

**United States Naval Academy  
Class of 1959 Memorial Service**

**Rear Admiral Larry G Vogt, USN (Ret.)**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, guests and fellow classmates and families, it is an honor to be here today at our 65<sup>th</sup> reunion Memorial Service. In my wildest imagination I never thought I would be up here in the pulpet of this beautiful and special chapel. From my Midshipman days to now, this is the place that I felt the onus of tradition, honor, dedication, responsibility and duty of serving as an officer in the Navy. Rusty and I were married here eight hours after graduation and 48 years later, we held her memorial service here. It is, indeed, a special National Treasure to me.**

**As we gather together to celebrate our shared past and the bonds that unite us as members of this esteemed institution, we also take a moment to remember and honor lost classmates and their families.**

**Since this may be our last class reunion, I will talk about the class as a whole and our legacy.**

**This includes all of you...**

**So I will retrogress for a moment...**

**Sixty-nine years ago, 1145 young men across the country received a letter that would change their lives forever. It was orders to the United States Naval Academy.**

**They came from every strata of society. Some were sports standouts, some Captains of their sports teams or Presidents of their high school class. Some were valedictorians, some had military or college experience. They came from military, farm, trades or business families. But they all had something in common. Each was eager, smart and scared. All of us here this morning were some of those men. **THEY** became **WE...a class....the Class of 1959.****

**We arrived at the Naval Academy about the 4th of July 1955 and a new world was suddenly and dramatically revealed to us and the special bonding between brothers began. After two months of rigorous military training in the oppressive Maryland heat, we were ready to face the returning upperclassmen. We were divided into 24 groups with about 45 midshipmen of each of the four classes comprising a Company. Company assignments depended on the language you chose to study. All other courses were exactly the same. All traces of our previous lives were gone.....we were all in the same station of life ready to be molded into military officers.**

**These young men were the roots that grew into the Class of 1959 Family Tree.**

**Our Family tree broke ground in June 1959 after its roots, 796 of US, were fertilized with leadership, discipline, education, moral values, trust and patriotism. Most of us went into the Navy but several went into the Marine Corps, Air Force and even the Army.**

**We scattered throughout the world on ships and stations providing security for the United States in times of peace and war. Most of us got married soon after graduation and started our own families. Our tree started to grow branches rapidly.**

**It not only grew with families, it branched out into every facet of American life. Our classmates have made a difference in every discipline...military, business, education, nuclear power, medicine, science and technology. Many made a mark in more than one area—military to business, military to education, military to government, military to clergy and military to diplomat.**

**In 2008 I gave a speech to a Kansas City civic club I called “Defining Decades”. I explained that in these periods events occurred which changed the direction of history for years to come. For example, the later years of the life of Jesus, the rise of Muhammed, the Third Crusade, the Revolutionary War followed by the French Revolution, and our Civil War. **I also identified the Viet Nam War and the 60s flower children.****

**WE have lived in several history-changing decades. With the technological advances and instant communication, they seem to be occurring more frequently.**

**Over the years sociologists and journalists have coined descriptors to describe different generations. The first was the Lost Generation. It consisted of those born just before the First World War. The Greatest Generation followed by those who fought in World War Two. Subsequent generations were called the Silent generation, Baby Boomers, Xers, Yers, Zers and the next will be the Alpha generation.**

**Our generation is called the Silent Generation...sort of an oxymoron since we were all born just before WWII. But the definition is derived from the post-war period of rebuilding and short peace. We were born on the tail end of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl with the attendant economic and political uncertainty. We were cautious but conscientious. We are often described as respectful, loyal but determined. We accepted the actions of the government without protest...thus the silent generation moniker.**

**We have lived through WWII, the Korean War, the Viet Nam War, the Gulf Wars, drug wars, The Cold War and fall of the Berlin Wall, and the war on terrorism which is really another name for a religious war. And we may be on the verge of another world war.**

**Those of us here and those we are honoring today, played major roles in some of these events.**

**While on active duty some of our classmates filled critical positions in service of our country. We flew combat missions, commanded carriers and squadrons and Battle Groups, commanded a battleship (yes, the USS NEW JERSEY), commanded surface combatants, nuclear submarines, squadrons, and Groups, and a deep submergence vehicle which recovered a lost nuclear weapon in the Mediterranean.**

**Every member contributed and received many personal awards**

**After service, they kept on serving. Some as college professors, lawyers, pastors, science and engineering specialists, nuclear power plant**

operators and managers, space support project engineers and trainers of foreign militaries.

