

## Memorial Service

delivered by Tom Lukish on October 5, 2018

I am deeply honored that the Reunion Committee has asked me to speak to you at this very special service in this very special house that we all revere.

I would like to recognize and thank the Reunion Committee for its dedicated time, effort and hard work in planning and executing this, our 59<sup>th</sup> reunion, which has resulted in a very successful and enjoyable weekend. So on behalf of our class and especially those here this morning, we thank you.

I would like to say a few words to our special classmates who are here, they are the widows and family members of our deceased classmates. You will always, always be a member of our class, we want you to know that your husbands and fathers are special to us, as are you. We share your grief, and hope that grief shared is grief diminished. Your presence here makes this beautiful picture that I am looking at even more beautiful. We love you and we thank you for attending your 59<sup>th</sup> Naval Academy reunion.

I think in life we are all just walking each other home.

We truly are just walking each other home and I am going to talk to you this morning about the values that have made our walk together cherished and memorable, I am going to talk about kindness, generosity and caring. I am going to talk to about courage and I am going to talk to you about friendship. These are the values that are the foundation of our class and they are the reasons that I am very proud to be a member of the Class of 1959.

It was the summer of 1955 that 1128 young men entered this special place to begin our walk together. Four years later 792 graduated. We lost through attrition 336 classmates, almost 30% of our class..

Since then 274 of our classmates have died. Of these 274, 36 lost their lives while serving our country on active duty that's almost 5% of our graduating class. Of these 36, 10 lost their lives in Vietnam, of these 36, 16 of their bodies were never recovered. We also lost 2 non graduates while they were on active duty.

This is why we are here, we can never forget our walk together and I know we are proud to have walked with them.

There are many, many memories in the Class of 1959, I will only talk about 3, but it is not only these three that make me proud to have walked with you all, it is all the many memories on which we can reflect.

#### KINDNESS, GENEROSITY AND CARING.

Maurice "Mo" Clark began his walk with us from his home in Brooklyn, NY. He was the first African-American to play football at the Naval Academy. Those of us who played with Mo, did not know that we were a part of an historical event. We saw Mo Clark as just another teammate on our team. Mo only played football for one year, but it was long enough for us to get to know him as a lifelong friend. He has a good sense of humor and loved being at the Naval Academy. Mo graduated, went to Pensacola, FL and entered the Naval Flight Training program. A few years passed and Mo was in Post Graduate School in Monterey, CA. He was married to his special love, Elsie and together they had three children. It was in Monterey where Elsie was involved in a horrendous automobile accident, which took the lives of their 4year old and 2year old daughters, and rendered Elsie disabled for life. Fortunately, Mo was not in the car at the time. The other survivor of the accident was Mo Clark's, 7 year old son Mo Clark, Jr who was injured but survived. Years passed , Mo was now out of the Naval service and was living near Philadelphia. Mo cared for Elsie, who was now a resident in a nursing home , along with caring for his son young Mo who never completely recovered mentally from the accident. Mo died about 20 years ago, which left young Mo responsible for his mother. It was about 10 years ago that Mo's 7<sup>th</sup> company classmates learned that young Mo was in need of some help. He was struggling to take care of both himself and his mother Elsie. His company mates stepped in, and along with many classmates raised a fund to financially help young Mo, they set up a funeral fund for Elsie to remove that burden from young Mo, and a fund to buy young Mo a car that he needed in order for him to hold his day to day job. A beautiful epilogue to this story is that it was one of our classmates who never graduated, who lived near Mo, who took him around to car dealerships to ensure that he got a good automobile. Elsie Clark died about three years ago, her funeral was paid for by the fund, and today young Mo Clark is doing fine. In my opinion, Mo Clark's company mates and our class saved this young man's life. Kindness, generosity and caring saved this young man's life.

