

A Fifty-year Link in the Chain: 1966 - 2016

Every member of the Brigade is part of something much larger than any one of them could hope to become individually - a link in the chain encompassing thousands of graduates; a chain epitomizing sacrifice, fidelity, courage, honor and commitment. The Class of 2016 will never stand alone. You have the encouragement and moral support of family, friends, and all who have gone before you. Additionally, and uniquely, each member of the Class of 2016 can expect sponsorship from the Class of 1966.

USNA Class of 1966: A perspective on service and commitment in an uncertain world.

We are much closer to the Class of 2016 than the difference in years would suggest. We entered service in a similar world: dangerous and unpredictable, requiring Naval and Marine officers with unique skills, character, and integrity honed at the Naval Academy.

On a hot summer day in June 1962, 1,301 of us found ourselves in Tecumseh Court to take the oath forming the Class of 1966. Like the Class of 2016, we were there for one reason – to serve, providing military leadership and commitment our country needed in unstable and uncertain times. The strong relationships that Plebe Year wrought, and the bonds formed, remain. Our motto, *Non Sibi Sed Patriae* - Not for Self, But for Country - exemplifies our commitment.

Upon graduation, we were ushered into the Cold War and smaller wars fought under the umbrella of the global East-West conflict, including our baptismal event, Vietnam. Other conflicts included the likes of Grenada, Libya, and Lebanon. The Cold War was our war. We drove boomer subs that carried the most secure part of the country's strategic deterrent. We drove and flew attack submarines, surface ships, and aircraft that hunted for Red October and faced down the Soviet Navy around the world. Our Marines landed in the midst of a bloody and unpopular war, and were in unnamed fire-fights known only to them - not unlike Afghanistan today. We flew the planes that bombed Hanoi and the Ho Chi Minh trail. We projected presence and power to the far reaches of the globe to demonstrate American influence abroad--to keep the seas free.

This was the first of three epochs marking our service. The Cold War was costly. We were in a dangerous business. One Classmate was a POW for over 5 years. By our 10th Reunion, 45 of our Classmates were gone, 20 in Vietnam. We lost 35 in combat and operational accidents.

In 1988, we created a living memorial to deceased Classmates, contributing \$379,000 for educational grants to 50 of their children. We established Leadership Awards for HUE CITY (CG-66) and GONZALEZ (DDG-66), presenting awards annually to an exceptional junior officer and petty officer on each ship. The Stadium Memorial Arch sponsored by the Class commemorates the Battle of Hue City, fought by

Marines during the Tet Offensive in 1968. The “Band of Brothers” dedication reflects our special bond.

Our second epoch of service began with the Decade of the 90s and showed the new world to be disordered and lawless. There were crises on every continent; places like the Philippines, Romania, the Trans-Caucasus, and Panama. Then, out of the blue, Iraq invaded Kuwait. With nothing but sand between Kuwait and the oil fields of Saudi Arabia, one of our Classmates was on the team that called on the King of Saudi Arabia to see if he would invite half a million friends to visit. Those friends all wore military uniforms; six months later Kuwait was liberated. One Classmate commanded Task Force Ripper, leading the Marines’ attack into Kuwait. One commanded WISCONSIN (BB-64), the last ship to provide Naval Gunfire Support with 16-inch guns. Another Classmate, commanding BUNKER HILL (CG-52), was the Gulf’s Anti-Air Warfare Commander. In 1995, one of our Classmates commissioned the first new fleet since WW II, FIFTH Fleet. We didn’t know then what was coming next, when 9/11 signaled our third epoch, the Global War on Terror.

Then, nameless and faceless men, armed with box cutters, and a deep hatred of the West, attacked the United States, killing over 3,000 people. While terrorism remains the most obvious menace, the long list of external threats includes cyber warfare, WMD, piracy, and nuclear proliferation. Significantly, a year after Gulf War II, a Classmate was chosen by the President as the first Director of the new National Counter-Terrorism Center. Yet another was chosen to serve as Naval Academy Superintendent from 2003 to 2007.

Although the cycle of uncertainty continues, we remain young at heart, more so than we imagined possible. Like previous generations, we appreciate the freedom so dearly won by those who have gone before us. We recall fallen Classmates, cherishing their memories. When we visit Memorial Hall, and contemplate monuments to service and bravery, we see sacrifice represented in a far different light than we did on that June day back in 1962. We know better what they symbolize. As we take our place among those classes participating in the “link in the chain” we endeavor to watch over and guide the future of our young men and women, trusting that they in turn will keep the flame burning bright and reinforce, as we have, links in the chain. We salute the Class of 2016 as you carry forward our enduring values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment.