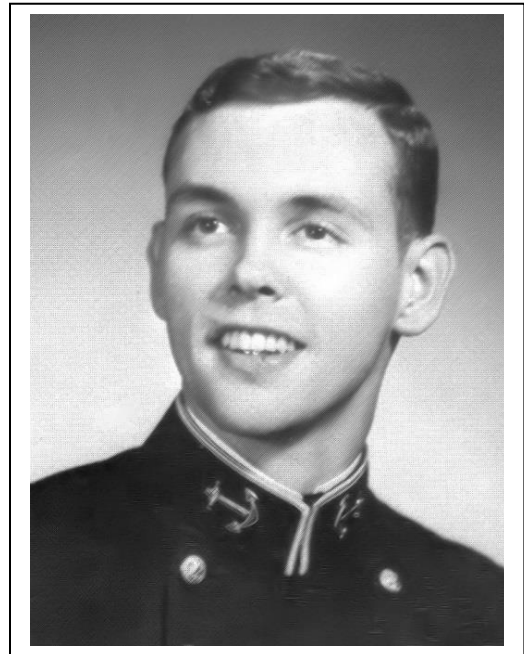
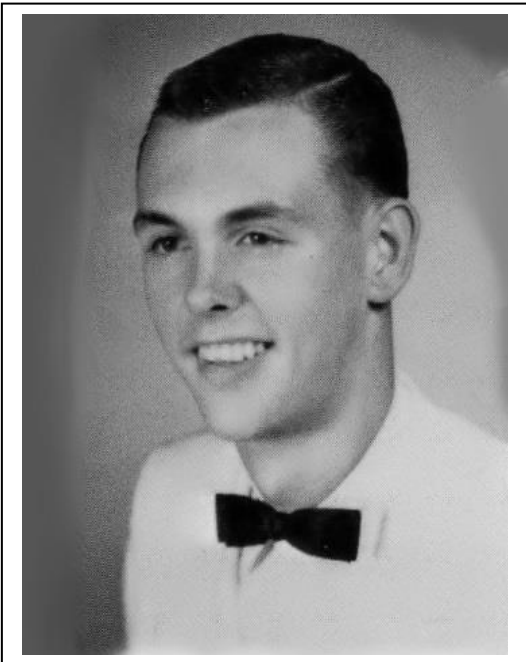


Remembrances of William C. “Bill” Matthews



**by
Captain Gordon I Peterson Jr, USN (Ret)
May 2015**

In Memory of William C. Matthews
By his High School and Naval Academy Classmates and his Fellow Naval Aviators

A brass plaque displayed in Dahlgren Hall at the U.S. Naval Academy records U.S. Senator Samuel I. Hayakawa's remarks on the floor of the U.S. Senate on the loss of two brave naval aviators assigned to Fighter Squadron 211 while deployed on the aircraft carrier USS *Constellation*. They died and were lost at sea when their F-14 Tomcat fighter jet crashed during operations off the coast of California. The inscription on the plaque reads:

In Memorium

LCDR William C. Matthews, USN, '68
LTJG Patrick Kilcline, USN, '75
Lost at Sea July 16, 1978
VF-211, USS *Constellation*

"There are all sorts of motivations which drive our complex society. One of the indispensable ones is that which seeks to preserve that society, its values, people, and institutions from the depredations of those who would undermine, conquer, or destroy them. The fulfillment of that essential task includes the need for men who are willing to take upon themselves personal hardship, danger, separation from their loved ones, and a myriad of other disciplines associated with their uniquely important craft. There is not and never will be in our free society a substitute for such men or the job which they must do. Someone must always have the watch, someone must always be the sentinel, and someone must climb into a cockpit and launch into the morning sky."

Senator S. I. Hayakawa
Congressional Record
July 19, 1978

Bill Matthews was a special man who is fondly remembered to this day by all with whom he came in contact. His classmates from the Class of 1964 at Wantagh High School, N.Y., the Class of 1968 at the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md., and Navy pilots who flew with him are proud to share their reflections on a truly decent person—a loving husband, father, brother, and son ... and a combat veteran of the Vietnam War who was a willing sentinel in the service of his nation. This remembrance consists of four sections: Reflections by Bill's high school classmates, reflections by his Naval Academy classmates, a narrative on his commissioned service, and photos taken during Taylor Matthews' recent visit to the Naval Academy. I extend my sincere thanks to all who contributed so quickly and enthusiastically to enable me to prepare this salute to our good friend and classmate Bill Matthews so that we may help Taylor, Jonathan, and their families have a more complete understanding of the person we knew.

Gordon I. Peterson
Captain, U.S. Navy (Ret.)
Wantagh High School 1964
U.S. Naval Academy 1968

Wantagh High School Reflections

As someone who grew up on Smith Street, down the block from the Matthews on Emma Street, I have always thought of Bill as “Billy.” With the exception of a couple of years at Beech Street School, Billy and I went to different schools until high school. We really didn’t have much to do with each other in school. Emma and Smith Streets had a fair number of kids around the same age. There was Bruce Spaeth, Eddie and Terry Groth, Pat Roll, John Boyle, Pat and Jimmy McDonald, Tommy Cheska, and obviously Billy and Bobby. Then there was younger crowd, around Mary Ann’s age, who we had to put up with.

My association with Billy was rather limited mostly to summers and the various activities that we all created to amuse ourselves. They were simple things such as Hide and Seek, Royal Rummy, badminton, etc. Some of them we took rather seriously, seeing who could find the best hiding place. My memories are rather vague as to who participated in what ... after all, it was a very long time ago! One memory which does stand out is a variety show we held one summer in the Matthews’ garage. It was probably the summer of 1958 or 59. As I recall, all of us participated and we attracted a rather large audience. It was a great success.....at least we thought so!

Many years later, possibly a Thanksgiving weekend, my next-door neighbor and our classmate, Tommy Cheska, had a party and invited many people from the neighborhood who were home for the holidays. As it happened, Billy and his wife attended. It was the first time I had seen Billy since high school. We spoke for quite a while, probably the longest conversation we had ever had. I was still searching for my niche in life, and I was impressed by Billy, by what he had accomplished, and how comfortable he was with his life. He obviously was in love with his wife, had a good marriage and was proud of the career he had chosen to serve his country. I was happy for him ... and envied him at the same time. I remember thinking later on, I was sorry I hadn’t known him better. It was the last time I saw Billy.

At that time, I had recently relocated to the Washington, D.C. area. I was working in Virginia when I learned of Billy’s tragic death. As improbable, as it was, the pilot with Billy [Ed. Note: LT Junior Grade Patrick J. Kilcline] the nephew of one of the men I worked with at the time.

Taylor, you had a good dad, who was devoted to keeping our country safe at all costs. His service was and is appreciated. I have some idea of what you went through as a child, as my son was 5 and a half when his father, a Marine died. Please know every morning I pray for all those in the Armed Forces, especially those who have died and their families. So, thank you for your dad’s service and your sacrifice....one that you shouldn’t have had to make. May God bless you and your family. [Ed. Note: Pat’s extracurricular activities included the Dramatics Club, Future Nurses, library staff, and both badminton and tennis at Wantagh.]

Pat Scofield Martin

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(Childhood address – 3606 Smith Street)

My memories of Bill are that he was simply a nice guy. That may not seem like much but high school students can be real jerks. Bill was never like that. "Simply a nice guy" may not sound like much, but I meant it as high praise. *[Ed. Note: Steve was in the Travel Club and Spanish Club for three years and played intramural football and basketball at Wantagh.]*

Steve Fein

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As a somewhat awkward kid growing up, I had the extreme privilege of being selected as manager for our varsity basketball team at Wantagh High School. I got to interact every day with these great athletic guys and remember that Billy always had an encouraging word for me, even though he never knew that all I wanted was to BE BILL. He was a great guy who always had time for the "little guys." *[Ed. Note: Ron was a member of the German Club for four years, the Chess Club, Biology Club, and managed the varsity basketball team for three years.]*

Ron Albert

ron@ronanddebbie.net



I know that Taylor and Jon are going to be even more proud of his dad when he receives the compilation of memories from those who knew Bill well. I wish I could contribute something of value. Because we were never in even one class together, however, my memories of Bill are observations formed from a distance. But I think it says something that although we were never close, I still remember Bill well. Of course he was exceedingly handsome, athletic, and a very good student. But perhaps more importantly, he was also respectful and kind. He formed deep and lasting friendships. I know this because of the times he spent in Pensacola with Nancy and John Hall, who still speak warmly of him to this day and who were devastated to hear that his plane went down. *[Ed. Note: Mary was a talented violinist in our school orchestra for four years, acted in several memorable musicals as a thespian, and was a member of the Student Council, Spanish Club and Yearbook staff.]*

Mary (Pappas) Packard

Packardm46@aol.com



Taylor and Jon, It is an honor to reflect on my friendship with your Dad. Our friendship began in 4th grade – nine-years old—or earlier, and my memories include childhood play, summer adventures, high school sports, and many other stories. I lived about one-plus miles from Billy, and we would play often after school or during the summer. Back in the day, we were allowed to bicycle through the neighborhoods, meet and play with each other without parental concern or supervision.

Your Dad was a naturally gifted student. In fact, he was part of a special group of students (the really smart kids), who were selected for an enrichment program in the early grades (3rd, 4th, and 5th grades). I was not part of the group! We had an excellent but strict teacher in 5th grade, Mrs. Lamb. She liked us and encouraged us to participate in many extracurricular activities. Billy, Don LaBelle, and I were "asked" to form a trio and to sing in the 5th grade Christmas Show. We sang a song while holding life size cut-out Christmas Trees with a hole for our heads to peak through—think of the Christmas show in the movie "Love Actually."

This is our 5th grade class. Gordon was also in the class. It was a power-house classroom! At the risk of too much detail – your dad and I are in the back row standing from *right to left* – Susie Erehart, your Dad, Ray Lake, and me—Arthur (Buzzy) DiMartino; Don LaBelle is wearing the Cub Scout uniform at far left on this row. Gordon is the third person from left side in the second row.



My memories recall playing pick-up tackle football in a back lot behind the Matthews house (5th grade) in a large field. In 6th grade, Billy delivered *Newsday*, the afternoon Long Island newspapers, to about 50 homes. The route took about one hour a day to deliver the papers. It was a good job for earning money through tips and to gain responsibility. I took over his route when I was in 7th grade. In the summer after 7th grade, we would go to Jones' Beach regularly on the early morning public bus and hang out all day during many summer days.

The essence of these childhood memories is that we had a great deal of independence. We got into some youthful mischief (which is not included herein), but nothing too serious. For several years we were in Boy Scouts together (eventually the troop was sponsored by Billy's church). The scouting experience included weekly meetings, camping and summer camp. Our summer camp was for two weeks (for two summers) at Camp Wawepak in Riverhead, Long Island. The surprising scenario was that our Troop Master had to work, so we were left alone for six out of 13 nights. Again, we survived without serious incident, but we had a great deal of independence.



A summer tradition in Wantagh was a 4th of July celebration. There were parades, games, food, and other events. Here is your Dad marching with the band in a parade in 1961. Our Little League teams also marched.

