called it. It is hard to believe nearly 45 years have passed since the great NAPS Class of 1967 completed its course of instruction and had its graduation. As we prepare to once again assemble on the grounds of the old Tome School, it is only fitting that we should look back at the history of our class and try to understand what made the experience we shared there so special.

We all had orders that read “You are hereby directed to report to the Commanding Officer, U.S. Naval Preparatory School, Bainbridge, Maryland not later than 2400 31 August 1966.” A total of 203* of us representing 37 states reported aboard as ordered and we all came from different backgrounds and levels of military experience spanning from salty and seasoned Navy and Marine Non-Commissioned-Officers to “jocks” that had been recruited by the Naval Academy for various sports who arrived as Seaman Recruits fresh out of Navy Boot Camp. Included in the new class were a number of battle-hardened Marines who came directly from the battlefields of Vietnam and some Sailors who had served in-country in Riverine squadrons or on ships in direct support of the war effort. Regardless of age, background or level of military experience, we were all equals with a common goal—qualify for entry and an appointment to the Naval Academy.

That is how it all started for the NAPS Class of 1967. Before going much further, let’s review some statistics---203 started the curriculum at NAPS but by the time we graduated in May of 1967, the number had dwindled to 110 and that is the number that qualified for entry to the Naval Academy as the USNA Class of 1971. Of that number, 41 actually graduated and were commissioned as Ensigns or 2nd Lieutenants in June of 1971.

Clearly the NAPS Class of 1967 had a very significant attrition rate but on further analysis and a closer examination of the numbers, the story that is told is a positive one. Of the 41 that graduated from USNA, 25 made the military service a career and went on to retire with 20 or more years of service. Additionally, 9 NAPSters that did not graduate from USNA also went on to enjoy successful military careers---thus out of the original 203, 34 ended up making the military a career. One of our NAPSters achieved Flag Rank (Rear Admiral Dave Polatty) and we had 8 Navy Captains (Bob Annis, Drew Beasley, John Brandes, Fred Gorris, Dave Howe, Ken Marks, Wayne Peters and Mike Wilson.) The remaining 24 included 14 Commanders/Lieutenant Colonels, 8 Lieutenant Commanders/Majors, 1 Lieutenant, 1 Master Chief Petty Officer and 1 Chief Petty Officer. The bottom line is that the Naps Class of 1967 had some exceptional military leaders some of which went on to hold significant sea and shore commands. Many of those that did not choose to remain in the Navy or Marines went on to colleges and universities and became successful in business, industry and government service. All of us can say with certainty that the NAPS experience served us well as we went on to pursue our individual endeavors. Of special note, our own student Battalion Commander, Sergeant John Condon, who was among the Marines reporting to NAPS within weeks of combat in Vietnam, opted for a Navy commission upon graduating from Annapolis and

went on to command two ships before retiring as a Commander. On the other hand and, just to balance things out, Radioman Third Class Ron Spratt went the other way and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the Marine Corps upon graduation and eventually retired as Lieutenant Colonel.

When we arrived at NAPS we were all in the final phase of what is called the formative years (17-21 years old)---some of us were mature enough to have a general idea of what we wanted to do with ourselves while others were just not quite out of the ‘teen years’ and thus ripe for some structure and direction. NAPS seemed to offer the ideal environment for both groups. It was an academic institution inside a military environment. For those that were academically inclined, it was a chance to actually learn subjects rather than to simply study for a grade in the way they may have done in high school. For others, who may not have previously taken many science and math courses, NAPS offered an opportunity to prove to themselves that they could handle the curriculum that would allow them to score high enough on the SAT’s to qualify for admission. All of this was done under the umbrella of a military environment which required some personal discipline and acceptance of a structured lifestyle---but alas, some soon found out that what was offered at NAPS was not for them and for a variety of reasons, they decided to move on. Those that left early received orders to various Navy or Marine Corps commands to complete their original obligations and, although we don’t have an actual count, we know many of them later saw combat action in Vietnam.

As indicated, some NAPSters left earlier than others but 110 were still standing at the end of the 9 month academic curriculum. Say what you will but, no matter how long or short your time at NAPS, you have to admit that we were all profoundly impacted by the NAPS experience. There was a certain unexplainable magic about the place. If that were not the case, why is it that whenever any of us NAPSters get together we end up talking about the place with reverence and whimsical nostalgia? The answer is easy because it truly was a special place and a special time for us all. Let’s take a walk down memory lane and explore why it was so special.