We have had Fleet Commanders, high Government officials, an Ambassador, Distinguished Graduates, business and civic leaders and numerous volunteers in church and charitable activities.

In this journey we have lost over half of our brothers...40 while on active duty, 10 of which were in Viet Nam. Sixteen of our classmates were never recovered. Two of these were submariners. We have with us today Gary Findlay who as an Air Force pilot was shot down over Viet Nam. He was quickly rescued and survived his serious injuries. Through sheer determination, he refused to be included in the above statistics. That same determination got him here from California. Gary it is an honor to have you here in our midst.

Probably the most important contribution to our American society, is our families. Most of us have great grandchildren by now. I would bet that most of our class family have college degrees.

We continue to serve the Nation through our children and grandchildren.

Our wives have made great sacrifices too by being de facto single moms while husbands were deployed. In my case, as a submariner, I was completely 'in comunicado' while deployed. The stress of raising small children, managing the household, working a job, and being the Uber driver to sports events was high. I picture Rusty with a new-borne, a two-year old and a four-year old pushing a grocery cart in the commissary and wonder how she did it. All of you special ladies in the pews did it too. Amazing! No wonder we men volunteered for combat and sea duty.

The Naval Academy has been a pivotal part of our lives, shaping us into the men we have become. Each of us brought something unique to our shared experience. Whether through our courage, humor, or dedication, our memories live on in the stories we tell and the lessons we learned from them.

**As we reflect on the time we spent together, let us remember the sacrifices made, the challenges overcome, and the triumphs achieved. Our journey has been one of service, duty, honor, and values instilled in us.**

**As part of that reflection, we would be remiss if we didn't recognize our class representatives and volunteers who have served us all these years. In particular, I would like to mention Frank and Martha Donovan. Frank was our class president since we began as a class. He and Martha raised an all-American and Navy family we are all proud of. Also, I would like to recognize Tom Lukish who now serves as President. He and his Team ... Tom Billings, Joe Flynn, Art Emmerson, Patty Ford, Bob Beaton, Larry Weaver, Pete Stout and many others, have done an outstanding job. And a special thanks to the ladies who catered the Tail Gates all these years. Thank you all.**

**As you can tell, today I chose to be all inclusive when talking about our Class...all of us here as well as those who have gone before. I feel as though we are still whole in spirit if not in body.**

**Our Family Tree has lost some branches and withered over the years, but its roots are still strong and it stands tall in the annals of Naval Academy history.**

**It is amazing the impact 796 motivated, educated and patriotic men can make on society.**

**I know of no other class who was as closeknit as ours. The friendships, loyalty and love of country are legendary. It has been a distinct life changing experience for me personally and I couldn't be prouder to be a part of this Class.**

**In the year about 380 BC, the great Athens general and politician, Pericles, gave a speech known as the Funeral Oration. It is recognized as one of the best speeches ever given and Abraham Lincoln may have tacitly referred to it in the Gettysburg Address. In it, Pericles was referring to Athens but I have paraphrased a portion of it to read:**

*“Fix your eyes on the greatness of America as you have it before you day-to-day. Fall in love with her and when you feel her greatness, remember it was won by men and women with courage, with knowledge of their duty and the best sense of honor in action.”*

All of us in **the Class of 1959** family are some of those men and women!

In closing, I would like to offer a metaphor I picked up somewhere years ago.

“Life is like a ship at sea. A ship is part of us until it sails over the horizon out of sight in our visual world. But it is still a ship, sailing on to the next port. The lives of our family and friends are part of us too, until they sail over the horizon of life out of sight in our physical world. But their souls live on, traveling onward towards heaven.” Those of us who believe, know this to be true.