Your Dad and some of his talented neighborhood friends had formed a band named the “Chordials.” As you may know, your Dad played the drums. The band played their music during the afternoon session before the big evening dance. This was the 1950s at its best! Billy and I spent a great deal of time together especially during the basketball season for many years. We started playing on our Wantagh school teams from 7th grade onward to 12th grade.



This is your Dad as pictured in our basketball team’s write-up in our “Black & Gold” yearbook our senior year. We spent many a late night over the years riding the school buses to away games—allowing us to share news, to grow-up together, and to listen to the upper classmen’s eye-opening jokes and stories. Our teams were mediocre, but your Dad used his height to his great advantage.

Buzz DiMartino

In college we went in different directions. I always thought that Billy would have really enjoyed the liberal arts college experience. In the summer of 1973, my wife, Susan, and I visited your Dad and Mom at their new apartment, when he was stationed near Oxnard. They were very happy. Your Mom and Dad prepared a delicious Mexican dinner for us; it may have been my first Mexican food I had ever had. We had a wonderful evening, catching up on the past few years.

I am sure that you and your brother share many of the wonderful attributes of your Dad. He was a prince of a guy: smart, kindhearted, responsible, fun, and not without some mischief. I look forward to sharing more memories and details about any of the stories that I have touched on. Please contact me if you are traveling to Boston or for any reason, anytime at your convenience. *[Ed. Note: Buzz was a talented “three-letter” man in football, basketball, and baseball. Our Class voted him and Dina Olson as “Most athletic.” Other activities included National Honor Society, General Organization, and the Key Club.]*

Arthur “Buzz” DiMartino
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I entered Wantagh High School in my junior year in 1962 after spending two years at Pius X. I knew most of all the guys from little league, CYO, etc. I was able to reconnect with everyone once again, and that was a wonderful time. I still see many of our gang at various events, reunions and a monthly lunch get-together. Bill was most definitely a part of that wonderful time, and I recall speaking to him often. He gave his support as I made my adjustment from private to public high school. To this day, I think of Bill often. For 47 years I have been working at Grumman/Northrop Grumman, and for many of those years I worked on the F-14 Tomcat. I have mentioned to many of my colleagues of that high school friend who went on to fly the F-14—but more importantly the genuine person that Bill was always. *[Ed. Note : During his two years at Wantagh, Joe played varsity baseball and intramural sports.]*

Joseph Stephan
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It is an honor and a privilege to write to you today. I grew up with your Dad and consider him one of my best friends. I suspect we had more similarities in our growing up than we even realized when we were in our youth. Don't think for a second that your Dad and I ever talked about what it was like growing up in our homes. Oh, from time to time we'd joke about getting caught doing something wrong and getting in trouble. I remember Bob and Bill talking about how he had poked fun at his father when the boys got caught and they were getting a chewing out. Bob said "oh, oh, sounds like he has an umbrella!" and your Grandpa said, "yeah, and I know where to put it and how to open it!" Frankly that told me that the boys had a pretty good relationship with their father; I hope so.

Billy (sorry, but he will always be Billy to me) and I hung out together through high school although he was in the smart kids' classes and I wasn't. For some reason he seemed to enjoy talking to me and doing things with me from time to time. We may have double dated a few times and I know there were sports we played together.

He of course was the goalie on our soccer team and I was a lump on the offensive and defensive lines in football. In our senior year we played lacrosse together, and I think that cemented our friendship. He was that long drink of water in front of the goal, and thank goodness he had no weight or he would have been tough to move out of the way. I can't think of a time he was angry or upset or aggressive either on the field or off. He worked hard, was smart as a whip, and had a great attitude about people and life.

After graduation we had fewer and fewer chances to see each other. There was no social media of course, and I don't think either of us were into writing letters. I remember seeing him during the summer of one of his 'cruise' years at Annapolis. He had just returned from Beirut, and he talked of the beauty of the city and the thrill he had being in a foreign country. In those days Beirut was the Paris of the Middle East, and he saw it in its heyday. Surely the big thrill was flying off the deck of an aircraft carrier that summer. Geez, he got excited describing the thrill when the engines were roaring, the brakes cut loose as the catapult did its work, and the after burners kicked in as the jet shot off the deck. I can feel the thrill in his voice as I sit here writing to you. He had found his love ... or one of his loves.

I remember the summer that he brought Gayle home to meet the family and see his ol' stomping grounds. He always got the pretty girls, and your Mom was the finest of all. Oh, and were they ever happy together?! Looking back it seems like we were pretty young—I surely wasn't ready for the commitments they had made to each other. They certainly were. It sure seemed like he had his career at hand, the love of his life by his side, the corvette in the driveway, and all was right with the world.

I think of your Dad frequently, Taylor. There is only one person I communicate with from those days in Wantagh. In fact, last week I went back there for the first time since 1973, and yet I still feel like I have roots there. That says more about me than it does Wantagh, but it reflects in part my admiration for your Dad.

Your Dad was a wonderful friend, a warm, personable young man who knew how to laugh (yes, and party too) and be kind and honest and forgiving. I, too, miss him dearly. Please remember me to your Mom, brother, Uncle Bob, and Aunt Maryann. Yours is a special family and I wish you a wonderful trip; enjoy learning about Billy, he was one of the good ones. *[Ed. Note: John was a member of the National Honor Society, Spanish Club, and a talented athlete who played varsity football, basketball, wrestling, and track.]*

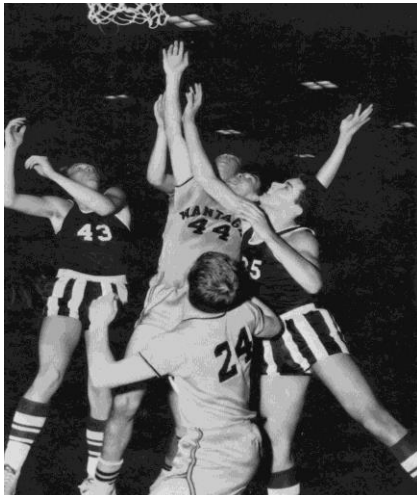
John Elizalde

503 740 9810

john_elizalde@hotmail.com



Hi Taylor and Jon, Your Dad was one of my best friends throughout junior high school and high school. We met playing basketball in 7th grade. Besides playing on the school teams, we played basketball in my backyard. We set the rim at 8 ft. and pretended we were playing an NBA All Star game, each of us taking on a favorite pro name.



Your dad wore numeral “44” during our senior year. As one of the tallest members of our team, he could always be depended upon to fight aggressively for a rebound at the basket or for a “jump ball.” The rather “short shorts” were standard issue back then! Times have changed.

Gordon Peterson

Although we went our separate ways in college, we did spend a bit of time together during summer vacations. It wasn't until I was drafted out of graduate school and enlisted in the US Navy and was stationed in Pensacola that we really reunited.

Your Dad and Gordon were both stationed there, and my wife, Nancy (my high school sweetheart from Wantagh) and I were now living in a small cluster of Surf N Sand cabins in Pensacola Beach, FL with your Dad, at a little cabin he had procured for us near his.

Unfortunately, this didn't last long—less than a year. Nancy and I moved to my next duty station, Norfolk, VA. I was assigned to the heavy cruiser USS Newport News. Your Dad was reassigned to San Diego. One year later, the *Newport News* received an order to report to Viet Nam for the mining of Haiphong Harbor, so the North Vietnamese couldn't receive supplies.

Your Dad and I tried to connect at the U.S. Naval Base in the Philippines, but our ships were never in port at the same time. Your Dad returned to California while the *Newport News* remained off the coast of Vietnam. It was shortly after I returned to New York and resumed my graduate studies that your Dad died. Needless to say, we were shocked beyond belief.

All these years later, you would be surprised at how often his name comes up in conversation. He was such a special guy, and there is still a hole that was left when we lost him. Love to Bob, Mary Ann, you and your family. A note from Nancy follows. *[Ed. Note: John was the vice president of our senior class and a member of the General Organization club, Dance Committee, and varsity basketball and baseball player for four years.]*

John Hall

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Dear Taylor and Jon, I also met your father in 7th grade. I actually remember telling a friend, after assessing what seemed to me to be an enormous class made up of hundreds of 12-year olds from five different elementary schools in Wantagh, that, hands down, John Hall and Billy Matthews were the nicest and cutest guys in our class!

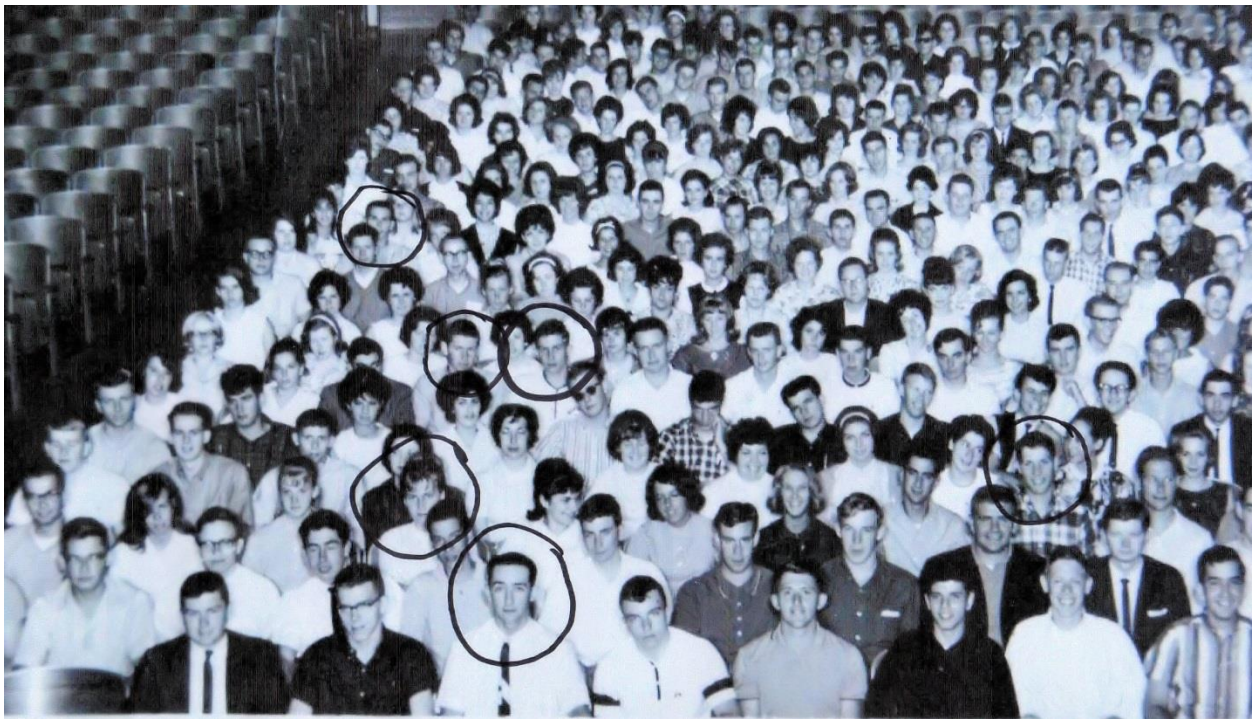
I started dating John when I was 15, and we got married the week we graduated from college—but I had the added bonus of John being such a good friend of your father's, so I was able to spend a lot of time with Billy during those years, too!