First of all, let’s talk about the school grounds. It is no exaggeration to say that each of us got blown away the day we first reported aboard when we saw the “campus” located on a plateau high above the banks of the Susquehanna and within but tucked back and away from the main base---U.S. Naval Training Center, Bainbridge. The school grounds may not have been as pristine and immaculate as they once were when it was called the Tomes School for Boys, nonetheless, the whole area was beautiful. The school itself was composed of six majestic granite buildings, five of which surrounded a rectangular athletic practice field called Tome Field. On the south side of the field was Tome Inn (the home of Company 1), Harrison House (the home of Company 2) and Jackson House which was vacant in between. Across the field from Jackson House was Madison House which a NAPster working-party would later clean up to house our dates just in time for the Graduation Ball. Monroe House, served as the Officers’ Club. Off to the west of Tome Inn was the former Headmasters Quarters of the Tome School, which in our time served as the Bachelor Officers’ Quarters for our single staff instructors. Finally, just beyond Tome Field to the northwest was Memorial Hall, the main school building with

its prominent bell-tower which was lit up at night. The whole area was a sight to behold and it was hard to believe that we were inside the confines of a Navy base! We lived in our own little corner of the base and the only people that ever went down to the Tome area were us students, the NAPS staff and a few officers and families that lived in adjacent officer's quarters or that frequented the O-Club. In fact, since most sailors on base didn't even realize NAPS existed, we lived in a secluded if not surreal environment while still enjoying easy access to all the amenities of a typical Navy base.

Remember walking about a mile "up the hill" on week-ends to visit the base facilities like the base theater, the chapel, the big gym, the bowling alley, the exchange and of course, Fiddler's Green? Most of us were still not 21 but we could legally drink all the 3.2 % beer we could handle! It was bad beer by any beer standards but it was beer, and we drank plenty of it. The saving grace that if we drank too much, Fiddlers Green was well within crawling distance back to our rooms in Harrison House or Tome Inn---for the less inebriated, at least the return trip back to our dorm rooms was all down-hill.

Speaking of walking or marching, how many of you will attest to having to march up and down Tome Field on Friday evenings to negate Extra Military Instruction demerits we may have received for various infractions (e.g. got caught) while everyone else was headed up the hill on liberty? Getting caught raiding the mess-hall pantry was a regular occurrence and the source of many an assigned demerit. And that mess hall, what a beautiful dining room---dramatic curved skylights, high loft ceiling and walls adorned with carved oak and dark paneling. Yes, we often complained about the lousy chow and we drove the assigned mess cooks nuts with our petty complaints but then again, like the old saying goes, "A happy sailor is a bitching sailor."

The focal point of the school complex was Memorial Hall where we spent our days in well-appointed classrooms. The building also housed all the support staff that provided administration services for both the academic and military departments. A beautiful building of classic Greco-Roman architecture, it was multi story with a granite exterior and of course, that prominent bell-tower. The main lobby area was spectacular with high ceilings outlined with beautifully sculptured plaster molding, ornate chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, brilliant marble floors and twin spiral staircases leading up to the second floor where most of the classrooms were located. Between the staircases was a large door that led into the auditorium which was impressive in both size and design. Surely we can still visualize LCDR Arlis Simmons (Officer-In-Charge) standing on the stage before us welcoming us to NAPS and giving us an overview of what was in store for us. And of course how can we forget attending the Masqueraders performance of "A Cook for Mr. General." Another use of the main lobby was to hold personnel inspections during inclement weather. How many of us can vividly recall the day when, in the middle of one of those inspections, the silence in the lobby was rudely interrupted by a deafening thud as Rick Hormel's chin hit the marble floor after passing out?

For a student body of our size, we sure had a lot of activities that kept us busy after class. A brief perusal of *the Cruise* yearbook shows that somehow we managed to field nine different varsity teams, we could participate in as many as five intramural sports and we

could also choose to be active in as many as nine different special interest clubs. We were busy bees to say the least! These activities kept the staff busy as well since they had to support all the varsity sports with multiple coaches and all clubs had an instructor as an assigned sponsor.