#### COURAGE

Jack Phillips was a Kansas farm boy. He began his walk with us from his home in the small town of Mission, Kansas. Jack was an enlisted Marine who entered the Academy from the Naval Academy Preparatory School, NAPS which at that time was located in Bainbridge, MD not too far from where we are. It was at NAPS where he met his best friend and future classmate another former enlisted Marine, Angelo Fernandez from Brooklyn, New York. Now Brooklyn, New York and Mission, Kansas are

world's apart but Jack and Angy became roommates and lifelong friends at NAPS. Both Angy and Jack worked hard and entered the class that summer of 1955 with the rest of us. Angy and Jack remained friends and graduated four years later as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants in United States Marine Corps. As the saying goes, "Once a Marine, Always a Marine". It was in 1967 that they both were engaged in the Vietnam War. Captain Jack Phillip was a company commander and Captain Angelo Fernandez was Assistant Operations Officer of the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment. It was in October of 1967 that the Vietcong with overwhelming force mounted an attack to cross the Cam Lo river, in Quang-tri Province, and if it had been successful the enemy force could have overrun the Province. Captain Jack Phillips's company was the lead company in defense of that attempted river crossing; the Vietcong did not win that battle and were defeated at the Cam Lo River bridge. The next day, Captain Angy Fernandez was sent from Regimental Headquarters to assess the battlefield circumstances and damage. Angy found his former roommate, Jack Phillips, dead on the battlefield, a bullet had gone through the left side of his flack jacket and penetrated his heart. Courage is what prevailed in that battle. Courage is what defeated an overwhelming enemy force. Courage by our classmate, a Farm Boy from Kansas and the courage of each one of the more that 125 casualties suffered in that battle. Angy Fernandez completed his walk with Jack Phillips. The Kansas farm boy is back home in Kansas, he is buried in the National Veterans Cemetery, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

## FRIENDSHIP

Ernie Ehlers began his walk with us from his home in Pottsville, PA, not too far from where I grew up. We played football against each other before we became football teammates at the Academy. We became close friends over the next four years. We graduated and we both went to Pensacola to begin Navy flight training.. I have many memories of our time together in Pensacola. But one of the nicest was while we were there Dolores and I bought our first piece of furniture together, it was an end table that cost \$25, a lot of money back then. What makes this memory so special, is that we had an Army/Navy football game party at our house. It was at that party that someone put a glass on the new end table and it caused a water mark. Ernie said don't worry Tom I can fix it, and the next day he came to our house and he worked on that mark and he did fix it. I will tell you a little more about this end table in a minute

Years passed it was now 1969 and Ernie was now stationed at Oceana Naval Air Station, Virginia Beach and flying the Grumman A6 Intruder Attack Bomber. He was schedule to fly a low level training flight on April 3, 1969. His daughter Judianne was to celebrate her 6<sup>th</sup> birthday on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, so the night before his flight Ernie baked her birthday cake, so that they could celebrate her birthday when he came home the next day. Ernie never came home, on April 3<sup>rd</sup> flying in the Shenandoah mountains of Virginia, his A6 hit an uncharted hill and both he and his flight officer were killed. He

never got to celebrate Judianne's birthday that day. Ernie left his wife Joanne, and four children ages 8, 6, 4 and 1. Ernie Ehlers was 32 years old..

We still have that end table, it is worn and tattered now it is in a corner at the entrance door to our home. I pass it every day when I come and go from our home. It is mainly used for storage now, and once in a while if I ask my wife where something is, she will say it is on Ernie's table. Even though I bought the table is now Ernie's table. My kids know the entire story behind that end table near our door, and they have told me don't worry Dad that table will never leave our family.

Friendships, with our classmates, are cherished. Each of us has many memories about these 274 deceased Classmates. We knew them all, some we knew better than others but we knew them all, and we will never forget them. They were special, and they did not die alone. They carried with them an endless and endearing love for their families. They carried with them the traditions of the United States Military. They carried with them a love for their country. They carried with them memories. And they carried with them each other.

We are all at the age where we can reflect on our lives. When things are quiet and I reflect on my life , I have reached a conclusion. I think we are all born with a little door in our heart, and as we go through life and meet special people, they seem to automatically get the little key to that door from us, and they open it and they enter our heart and they remain with us forever. These 274 classmates, of whom we are here to honor, are special.

In closing I would like to ask you to do something, not for me but for the guys we are here to honor and remember. Within the next few weeks, and maybe periodically after that, sit down with someone you care for and share a memory that you have about one of these 274. Let us remember them this way, let's never forget them , ever.

I THINK IN LIFE WE ARE ALL JUST WALKING EACH OTHER HOME. Please , ENJOY THE WALK.