Your father was a total gentleman. He was smart, athletic, and fun to be with. I actually don't remember him ever saying anything unkind about anyone. His parents were lovely, and they always made his friends feel welcome.



Your dad was very popular in high school. He was elected vice president of our class during our sophomore year and president as a junior. He is shown here as a junior with Mike Hallenbeck, our class treasurer. In addition to his talent as an athlete, Bill also belonged to two of our school's most prestigious extracurricular activities—the National Honor Society (for his high grades in the classroom) when he was a junior and the Key Club during his sophomore through senior years. The Key Club's purpose was defined simply as “to serve the school and the community.” Students needed to be elected by member of the club to join. Bill was president of the Key Club during his senior year. He also was the student chairman of the committee that initiated the community service of mourning following the assassination of President Kennedy November 22, 1963.

Gordon Peterson



This photo of our senior class “back in the day” was taken shortly before we graduated in 1964. I circled John (first row), myself (3rd row), Buzz DiMartino (also 3rd row), John Tschirhart and, to his right, Gordon Peterson, and your Dad three rows behind them.

But most of all, I remember your father during the Pensacola days. That was a very hard time for me. I had a miscarriage shortly after I arrived down there, and John, who had enlisted, was low man on the totem pole. He had no control over his schedule and was off on duty a lot, so I was kind of stranded on the beach in the wintertime.

Your Dad was my lifeline during that time. He was a great friend. In the military world, most officers didn't "socialize" with enlisted personnel, especially in uniform, but your father never had a party without inviting us, and he and his friends came over regularly for dinner and just to hang out.

I was lucky that this overlapped with when your parents started dating, so I got to meet and spend time with your mother as well. While we always lived in different places, we stayed in touch after everyone left Pensacola, and I remember receiving photos of you during your early years—and your brother.

As John mentioned in his letter, we still think of your father often. If things had played out differently, I suspect we would know you well, and you and our kids would probably all be friends. We'd love to meet you one day if you ever find yourself coming to New York City. Our home telephone is: 212-260-4874. Love, Nancy. *[Ed. Note: Nancy was very active in all aspects of school life, including Government Organization, Future Teachers of America, Travel Club, The Warrior school newspaper, orchestra, intramural sports, and other activities.]*

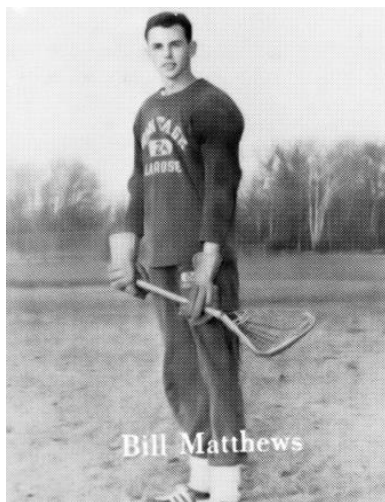
Nancy (Christensen) Hall
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I knew your Dad in Wantagh from 7th through 12th grade, and then he, Gordon Peterson, and I all went to the Naval Academy in the summer of 1964 from Wantagh High School. I have thought of your Dad many times over the years, and every time with the deepest respect and admiration, and much sorrow.

Back in Wantagh our classmates held your Dad in the highest esteem. I never heard anyone say an unkind word about him: he was universally liked. I don't mean to gush on and sound embellishing, but he was just plain enjoyable. He was also tall, and you could see him walking down the school hallways from the other end. I would think 'there's Billy, I've gotta see how he's doing.'

He also dated one of the prettiest girls in our class for several years, what a handsome couple. I knew your Uncle Bob a little, he seemed to share the same fine qualities with your Dad, probably handed down from your Grandfather Matthews who I felt honored to meet a few times.



Your Dad and I were teammates on the freshman and varsity lacrosse teams during our days in Wantagh. Our coaches worked us and drilled us as you would expect, but they also made playing the game a very wonderful and rewarding experience. Your Dad was our center attack man—his height and quick flick shot made him a real threat to the other teams. I was a defensive player, and we'd scrimmage against each other a lot. I can recall getting frustrated on more than one occasion trying to prevent him from scoring.

Those were very good days, probably my favorite time playing any sport. Even getting to practice was a treat, because we had to walk from the high school through some woods, across a small highway, through some more woods, then cross a stream on a log, just to get to the practice field.

Often there would be some teammates hiding in the woods waiting for you to cross the stream, and then they'd bombard the stream with rocks to get you soaked. In our senior year your Dad dated another one of the prettiest girls in our class and she would be on the sidelines on game days keeping the game clock, and as she noted wryly in my yearbook, keeping track of our time in the penalty box.

I don't think I was ever in one of the same classes as your Dad. I was pretty good in school, but your Dad was very good in school. In 7th grade he was in 7-1 and eighth grade he was in 8-1. If you can believe it, they would put us kids in 13 classes, in 7th grade from 7-1 to 7-13, with the brainiest kids in 7-1 on up to the most struggling kids in 7-13. Talk about getting labelled early on in life, what was the thinking there? Anyway, your Dad was one very well rounded kid for all his academic achievements.

At the Academy your Dad lived on the other side of the world from me. That is, everyone lived in the same building, Bancroft Hall, but he was in the eighth Company while I was in the 27th Company, so our paths seldom crossed. Seems silly that we didn't get together often, but the Academy was not like a college, time for socializing was minimal, especially plebe year when hazing by upperclassmen seemed the biggest issue in your life. We ventured out of our rooms when necessary.

He and I did play on the freshman (plebe) lacrosse team there, but I can't say that it was as much fun as high school. Things became very serious at Navy lacrosse, the varsity team was the national champion for the five years before we arrived and that continued for several years after.

In spite of not seeing one another often at USNA, we would get together back in Wantagh on leaves. There were some fine parties with memories that remain today. I resigned from the Academy after two years, deciding that a naval career was not for me. So our paths veered apart and my only contact of sorts was hearing news about his last days at USNA and his Naval exploits.

I am glad to hear you are taking a tour with Gordon, and I wish I could be there to share fond memories of your Dad, but I live in Colorado these days. I will close by saying you can be so very proud of your Dad, and I bet he would be very proud of you and Jonathan, after all, you have excellent genes. *[Ed. Note: John was a member of the Government Organization Club, German Club, Chess Club, and played varsity football, indoor track, and lacrosse.]*

John Tschirhart
cheerheart@msn.com



I have included a photo from May 1965, taken on Gordon's front lawn at his home in Wantagh. We were on a three-day leave from the Naval Academy at the end of our plebe year and feeling "spiffy" (midshipman slang for "cool" or impressive) in our new khaki uniforms. From left to right: your Dad, Earl Kindstrom, Scott McDaniel, Gordon Peterson, and me. Earl and I were roommates. Best, John Tschirhart

Gordo adds: We're not smiling ... but then again, we were returning to "the monastery!"



Bill Matthews was "the class of the class". He carried himself in a way that was model to us Long Island yokels, standing tall in physical stature and personal character. There is no doubt in my mind that Bill would have led a full life that would be an inspiration to us all. His early death robbed not only those who knew and loved him, but also those he might have touched in future years. *[Ed. Note: Our Class selected Bruce as "Most helpful to the school, Most likely to succeed" along with Dolores Giordano. He was also active in numerous clubs and played varsity soccer (captain senior year) and baseball (co-captain senior year).]*

Bruce Wheeler
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Just like my friend and WHS/USNA classmate John Tschirhart, you will get a "two-fer" with my recollections on your father, because I was fortunate to be his classmate during the years we lived in Wantagh and again at the Naval Academy. My fond memories of Bill go back to when I first met him at our Beech Street Elementary School in Wantagh in the mid-1950s. Wantagh had several elementary schools, but the Beech Street School was one of the largest and most modern.

Bill and I were what I call "school-day" friends, because my home was located more than two miles away on Jerusalem Avenue, the boundary between Wantagh and Levittown on Long Island's south shore in Nassau County. As a child, one's day-to-day playmates generally lived on or near the street where you lived, like my neighbor and classmate Jim Boyle. We all looked forward to summer vacation and such pastimes as playing Little League baseball, street games like stickball, trading baseball cards for teams like the Brooklyn Dodgers, New York Giants and the Bronx Bombers, and riding our bikes all over town right down to the south shore of Long Island.

As Buzz DiMartino noted, we seemed to have more independence as a child in those days. I knew I needed to be home by dinner time during summer vacation, but beyond that I was free to pedal my bike to my heart's content around Wantagh and the woodlands and streams that bordered Wantagh Parkway.

By way of background (sorry, it is the historian in me), Wantagh is an old community, named for the "grand sachem" (chief) of the Montauk Indians hundreds of years ago. Tell most people who are not from New York that you were raised in Wantagh and they invariably ask, "Oh, I know where Montauk is," confusing Wantagh for Montauk Point at Long Island's east end. President Washington visited the small village of Wantagh (then called Jerusalem) in 1790 during his five-day visit to Long Island.

We prided our town as being the "Gateway to Jones Beach," a magnificent attraction south of our town accessed by Wantagh Parkway. I mention this because Jones Beach was a favorite place to go every summer owing to its beautiful beach along the Atlantic Ocean, the Jones Beach Theater on Zach's Bay with its water for a stage, and other activities. One of my best summer jobs in high school was "working the grill" at one of the beach's snack bars.



Many who attended the Beech Street elementary school also attended first grade at a small, two-story school a short distance down the street. It was Wantagh's oldest school, dating to the turn of the 19th century. The four classrooms were large. We sat at old desks made of cherry wood—with a hole for an inkwell at the top. The school is well-maintained today as a day-care center.

I first met your father when we were in Mrs. Lamb's fifth-grade class. What stands out most in my mind is what a swell guy he was—and the fact that he stood a good head taller than me and my classmates, even then! He always had time for a pleasant greeting and invariably had a smile on his face. We all knew him as "Billy" then. Later, at the Academy, this was shortened to "Bill."

Each day in school, after lunch time when the weather permitted, we went outdoors for recess across the street at a large athletic field. We played all manner of active games and invariably returned to the classroom in the afternoon hot, sweaty, and with an occasional skinned knee. Sometimes, if we arrived at school early, we would also have a pick-up game of dodge ball or "keep away" in the playground adjacent to one end of the school.



The Beech Street School continues in use today, looking very much like it did in the 1950s when your dad attended school there.

Your dad was an excellent student and athlete. Some aspects of growing up in Wantagh that stand out in my mind were the school's high academic standards, outstanding faculty and staff, and the number of extracurricular activities from elementary school onward. At the Beech Street School, for example, we had the opportunity to join the band or orchestra in the fourth grade. Your dad played the drums; I played the violin (my sister played piano, so I wanted to try a different instrument). I believe he also played with the orchestra during our modest concerts. These activities carried over into high school, although your dad dropped band after his freshman year, no doubt owing to the many other activities that competed for his time.