Then there was the staff---what a dedicated bunch we had. Lieutenant-Commander Arlis Simmons set the standards and provided the vision for the rest of the staff while Captain Prichard (Battalion Officer) along with Captains Mattiace and Christy (Company Officers) provided the day-to day leadership and military oversight. As a group, we could not have had better role models to emulate. They were outstanding in every respect and provided us with just the right combination of discipline and mentorship. The administrative staff, a blend of military and civilian personnel, numbered 17 in total and they provided administrative services for the academic as well as military groups. Finally, we had a total of 24 instructors, 23 military and 1 civilian, who taught all the academic courses. All were fantastic and several were of a caliber that had a profound, life-long effect on us. They were professional and demanding but at the same time, very personable and approachable, and all were dedicated to the mission of having us qualify for academic admission to the Naval Academy. The total staff (leadership, academic and administrative) numbered 44 in total which was an astounding staff-to-student ratio without equal.

We would not all be interested in a reunion if we had not developed bonds and friendships with our fellow students and therefore we need to address that topic as well. The Naval Academy brags about a “brotherhood” that exists within each class and within the alumni group as a whole and that is a truism. Well, us NAPSters have similar bragging rights because we too enjoy a special bond and brotherhood---if not the case, why do we cherish being referred to as NAPSters? The fondest memories we all have of NAPS is of the friendships we developed and when we get together in pairs or groups, the ensuing conversations seem to instantly take us back to the time we spent at NAPS. We are all truly connected in a special way and it is something we cannot deny. A poignant but sad example of that connection was recently shared by then CPL Frank Haak. Frank left NAPS early and eventually found himself with orders to Vietnam and was assigned to a Marine infantry company in the 4th Marines commanded by none other than Captain Prichard! Since both were connected by their respective NAPS experience, Captain Prichard went out of his way to befriend and advise him and they became close. Sadly Frank was the last NAPSter to see Captain Prichard alive as our beloved Battalion Officer was killed-in-action in January of 1968 during the Tet Offensive. (Captain Prichard was posthumously awarded the Silver Star Medal for his actions. It was formally presented to Mrs. Prichard in an award ceremony held on Tome Field which was at the same time re-named John L. Prichard Field in his honor.)**

We can all recall riding along Interstate 95 either in a car or bus leaving or returning to Bainbridge while on liberty and each time we were about to cross the bridge over the Susquehanna River, we would instinctively and without hesitation gaze at the bluff above Port Deposit to look for the familiar bell tower of Memorial Hall seen just over the tree-tops. Over the years, many of us that happen to travel along that interstate corridor

continue to look longingly upon that sight and that practice continues to this day. When you drive into the area in October, you too will undoubtedly find yourself trying to catch a glimpse of that familiar landmark.

If you have gotten this far in reading this write-up, you are probably overwhelmed with your own memories triggered by what you read above. We probably did not realize how good we had it until years later and with that said, the unique opportunity to soon relive some of those memories on the same grounds where they were formed and to do so in the company of the same friendships that were started nearly 46 years ago is also going to be pretty special. The bottom line is that NAPS was truly a special place and we were all lucky enough to have been blessed with having shared a very special experience.

Another positive outcome of organizing this reunion is the fact that many NAPSters (students and staff alike) have already re-connected with one another after nearly five decades as a result of the tracking efforts performed by Ken Marks. This hopefully is simply the beginning of what is yet to come since many more re-connections will inevitably take place once we have the reunion. A perfect example is Jim Rehrmann and Gil Powell---both were originally from California and they have not seen one another since May 1967 and now they come to find out that they are living within 15 miles from one another in the Seattle area! We expect to hear of many more of these reconnection stories in the coming months.

In closing, for those of you who have decided, for whatever reason, not to attend, please reconsider. And for those of you who are still on the fence, please decide to join us. Finally, if you have taken the time to see many of the pictures that depict the sad state of the once beautiful buildings, don't let that scare you. After all, the effects of time is one of the cruelties of that wonder of all wonders that we call life. To make a point, have you taken a look at yourself in the mirror lately?

Hope to see everyone on 12 October!

For the Committee

Wally Poleshaj

* *The Cruise* yearbook depicts a total of 185 students----the difference in head-count is the result of many students having left before the yearbook pictures were taken.

** http://naps1967.com/obits/Obit_Capt_Prichard.pdf