During one band concert, Bill wore a bright red sports coat. He towered over everyone anyway because he was tall for his age even then, but that jacket really set him apart. My parents would attend these concerts if my father was not away on sea duty (he was an officer in the Navy). I remember my mother asking me if I knew the tall, attractive boy who was standing in the back row in the red sports coat! Well, it was your father!

My elementary teachers like Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Kellerman, Mrs. Lamb, and Mr. Bailey were outstanding teachers. They expected us to be prepared with homework assignments and to work hard in the classroom, but there was still time for fun. In retrospect, I may have clowned around too much at times—anything for a laugh, even then!

The friendships we forged in those early years of our childhood continued into our days with the “Wantagh Warriors” at Wantagh High School. They have now spanned a lifetime. Bill was extremely sociable, easy-going, and friendly, so he always had a large circle of friends. We have good turnouts at our periodic WHS reunions. This isn't unusual; alumni from all high school classes generally have fond memories of the friendships and special days we shared growing up in Wantagh. We were very fortunate.

In September 1958 everyone in Wantagh High's Class of 1964 came together for the first time when we left the several elementary schools in our small town and entered seventh grade. The seventh and eighth grades attended the same school building as the four upper classes. Later, a separate wing was built at the school for those going to junior high school. Again, just as in elementary school, we had exceptionally well-qualified teachers. A number of them taught at local community colleges in the evening. The school is consistently ranked at the top academically to the present day.

Wantagh High School, shown here in a recent photo, hasn't changed much since the 1960s ... but the school marker is new, and the tree is taller!



I shared a number of classes with your dad during our high school years. Because I was a member of our cross country, indoor track, and outdoor track & field teams we never competed in the same sport. We also had an extraordinary number of extracurricular activities (I counted 33 in our senior yearbook) that encompassed a wide range of interest. Our school even boasted a shooting range in the basement for a rifle club!

Extracurricular activities were not solely devoted to academic or recreational pursuits. Many were career-related (e.g. future teachers) or contributed directly to the quality of our high school experience (e.g., a very professional Drama Club, the school newspaper, the Key Club, the *Black and Gold* yearbook, band, orchestra, chorus, etc.). Dances were also held during the school year, culminating in the major hops during the last month of the school year as graduation approached. I believe your dad was often in attendance, but I'm not the person to ask because I only went to one dance in four years—a “turn-about” dance to which I was invited!

Again, we were fortunate to have such outstanding teachers and a full slate of college-preparatory courses in math, science, English, history, and foreign language that would serve us very well at the Academy and beyond. Those who worked hard over four years studying a foreign language, for example, could become fluent conversationally by the time they graduated. Later, during our first summer at the Academy, we took a test and, if you scored well, you were able to validate the Academy's requirement for two semesters of a foreign language and take other elective courses.



Here is your dad pictured in our yearbook as a sophomore. As always, he was generally a head taller than our classmates!

I still have our high school's three-page, mimeographed Department of Social Studies handout on "Answering the Essay-Type Question in History." Our lengthy New York State Regents examinations in history included mandatory essay questions. The handout contained detailed guidelines for interpreting and answering them. One excerpt says, "Strive to acquire the art of writing, including *multum in parve*—that is, to say much that is significant in a few words." (I seem to be ignoring that counsel now!)

As a sports writer for our school newspaper, I accompanied my fellow students on the editorial staff on field trips to New York City to attend Columbia University's School of Journalism's workshop for high school newspapers. I still have the sports-writing handbook we were given at the day-long event.

I cite these examples because our education in high school exerted a very important influence when we graduated and reported to the Naval Academy. Our transition to the Academy's rigorous and demanding academic program was seamless. We owe our elementary and high school teachers an immense debt of gratitude for their years of hard work and example.

One interest that your dad and I shared was the U.S. Navy. Your paternal grandfather worked at Grumman Aircraft Corporation in Bethpage—a company known in the Navy as "The Grumman Iron Works" owing to the strength and durability of the aircraft it had designed and built for the Navy over many decades. My father was a career Navy man who enlisted when he was 17 and, 31 years later, retired as a lieutenant commander. A Navy assignment at Grumman is what brought my family to Long Island from Boston in 1948.

Your dad and I each enlisted in the Naval Reserve when we turned 17 during our junior year in high school. He enlisted in the Reserve's aviation program that drilled, as I recall, at Floyd Bennett Field near JFK airport in Queens. On the other hand, I was assigned to a surface unit that drilled in nearby Freeport. Our enlistment required us to attend a two-week recruit training program during our summer vacation prior to our senior year, to report for drill sessions for several hours one night each week, and to complete a two-week active duty assignment during our first year of service.

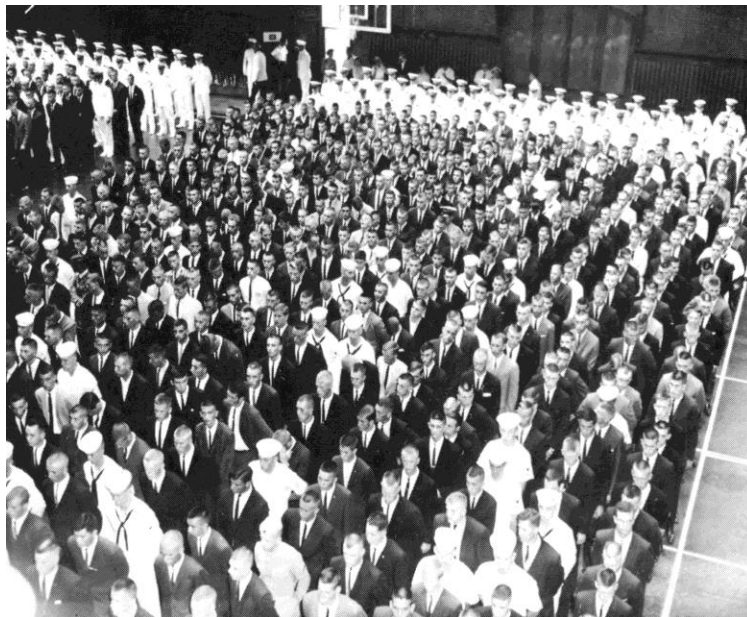
We each had the same goal, however, and that was to obtain one of the Secretary of the Navy's 120 appointments allotted to the Naval Reserve. We were successful in this endeavor. The year of Navy training served us well when we reported to the Naval Academy. For one thing, we were a leg up knowing how to march!

The final months of our high school years passed quickly and soon your Dad, John Tschirhart, and I were heading to Annapolis. A year later another high school classmate, Mike Saraniero, entered the Academy as a member of the Class of 1969 together with Steve Comiskey a 1965 graduate of Wantagh High. Mike spent a year at Bullis Preparatory School. Few high schools in the country could boast of having six alumni attend the Academy in a two-year period, so that is another testament to WHS's "whole-person" approach to a student's academic, physical, and social development.

Our commencement program notes that your dad received New York State Regent's endorsements in language and science on his diploma. We graduated Tuesday evening, June 23, 1964. Seven days later, we were at the Naval Academy to take our oath of office as midshipmen in the Navy.

On to the Naval Academy

Induction Day for the Class of 1968 was beastly hot with excessively high humidity, so our oath-of-office ceremony June 30 was held indoors in Dahlgren Hall—what was then an armory that doubled as a facility for intramural sports, popular-music concerts, and formal balls during June Week (the week full of activities preceding graduation). It is a far more elegant building now. My classmates and I were all assigned to one of 36 companies. We remained with these men in the same company for our entire four years. As we marched back to Bancroft Hall I felt like we were going to be like red meat thrown to the lions—the upperclassmen from the Class of 1966 who would oversee our indoctrination and training during Plebe Summer were waiting! I was right.



Our Class was inducted at the height of the Cold War and the early years of the Vietnam War. It numbered 1,347 at its height and included more than 200 men with enlisted service in the active ranks of the Navy and Marine Corps, as well as enlisted men in the Naval Reserve. 70 percent stood in the top fifth of their high school class academically. Approximately 52 percent of our class served as presidents or student-body officers in their high school class, and 73 percent were varsity athletes. This was typical for most Naval Academy classes then and now.

That first summer in Annapolis was filled with PT, marching, sailing lessons, qualification on the M-1 rifle and .45-caliber pistol with Marine Corps instructors, more marching, lessons and lectures in naval history, battalion athletic competitions, more marching, an endless number of "white-glove" room inspections, measurements at the Tailor Shop for our beautiful wool "service-dress blue" and cotton "summer dress white" tailored uniforms, more marching, and the persistent memorization of a pocket-sized, 255-page book ("Reef Points") packed with information on the Code of Conduct, Naval Academy history, customs and traditions, varsity athletics, Navy and Marine Corps history, Navy songs, and our class "rates" (required knowledge, rules, and regulations, etc.) as plebes.

We learned that there were five answers to any question: (1) Yes, Sir, (2) No Sir, (3) I'll Find Out, Sir; (4) No Excuse, Sir; and (5) Aye, Aye, Sir! We "chopped" (jogged) in a full "brace" (chin tucked in) and "eyes in the boat" (looking straight ahead) if we were indoors transiting Bancroft. We also ate meals in a full brace while sitting on the outer three inches of our chair's seat as upperclassmen peppered us with questions. Failing to know the correct answer to required areas of professional knowledge or other plebe "rates" would result in a "come around" to that upperclassman's room in the early morning before breakfast or during another "come-around" session before evening meal. Think of hazing with a capital H for what those sessions were like. It was nothing to do 68 push-ups ... our class numerals ... plus "one to beat Army!"

I have shared with you separately the history of our Class that I co-authored with a classmate of mine, so there is no need for me to dwell on the experiences we had over our four, busy years. It is worth noting, however, that we only graduated 836 members in my Class. Despite being one of the best-qualified classes academically at the time we arrived in Annapolis, by the time we graduated we had experienced the highest attrition up to this time dating back to World War II—37.9%.

Attrition during our first year was a significant factor owing to the combination of the demanding academic routine, multiple priorities all competing for scarce time, and the extraordinary challenges associated with our "Plebe Indoctrination System." Some of my classmates decided the Naval Academy was not for them. My classmates and I understand their decisions; I'm sure most of us questioned our ability or desire to "stay the course" at one time or another. Those who departed our ranks are considered to be members of our Class. We include them on class communications if they desire and invite them to our reunions.



This photo illustrates one of our "P-Work" (practical work) navigation examinations in the top "deck" of Luce Hall. Times have change with today's highly digitized navigational systems, but there is still something to be said for a chronometer, sextant, and compass!

We referred to our Class as 196X ... with X meaning "experimental." During our time at the Academy, one superintendent introduced an academic "revolution" that added to our already demanding academic course work. Fortunately, we could minor in an area of academic concentration as a result. Some classmates "overloaded" with additional courses to complete a designated major. A major multi-year construction program commenced to build new facilities. We also faced a more demanding professional training program that included an examination after our summers of naval training at sea on board ships of the fleet. These developments also took a toll. Even as upperclassmen we were severely regulated and did not experience many of the simple pleasures our college contemporaries took for granted. I suppose that is one reason why we sometimes referred to the Naval Academy as the "uncollege!"

Through it all, there were wonderful educational opportunities, top-flight athletic teams, many extra-curricular activities, and summer training cruises to distant oceans (*not* of the Carnival Cruise Lines variety—some of us deployed on ships conducting wartime operations off the coast of Vietnam on our “first-class” cruise). We honed leadership skills, learned the importance of discipline, and forged very close friendships with our classmates that have lasted through peace and war for more than five decades.

Just as John Tschirhart related earlier, it may seem surprising but I also did not have many opportunities to see or interact with your dad during our time at the Academy for the same reasons. That sounds crazy, I know, but remember that we’re talking about the “uncollege!” The Brigade of Midshipmen was organized into two regiments with 18 companies in each. I was in a different regiment, did not share any academic classes with him, nor participate in summer training together. Classmates generally formed the closest friendships with their roommates, company mates, or those they came to know playing sports or sharing other activities together.

Also, varsity athletes had even less discretionary time—even as upperclassman at the end of the academic day or on Saturdays. We devoted many hours to practice and athletic competitions. As a senior, for example, it was not unusual to have four classes on Saturday morning each semester. We carried an average of 21 semester hours. Such was life at the Academy and living in “Mother B.”

Finally, our final spring break arrived with a few days of leave authorized over a long weekend. As seniors—first classmen—we were authorized to purchase automobiles and drive them within the seven-mile limit of the Academy and the “yard” (our term for campus). Your dad was very proud of the new Chevy Corvette he bought. Like so many of my classmates, I took advantage of the low interest rate for car loans offered by the Northeastern Bank of Scranton, Penn. I purchased my shiny English racing green MGB sports car from Capitol Motors on West Street in Annapolis. It was waiting for me when I returned from my cruise to the Western Pacific in August. I drove home to Wantagh for a couple of weeks leave before commencing our senior year. I garaged the car with my parents until we were authorized to drive in the yard seven months later.

Your dad’s entry in our *Lucky Bag* yearbook in 1968 relates that “... there were times when he wanted to change the Academy to a liberal arts college since his academic inclinations were definitely more literary than scientific. Even with this and numerous activities, he managed an occasional appearance on the Superintendent’s list [academic grade average above 3.0 on a 4.0 scale].”

Prophetically, his yearbook entry also notes: “Bill shows an inclination towards fast cars and fast planes and hopes to indulge the latter by flying F-4s when he graduates. Wherever he goes, both on and off duty, Bill is sure to be an asset to the Navy.” Bill’s dream of flying in fast aircraft like the F-4 Phantom would be realized at the completion of flight training a year after graduation.

June Week 1968, the culmination of our days at Navy—at last! Our weather was clear, sunny, and warm after a cold, wet spring. The week was spent with our parents and family (and a girlfriend, perhaps), hops (i.e., dances), band concerts, picnics, sailing on the Severn and the Chesapeake Bay, full-dress parades, beautiful “drags” (dates) in mini-skirts, crowded streets in Annapolis, and brand-new cars (GTOs, 442s, Vettes, Mk 3000 Austin Healeys, an occasional Porsche, MGBs ... no vans!).



Your dad was assigned to the 26th Company, shown here “passing in in review” during a dress parade on Worden Field, the Academy’s parade ground. Each company was graded on its precision in marching and performing the manual of arms during autumn and spring parades. The scores were one factor used to determine the Academy’s top-ranked “color company” each year. This tradition, as old as the Academy, continues to the present day.

As noted in our Class history, two outside events during our last semester provided texture to the historic times upon which we were about to embark upon graduation. On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King was murdered, and during the early morning hours of June 5, 1968—just hours prior to our graduation—U.S. Senator Robert Kennedy was also assassinated. These tragic deaths were a shock to us all and affected us profoundly.

At our commencement ceremony at Navy-Marine Corps Stadium June 5, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, the Chief of Naval Operations, told us that we were at, “... the beginning and not the end of your acquisition of knowledge.” Prophetically, he said we would be called upon “... to participate in and contribute to the development of national policy—a policy which protects our interests, our security, and the peace of the world.” *[Gordon Peterson served as a Navy helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War, flying 515 combat missions with the Seawolves of HAL-3. He later served as a Navy public affairs specialist before retiring as a captain in 1998. Most recently, he served as U.S. Senator Jim Webb’s military legislative assistant from 2007 to 2013.]*

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We received our diplomas and raised our right hands to swear our commissioning oath as officers in the Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force (one classmate). With that, we threw our “covers” in the air in a fit of jubilation. We all graduated with Bachelor of Science degrees. Some members of our class were able to satisfy requirements for a major field of study too.



U.S. Naval Academy Reflections



Billy and I were “firsties” (i.e., first class midshipmen senior year) roommates for winter set. He was our midshipman company commander. [Ed. note: Each academic year was divided into three sets—autumn, winter, spring. Midshipman company officers were appointed to leadership positions within the Brigade of Midshipman. Each company had first classmen designated midshipman company commander, deputy commander, and chief petty officer.]

One tale I remember concerned his brand new corvette he drove up to Long Island. Well, another company mate, Denny Rowley, was invited to drive his brand-new corvette up to the Island as well and spend the weekend with the Matthews family. How nice—two brand new corvettes. I noted a sense of sadness on their return to the Yard, however. It seems the two corvettes had a rapid and uncontrolled meeting on Long Island. I think Gary Jensen also drove his car (a non-corvette) along with them. All fun aside, Billy captured the respect of all around him and was an admired member of our company mates and classmates. *[Ed. Note: A Michigan native, Mike served three sea tours as a surface warfare officer before entering the Naval Reserve in 1977, retiring as a captain in 1998. His civilian career was in engineering and teaching mathematics.]*

Mike Metcalf

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As related by Mike Metcalf in his reflections, he was the 26th Company’s deputy midshipman commander (at left) at the same time your dad (center) was the “three striper” midshipman company commander during the winter “set” his senior year. In this capacity, your dad performed important leadership duties for his company and worked closely with the commissioned officer in charge of the 26th Company, Captain Berlis Ennis, U.S. Marine Corps. At right is Bill’s company mate Ed Hollyfield



I regarded Bill as a good friend throughout the four years but particularly during first class year. Bill and I roomed together first set during first class year when I was Company Commander (a “three striper”), and Bill was Sub-Commander (a “two striper”). In an unusual situation, Bill was then Company Commander second set.

I'd like to think I was at least partially responsible for that. The original plan had Curt Schantz, another classmate in our company, as second set company commander but then whoever was scheduled to be the Battalion Commander had some "conduct issues" so Curt was selected to have the Battalion slot. Our Company Officer asked me who should take his place and I told him Bill Matthews was the best choice.

At the time was I was dating Mary Jo Beneke. Bill, Denny Rowley and I used to talk about the perfect date being "attractive, witty intelligent and thoroughly poised in any situation." I think there were also some qualification about being filthy rich and living above a liquor store but those are probably not important to this story. In any event in talking to Mary Jo one evening about a possible date for Bill she mentioned that she had someone who met all those criteria. Turns out it was Mary Jo's younger sister, Gayle, who Bill dated and eventually married.

During Spring Break our first class year, Bill invited Denny Rowley and me to stay with him at his home on Long Island. We had all just gotten our cars; I had an Olds 442 convertible and Bill and Denny both had Corvettes. After a night of clubbing in Manhattan, and more than a few drinks we left to drive home. As I turned a corner I heard a crash, and the girl I was with looked back and said, "They ran into each other!" I don't remember who was in the lead, maybe Denny can help me out on that, but someone had stepped off the curb. The lead car stopped suddenly, and the second car didn't stop in time. Remember 1968 was the first year for the Corvette redesign so there were lots of interested bystanders wanting to see the new cars. After graduation Bill went off to flight school, I went to sub school and, as happens in different warfare communities, we sort of lost track of each other. Please pass on my best wishes to Taylor and tell him if he is ever in Hawaii to look me up. I'd be happy to meet with him. *[Ed. Note: Gary was a nuclear-qualified submariner who served on a number of attack submarines and commanded USS Swordfish, retiring as a captain in 1997. A second career followed in federal service with the Office of Naval Research and Department of Homeland Security.]*

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Aloha, Taylor, My name is Dennis Rowley. I'm proud to call your Dad a friend. Billy went through the USNA experience with all of us in the Eighth, then the Twenty-sixth companies. You know...that's a \$250,000 education crammed down your throat a nickel at a time. (We chose a different part of the anatomy for that description, but that's another story). Through it all, your Dad led the way with inextinguishable good humor, a quick wit, and a great sense of fun and foolishness. Bill was a friend to all. He and I roomed together First Class Year. Two significant events from that time come immediately to mind.

Act One: How I Met Your Mother. At one point First Class year there was a big concert at the University of Maryland. Our buddy, Gary Jensen had his date set up Billy and me with girls from her sorority. At the last minute, Bill's date couldn't make it. Too late to set up a replacement, my date said that she had a little sister who would love to attend the concert. Ever the gentleman, Bill was happy to offer to take her along. She was, as I recall, fourteen at the time.

Tall and willowy, she was a beauty. Although much younger than the rest of our party, she held her own in conversation and displayed a quiet confidence. Back in our room the night after the concert, I was good humoredly teasing Bill about ‘jail bait.’ Although the teasing continued as he asked this youngster out the second time, it promptly ended when he asked her out a third time. Even I could figure out that there might be something going on. That beautiful young woman was, of course, your mother. I remember fondly the day that, years later, when we celebrated Bill’s ability to finally take Gayle into a bar legally.

Act Two: How I almost killed your Dad. Billy and I proudly picked up our brand new 1968 Corvettes at the same time. Wantagh, New York was a lot closer than Walnut Creek, California, so we decided to drive our new ‘Vettes up to visit his parents/your grandparents on a long weekend. Bill fixed us up with a couple of dates and we headed in to the City.

After a long and liquid evening we were coming out of town at 0200 the next morning. I was in the lead and Bill was on my tail. We were stopped at a light on the Avenue of the Americas. There were pedestrians in the crosswalk when the light changed. Evidently your Dad had lost his situational awareness by this time. Seeing the green light, he proceeded to ram his brand new ‘Vette into the back of my brand new ‘Vette. It was not pretty.

I distinctly remember that I had 314 miles on the car when Bill decided to play bumper cars. Standing on the sidewalk, surveying the wreckage, I placed my hands as deeply as I could into the bottom of my pockets so that I wouldn’t strangle him. Had I done so, you would not be here today. No need to thank me. Just buy me a beer when we meet ...and meet we can. My Gail and I are frequently in San Diego. Gail was a good friend to your Dad. We’d love to meet with you on our next visit and share some more great stories about him. He was one hell of a man. *[Ed. Note: Denny was a naval aviator who flew combat missions with HAL-3 in Vietnam, a Navy test pilot, and helicopter pilot and detachment officer in charge in several squadrons before retiring as a commander. His civilian career included management of the Pacific Missile Range Facility in Kauai, Hawaii.]*

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“Billy” Matthews was my roommate along with “Johnny” Machniak part of plebe year. Billy and Johnny were both from New York so, despite the perils of Plebe Year, we always had fun - particularly on weekends. Johnny always had a plan, Billy was happy to go along with it, and after a while they would convince me to come along too! When I arrived at Navy, I had never heard of Lacrosse, but Billy soon fixed that. He played Battalion Lacrosse and was an avid fan. He dragged me to the first few Navy games Plebe year, and soon I became a diehard fan as well.

I can remember sitting in the stands on spring Saturday afternoons, after a particularly hard week as Plebes in the Hall, with Billy and Johnny watching Navy play – screaming our heads off. Billy knew most of the players on the team, particularly the guys from Long Island. Even after Plebe year we would attend the Lacrosse games together.

We were fortunate to be at the Academy when the great Jimmy Lewis was there and Navy was National Champs several years in a row. Nothing made Billy happier than to see those great teams disassemble an opponent – particularly if it was Army!



In this photo likely taken at the end of plebe year in early June 1965, Bill is flanked, from the left) by classmates John Machniak and Jim Andrews. They were roommates for a part of Bill's first year at the Academy. Both John and Jim departed our ranks prior to graduation.

Billy was not a great student, but he was determined to graduate so he worked hard to keep his grades up. He always seemed to me to be mature for his age as he was able to keep a level head about him no matter what the situation (except at lacrosse games).

The 68ers of 26th Company were and still are a great company with a bunch of wonderful guys, but I always considered Billy one of the best. Everybody liked him, he was always willing to take time out to talk, and was as loyal as they came. He didn't make a big deal of it, but he was very proud of being at the Naval Academy and becoming a naval officer.

After he graduated we did not see each other much as he went to be an aviator and I went off to nuclear power school. But I vividly remember seeing him in Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines, during the Vietnam War. I was stationed on a cruiser, and he was assigned to a squadron on the aircraft carrier USS *Midway*. Our ships were in port for "R & R" (rest and relaxation). His wife, Gayle, had come to Subic, and I had the opportunity to meet her. He was clearly happy with his life. He was flying, had a great wife, and he was serving his country. Sometime later I heard of his death and have always kicked myself for not staying in touch with him better. He was a great company mate! *[Ed. Note: "JT" Lyons was a nuclear-qualified surface warfare officer who served on nuclear-powered and conventionally powered cruisers and destroyers who retired as a captain in 1999. A second career in engineering followed.]*

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I had the chance to meet with Taylor and his mother when Taylor was in college, and then again last week when he was visiting the DC area. He lives in San Diego and has a very successful career as an engineer. I know how proud Billy would be of Taylor, especially given the fact that Billy and I were "reluctant engineers," both of us escaping to literature as our chosen minors despite the mandatory engineering curriculum for our majors.

I've talked with Taylor personally about his father, whom all of us remember so vividly as a quiet, funny, and caring friend. I'm glad that he is now hearing so many personal testimonials to the impact that Billy had on all of us. *[Ed. Note: Jim, a highly decorated Marine rifle platoon and company commander during the Vietnam War, has interspersed a career in public service in the Department of Defense and U.S. Congress with a distinguished career as a journalist and author. Most recently, he served as a U.S. senator for Virginia, chairing the Personnel Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Armed Services. The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill that he drafted and introduced as legislation was enacted into law in 2008.]*

Jim Webb



Bill was a good friend: affable, quick-witted, and engaging. A company mate but never a roommate, I can chip in where JT left off after graduation – Pensacola. At Flight Training in the fall of 1968, Bill was part of our Sunday night “Smothers Brothers Ground School.” I was the only one with a new bride, Kathleen, and a TV – black & white 19” (!). The crew consisted of Billy Matthews, Ed Madden, John McKee, Denny Rowley, Hank Schmidt and myself. Gathering at our somewhat small apartment, they would bring the beer (typically a case of Old Milwaukee – ensign affordable) and we would cook something, or often as not a bucket of KFC would accompany the beer. We would then settle down and watch the “Smothers Brothers Hour” and “Mission Impossible.”

Our gatherings culminated in November with Kathleen cooking Thanksgiving dinner for the crew, after which we dispersed to other locations for our next level of training. This was a truly fun and memorable ten weeks and Bill Matthews was in the center of it. *[Ed. Note: Tom was a jet pilot who served as a flight instructor, flew A-7 attack jets, and other aircraft before transferring to the Naval Reserve and retiring in 1992 as a captain. A career in engineering fields followed.]*

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Bill and I were on opposite ends of a few measures. Bill was tall. I was not. Bill was quiet. I was not (unless upperclassmen were around). I was a swimmer and spent most all my time "head down" smelling chlorine and looking at little tiles go by. Bill was a heads up guy who "smelled the roses" and watched the days go by ... until his next "outing." Bill got the liberal arts stuff; I suffered through. He had a self-assurance about him, a friendly demeanor, and he always had time for his classmates.



The Herndon Monument is a 21-foot, granite Obelisk located a short distance away from the Naval Academy Chapel. Each year, before the last full-dress parade of the academic year, upper class midshipmen heavily grease the monument. Then, following the parade, the plebe class races to it with the goal of climbing its slick sides. They all work together to climb the monument and replace a plebe's "dixie-cup hat" on top with a "combination cover" like your dad is wearing in this photo of him taken in June 1965—after our Class scaled Herndon in 23 minutes 7 seconds, one of the fastest times on record. This marked the official end of our plebe year. We were third-classmen ... plebes no more!

While there is often banter about selections for company leadership positions, I recall the Company being pleased that Bill would lead us. I never crossed paths after graduation due to warfare specialty choices, but I was deeply saddened when I learned of his death. He would certainly have excelled in his career. Simply stated, he was a great guy. *[Ed. Note: Joe was a surface warfare officer and destroyer man who went on to serve as an acquisition professional before retiring as a commander in 1989. In civilian life he worked in strategic planning, business development, and defense management. He also served as our Class president for many years.]*

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Bill was a great guy, and I continue to think of him often. He and Denny Rowley were my two closest friends both at the academy and flight school. My initial memories of Bill involved his performing as the goalie on the Company soccer team. We virtually had no one on the team that knew anything about soccer (mainly ex-football players) so Bill had an extremely busy time trying to defend the goal. He never got frustrated and always kept the rest of us relaxed no matter how badly we were getting beat.

I also spend a great many Saturday nights during youngster and second class years on liberty with Bill in DC. We adopted the time-honored approach of wearing civilian clothes underneath our uniforms at Saturday formation to maximize the five-hour time slot. On far too many occasions, we left DC testing whether you could really make it from Georgetown to the Academy within 35 minutes.

I also remember how proud Bill and Denny were when they got their new Corvettes in the Spring of our senior year. Shortly thereafter, we were all in New York on a "long weekend" break when they both ran into each other in their new cars. I distinctly remember when Bill met his future wife, Gayle, Taylor's mother. From that point on, I had to find a new running mate for the Saturday night excursions into DC!

I also roomed with Bill, Denny and Kevin Moore during flight school at one of the old two-bedroom, cinder-block structures located immediately on Pensacola Beach. We had a great time during that period, and Bill seemed particularly relaxed and happy. It was clear that he was enjoying flight training and that he had found the perfect career for him.

Being in the Marine Corp I regrettably lost contact with Bill and others following flight training. I did, however, have one last contact with Bill. In autumn 1972, I was flying out of Nam Phong (a/k/a the “Rose Garden”) in South Vietnam, and we often refueled and rearmed following a mission at the airfield at Da Nang. One day, I was sitting in the shack located off the runway in Da Nang, exhausted and staring straight ahead. After about 15 minutes, I got up to leave and finally noticed the guy sitting next to me. It was Bill, equally exhausted and also waiting for this plane to be refueled! I have always been grateful for that last opportunity to reconnect with him.

In short, Bill was one of the best guys I ever knew. He was laid back, maintained an “even strain” under all circumstances, and was probably the best-liked guy in the 26th Company. I am so sorry that Taylor and his brother had such a short time with him. *[Ed. Note: Pete served as a captain and Marine Corps aviator; he resigned his commission, attended law school, and is a practicing attorney.]*

Pete Degnan

pdegan@meagpower.org



At the beginning of our plebe summer in June 1964, our company was assigned rooms at the same level as and very near Bancroft Hall’s Memorial Hall and the Rotunda. Our rooms were on the second deck, third wing of Bancroft—directly over the Main Office and Mrs. Marshall’s office (the social director on the Academy’s administrative staff—where all the young ladies who had dates with upperclassmen would wait to meet their midshipman host).

Taylor, your Dad was one of the bravest. During this time, the Rotunda was full of large easels with pictures and stories of Naval Academy alumni--aviators and Marines—who died in Vietnam. That didn’t stop Bill from becoming a Navy aviator.

Roy Graham

roy_graham@comcast.net



This photo from a Matthews’ family album shows “Tecumseh” wearing his war paint in anticipation of the Army-Navy game during our time at the Academy. The so-called “God of 2.0” (the minimum passing grade at the Academy) is a bronze casting of the original carved, wooden figurehead for the USS *Delaware* made by the Class of 1891. With a wish for good luck, Midshipmen have long thrown pennies at Tecumseh while walking past en route to final examinations. Tecumseh faces toward Bancroft Hall and the courtyard that also bears his name—called “T-Court” for short.



Commissioned Service Reflections

By Gordon Peterson

Our Class history relates that upon graduating from the Naval Academy June 5, 1968, the Vietnam War was our immediate reality and our post-graduate education in leadership, politics, survival, and morality. The war was never far from our minds during our time at the Academy and in flight training. In August 1964, Congress enacted the so-called Gulf of Tonkin joint resolution following a reported incident between the destroyer USS *Maddox* and North Vietnamese torpedo patrol boats in the waters off North Vietnam. This resolution authorized President Johnson to deploy conventional military forces in Southeast Asia without a formal declaration of war.

More than 16,500 U.S. service members were killed during 1968 alone. As our classmate and former Secretary of the Navy and U.S. Senator Jim Webb later wrote, two-thirds of those who served were volunteers, as were 73 percent of those who died. Large white boards in the Rotunda of Bancroft Hall displayed the photographs and narratives of former midshipmen who were killed in action. Week by week and month by month, the number grew as combat deaths mounted. We recognized many of the faces of men who, just a year or two earlier, were fellow members of the Brigade. A total of 145 Naval Academy alumni were killed during the Vietnam War. Many others endured years of brutal captivity in Hanoi as prisoners of war.

During the first year following our graduation, our Class suffered our first four operational losses—two classmates died in aircraft accidents during flight training, one drowned at sea following a night-time collision between his ship and an Australian aircraft carrier operating in the South China Sea off Vietnam and one, a Marine, was killed in action in Vietnam.

Your dad liked fast cars and fast aircraft. It was no surprise when he and many other classmates reported to the Naval Aviation Schools Command in Pensacola, Fla. in the summer of 1968 to begin flight training. He embarked on the pipeline to become a Naval Flight Officer (NFO), an aviation specialty entailing the operation of airborne weapons and sensor systems, navigational systems, and other complex functions for which four hands and two brains are better than two and one. NFOs are not pilots per se, but they may perform many "co-pilot" functions, depending on the type of aircraft.

I did not report to flight school until September 1968. I was assigned as a deputy company officer for a platoon of Reserve Officer Candidates, part of a larger number of men trained that summer at the Academy in the rush to increase our Navy's personnel end strength to meet the growing demands of the war in Vietnam. I saw your dad a number of times, mainly on weekends on Pensacola Beach when the weather was nice in late autumn 1968 and early spring 1969. He roomed with company-mate Denny Rowley in a rental cottage on the beach.

I was shunted between several Navy airfields during my flight training and usually lived in a BOQ at Saufley Field, Whiting Field (north of Pensacola for more advanced fixed-wing aircraft culminating in carrier qualification and advanced instrument training), and finally Naval Air Station Ellyson Field in Pensacola for a two-month finishing course in helicopters.

I also lived at Pensacola Beach for a time with my very good friend and classmate Danny Still before he progressed to jet training at NAS Meridian, Miss., later in 1969. We flew hard during the week, and we partied hard on the weekends. Danny designed our '68 class crest. Tragically, he was killed in an aircraft accident off the coast of California in June 1972, leaving his wife and two young sons.

I received my wings in just a year in early October 1969 owing to the need for pilots in the fleet resulting from the Vietnam War's growing operational tempo. Then it was off for a two-week career counseling course, a longer Survival, Escape, Resistance, and Evasion school in Little Creek, Va., two months of helicopter aerial gunnery school with the Army in Fort Rucker, Ala., and Vietnam. Your dad was seeing your future mom regularly during his time in flight school in Pensacola and, later, in Texas. Finally, in July 1969, he was awarded his coveted Navy wings of gold as an NFO. He married Gayle 11 months later in June 1970.



Bill proudly wears his wings of gold as a Naval Flight Officer in July 1969. He began his training in the supersonic F-4 "Phantom" fighter jet with Fighter Squadron 121 (VF-121) at Naval Air Station Miramar, Calif., in August 1969, where he qualified as a Radar Intercept Officer (RIO).

From September 1970 to June 1973, Bill served with Fighter Squadron 151 (VF-151), making two Western Pacific combat deployments during the Vietnam War on-board the aircraft carrier USS *Midway*. The carrier, the first of its class, was commissioned a week after the war with Japan ended in the Pacific in September 1945. The ship was later modernized with the addition of an angled-flight deck and other improvements during the 1950s.



VF-151 deployed on its sixth combat cruise of the war in April 1971 with Carrier Air Wing 5 (CVW-5) aboard *Midway*, flying 1012 combat sorties. In April 1972, the squadron deployed on its seventh and final deployment of the Vietnam War. The squadron spent 205 continuous days in combat flight operations, including support of Operation Linebacker, the bombing campaign designed to disrupt supplies to the North Vietnamese. This was the longest period of combat flight operations in the history of the war. This photo of *Midway* was taken during its 1972 deployment.



This photo shows a VF-151 Phantom fighter (like your dad's aircraft) preparing to land while assigned to the air wing on USS *Midway*. It was taken during its combat deployment to Vietnam in 1973. The Phantom was a true warhorse. Beginning in 1959, it set 15 world records for in-flight performance—including air speed and altitude records

Fred "Phyllee" Philipsen, a pilot who flew with your dad in VF-151, recalls those years:

"I met Bill, not Billy, most likely in the RAG [Replacement Air Group Training] at Miramar in late 1969. We went through training in the F-4 together, I assume. We really got to know each other once we were sent to VF-151. Somewhere early in our odyssey in 151 he got the name of 'Shadow.' I have tried to remember exactly how this happened, but can't. He tended to be somewhat quiet and remain in the shadows, but I can't say that led to his nickname. Once these nick names are assigned, they stick like glue.

"As I recall our training and workups for our first cruise to Vietnam went well and the group of JO's [junior officers] that had joined VF-151 for their "turn around" seemed to really bond with each other as well as the "old salts." The '71 cruise was uneventful. We flew close-air support, photo-reconnaissance escort, but mostly BARCAP, that stands for barrier combat air patrol, which was abject boredom flying racetrack patterns for two hours off the coast of northern North Vietnam. The only excitement on these was the CAT shot [catapult deck launch on *Midway*], the sometimes high-speed run returning from station to the boat at 1.2 Mach, and the landing itself. Since Shadow and I were "nuggets" [junior pilots], we generally flew with crewmembers who had made the previous cruise.



VF-151 on "liberty" in Kyoto, Japan's ancient capital during *Midway's* '71 cruise. Your dad is now sporting a beard! The new CNO authorized more "facial hair" in the Navy in 1970. Pictured are: Shadow, Bruce "Bronto Saurus" Hayward, and Don "Symo" Symington. We were in Yokosuka for a port call, so we took a day trip.



Like all Navy ships, living and working conditions on USS *Midway* were pretty Spartan by civilian standards. Your dad's beard grew in very well during his assignment with VF-151.

"The '72 cruise was a whole new ball game, beginning with the resumed bombing of North Vietnam at the end of March and early April 1972. We left April 10th and returned in early March 1973. Our six-month cruise became 11 months.

"We left two months early and made up for it by coming home three-months late, after the war ended. Our skipper, Cdr. Chuck Kother, was getting divorced and had a girlfriend, Tammy, who looked like a "Vegas" hooker, but she was actually very nice. Our XO, Cdr. John Disher, suffered from chronic assholia. This was a trip!

"Two-aircraft flights, consisting of two pilots and two RIO's [radar intercept officers], were led by rank, not experience. Shadow was assigned to the back seat of our operations officer, the senior lieutenant commander in the squadron, but close to the least in experience, having never flown fighters before, nor been in combat. I will call him FD. I was assigned to his wing, with Richie Potter as my RIO.

"At the very beginning we flew close-air support around Saigon, Ahn Loc, as a "warm up" before heading up north since *Midway* did not get a "mini cruise" prior to the real cruise. Soon it became quite evident that FD was way in over his head. Our CO was blinded by his girlfriend's voluptuous looks and held fast on his decision that you led by rank.



A VF-151 F-4J Phantom fighter taxis to the catapult during flight operations on USS Midway in the 1970s.

“Up North, which we arrived at by May 1st, we flew some BARCAP, but just as many photo escort, road recce, Alpha strikes (the 20-plane raids I called them), and MIGCAP [a combat air patrol to intercept North Vietnamese MiG fighter aircraft]. It was pretty much like out of a movie, except FD was going to kill us all unless we kept an eye on him. In the meantime a group of about six squadron wives, pretty much all newlyweds, came over to the Philippines, to follow the ship. Shadow's wife, Miss Gayle, and my X, June, became close friends, as all the wives actually did.

“I wanted off FD's wing, but could see that wasn't going to happen, so I did the next best thing! I asked the skipper if we, FD and I, could switch backseaters! Since our wives were traveling together, why shouldn't we fly together, that way they (Gayle and June) would most likely go home winners or widows together.

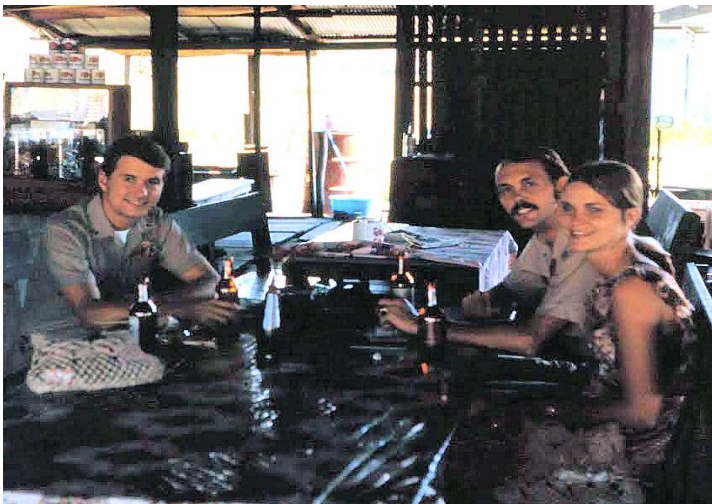
“It made perfect sense! Now, you must try to understand fighter-pilot humor as well as combat/ready room humor to fully grasp the logic of this request, but it was approved on the spot! So the wives were able to ‘relax’ a bit now that Shadow was out of FD's back seat, but we still flew his wing for the most part.

“The cruise was a long one, but our squadron fared well; we put two guys in the Hilton [i.e., two men were captured and held as POWs in the “Hanoi Hilton” prison] and lost only three planes, while the air wing's total tally was 32 enemy planes damaged or destroyed. Our POWs were returned home after the war as you know, Ted Triebel and Dave Everet. Of the eight or nine times we pulled into port, only once did we do this on time. We participated in Operation Linebacker [a Navy-Air Force bombing campaign from May to October 1972 to interdict supplies for North Vietnam's “Easter offensive”], flying MIGCAP for the B-52s that pummeled the Hanoi area, but we left the ‘party’ early to be in Singapore for the Christmas Day Bob Hope Show on the USS *Midway* in 1972.



Bob Hope Show, USS Midway 1972

“After that Shadow, Gayle, June and I went on leave; traveled to Kuala Lumpur, Penang Island, and Bangkok. We had a great time, but had to part with our wives and head "bak Sheep" [back to the ship] via Saigon, Danang, and the *Midway*.



Your mom and dad ... more liberty
with VF-151. No beard!

“By this time the war was slowing down and an end seemed likely. Our last few missions were close air support in the northern part of South Vietnam, because the ‘bad guys’ were coming south in a land-grab attempt prior to the cease fire. After the cease fire we hung around for a while, mostly in NAS Cubi Point, Philippines, to see if it would last. The morning the ship pulled out a bunch of the girls from the Cubi Officer's Club came down to the pier to wave us off as the ship's public-address system played ‘California Dreamin.’ What a sight and feeling! There were not too many dry eyes!

“That was a trip! What a ‘slice of life,’ as they say. I will never forget it, and for the better or worse, it was a major part of my life. When I got back my cousin, a Marine vet of post-World War 2, China, and Korea, called me and said, ‘The crap games will never be the same!’ Shadow was one of the greatest. I have never forgotten him!”

Fred "Phlylee" Philipsen, VF-151
phlylee@hotmail.com



Bill's Naval Academy classmate Ed Powell was assigned to a Navy helicopter squadron on USS Midway during the 1972 cruise that Fred discussed. Ed recalls that memorable deployment:

“Phyllee is/was a classic fighter pilot. He is one of my best friends, but I didn't get to know him until the latter part of the cruise on USS *Midway*. We've become good friends. His subtle humor is throughout his reflections (I must have heard "bak sheep" 100 times), but I agree that was a long, long cruise. Our classmate Bob Duggan and I were aircraft commanders in Helicopter Support Squadron One, Detachment 2, when we deployed on *Midway*—a true working ship. The early deployment and the extensions were a result of other carriers breaking down; we never did. I believe those 11 months were the longest cruise for a carrier during the 'Nam era—not sure.

“The way I understood most of our operations during a line period (as a helo pilot I didn't have a need to know), we were paired with another carrier. We had a plane over the target 12 hours of the day (literally a continuous line of bombers) and the other ship took the other 12 hours. Much of the time there were three pairs of carriers operating off North Vietnam. As you can believe it took several hours and a lot of work just to get that first plane over the target. Returning also took time so many guys were working 20 hours a day.

“Guys like Fred and Bill would fly three missions a day, many times encountering flack [i.e., anti-aircraft fire or SAM missiles]. Many line periods would get extended (as noted in Fred's reference about not going to port on time, which was a pain for the wives chasing the ship). I think we had three line periods that were well over 40 days straight. The war was ending, everyone knew it, and flying these missions was dangerous. The U.S. was trying to score points, and the North Vietnamese were collecting bargaining chips (POWs). It was a strange atmosphere, but everyone continued to do their job to the best of their ability. *Midway* was a great ship. It received several awards for that cruise.

“Bill and I were at the Academy and in Pensacola at the same time (I remember him being a vet owner). We were also on a 4,000-man ship together, but for some reason I never got close to him—just nearby. I missed knowing a good one.” *[Ed Note: Ed Powell entered flight training following graduation and served as a Navy helicopter pilot. After resigning his commission in 1973, he attended graduate school and went on to a career in civil engineering.]*

Edward “Ed” Powell
epowell@acsalaska.net



Following his combat assignment with VF-151, Bill served from July 1973 to October 1975 with Air Test and Evaluation Squadron Four (VX-4) at Naval Air Station, Point Mugu, Ca. commonly referred to by its nickname, *The Evaluators*) was the Navy's air test and evaluation squadron. It was re-commissioned in 1952 at NAS Point Mugu to conduct evaluations of air-launched guided missiles built for use by the Navy and other branches of the armed forces. The F-4 Phantom II was introduced to VX-4 in the early 1960's, and the F-14A Tomcat arrived in the 1970s. Between 1969 and 1992 Grumman produced some 710 F-14s all in all with the last one being an F-14D on 20 July 1992. Your father initially flew F-4s and later transitioned to the F-14 at VX-4.



An F-14 Tomcat, assigned to VX-4 at Point Magu, sports its distinctive Playboy tail art.

Jet aviators like your father long anticipated the arrival of a new and, in many ways, revolutionary fighter aircraft. With its ability to “sweep” its wings (i.e., move them forward or aft in flight to allow slower or faster air speeds), the early model Tomcat soon became the dominant fighter aircraft in the world. The “A” model had a maximum air speed of 2.38 Mach [i.e., 2.38 times the speed of sound, or 1,554 mph), a ceiling of 50,000-plus feet, and a range of 1,730 nautical miles].

Naval Academy Classmate Dick Evert was assigned to VX-4 with your father at the time.

“I served with Bill in VX-4 from 1974 to 1976. I was an F-8 pilot in VF-24 from 1971 to 1974. Bill worked on several VX-4 weapons projects, including the AIM-7 Sparrow and Sidewinder missiles. He may have worked on Air Combat Maneuvering [ACM] Range with our Academy classmate Mike Grulli as well.

“Bill was known for his professional approach to both flying and testing. His laconic voice on the radio and always knowledgeable test summaries were a hallmark. He was very well regarded personally and professionally.

“As a part of the F-14 test team I did not fly with Bill very often since he was on other F-4 test programs at the time. We did fly together from time to time as an “adversary” aircraft conducting air combat maneuver training with other Navy aircraft. On one such occasion we were near the China Lake range and intercepted an Alpha Strike [a large air attack by an aircraft carrier’s air wing] that launched from NAS Fallon en route to other China Lake target ranges. Bill and I did ACM with their fighter escort.

“As the engagement continued we flew lower than planned in the mountainous environment, and I had to pull pretty hard to extract us from the weeds. Bill was tracking the opposing aircraft and unprepared for the direction change. I apologized for banging him around the rear cockpit but he was, as always, good natured about the incident.

“We both attended Lamaze classes with our wives, and Taylor was born about two months before my son Matt. Both of us suffered kidding from squadron mates about the classes and the ‘breathing’ exercises. Bill joined Fighter Squadron VF-211 around in April 1976. He was lost with LT Junior Grade Patrick Kilcline in the area around USS *Constellation*. I launched about 30 minutes after Bill and participated in the search for the crew after his accident. Both squadrons were traumatized and bereaved over their loss. We kept up with Gayle and the boys over the years as they moved to Virginia near Crystal City.

“Bill was a wonderful man who loved his family very much and enjoyed a stellar reputation in our aviation community. No doubt he would have been part of aviation leadership going forward.” *[Ed. Note: Richard “Dick” Evert is a Naval Academy classmate of your father’s who served a distinguished career in naval aviation.]*

Dick Evert

richardevert68@gmail.com



As Dick Evert notes, your father reported to VF-211 in April 1976. The squadron, known as “The Fighting Checkmates,” had transitioned to flying the F-14 Tomcat in 1975. Your dad completed a Western Pacific Deployment on USS *Constellation* in November 1977.



F-14 Tomcats assigned to VF-211 display their “checkmate” squadron markings on their vertical stabilizers.

According to the Navy’s history of the aircraft carrier USS *Constellation*, in January 1975 the ship departed San Diego for the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, Bremerton, Wash., to undergo one of the most extensive carrier overhauls ever undertaken, enabling her to carry the Navy’s newest air supremacy fighter, the F-14A *Tomcat*, and the S-3A *Viking*, a submarine hunter.



USS Constellation underway during the 1970s.

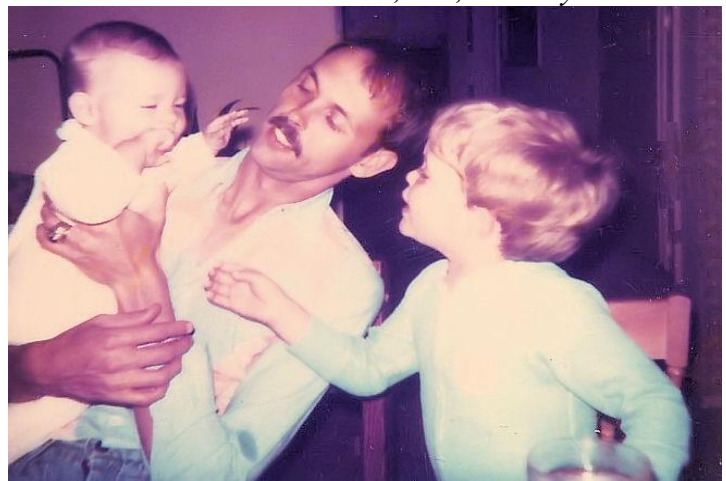
Constellation then served in multipurpose air, surface, and ASW roles, depending on the type of aircraft carried. After 14 months at Puget Sound, *Constellation* departed the shipyard in April 1976 and rejoined the Pacific Fleet.

On July 3, 1976, *Constellation* celebrated our nation's Bicentennial by hosting a nationally-telecast TV special from her flight deck. The special featured many major celebrities and guests. The newly refurbished aircraft carrier began her tenth operational deployment in April 1977, which included the first port call by a U.S. carrier to Pattaya, Thailand. Your father was promoted to lieutenant commander in September 1977. The ship and its air wing returned to the United States that November, and your dad was reunited with Gayle and Taylor. It wasn't long before Jonathan arrived on the scene!

Gayle, Jon, Bill, and Taylor ... 1978



Jon, Bill, and Taylor ... 1978



Tragically, your father lost his life in an aircraft accident July 16, 1978, while flying in an F-14 with pilot LTJG Patrick Kilcline during operations at sea on board USS *Constellation*. I heard second-hand accounts of what transpired, but I would not want to attempt to describe the accident without first knowing what the Navy learned following the completion of its aircraft-accident investigation into this mishap. However, my understanding is that the aircraft entered uncontrolled flight in an extremely unusual attitude that made it virtually impossible to eject safely given the emergency procedures that existed at the time for the F-14 aircraft.

Your dad's military decorations included 11 "Strike-Flight" Air Medals awarded for his combat operations during the Vietnam War, the Vietnam Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, and the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross.



I was shocked to learn of your father's death just 10 years into his Navy career. I was assigned to the Office of the Secretary of Defense at the time of your dad's death, working as a public affairs specialist for the assistant secretary of defense for public affairs.

There was no Internet or email then, of course, so I was unable to contact your mother immediately to express my condolences. I wrote your paternal grandparents to express my sorrow over Bill's loss at the time and asked that they convey my sympathy to your mother. In your grandmother's reply to me in October 1978, she said, "Bill's sudden and untimely death was a great shock to us and has left us grief stricken. Our greatest consolation is in knowing that he was highly thought of in Navy circles and that he was doing what he loved." She went on to say, "He was always a good son, a very loving husband and exceptional father to his two little boys. We have only good memories, and I don't think there was anyone who didn't love and respect him."

I obtained a copy of Senator Hayakawa's remarks on the floor of the U.S. Senate honoring your father and LTJG Kilcline and had them engraved on two brass plaques. One was mounted on the wall in Dahlgren Hall in 1979 to honor your father's service and sacrifice for his country. The other I mailed to Bill's parents with the request that they give it to your mother with my warm regards.

Bill's mother wrote to thank me in March 1979. She said, "We were pleased to hear that the plaque had been placed at the Academy, and since we always go that way, we stopped to see it. It is a really nice memorial to Bill and Pat." She continued, "It is truly hard to realize that Bill is gone. Life deals many hard blows, but I cannot think of any harder than losing a child. We must now live with our memories of a fine son serving his country and doing what he loved. He has a fine heritage in his two sons and a wife who will raise them to be as fine as he was, I'm sure."

Taylor and Jon, I hope the foregoing reflections on your dad's life helps to fill in some of the missing pieces of information relating to his youth and ensuing Navy career. As these remembrances illustrate, your father was a remarkable man in many dimensions. His love for your mother, the two of you, his other family members, and friends was manifest. As so many of his classmates from high school, the Naval Academy, and his fellow naval officers with whom he served on active duty have related, we miss him a great deal, but we remember him with fond affection as a stand-up guy. I know you are proud of him—and rightly so—as we all are.

“They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them. “

Excerpt from “*For the Fallen*”
Lawrence Binyon, 1915



This May, Taylor visited the Naval Academy with classmate Joe Conway and me. He is shown here standing next to the plaque honoring Bill and LTJG Pat Kilcline that is displayed in Dahlgren Hall.

Sincerely and with my deep affection
for you, your mother, and families,

Gordon Peterson
May 12, 2015

**Taylor's Visit with the Petersons in Virginia
and a "Walk Through the Yard" at the Naval Academy
April 30-May 1, 2015**

Getting ready to grill some salmon steaks Thursday evening.



Diana sets a nice table with delicious food ... and an apple pie for dessert in honor of Taylor's visit! (Don't see much dessert these days unless we have company!) We also ran some trains on my Port of New York & New Jersey O-gauge railroad!



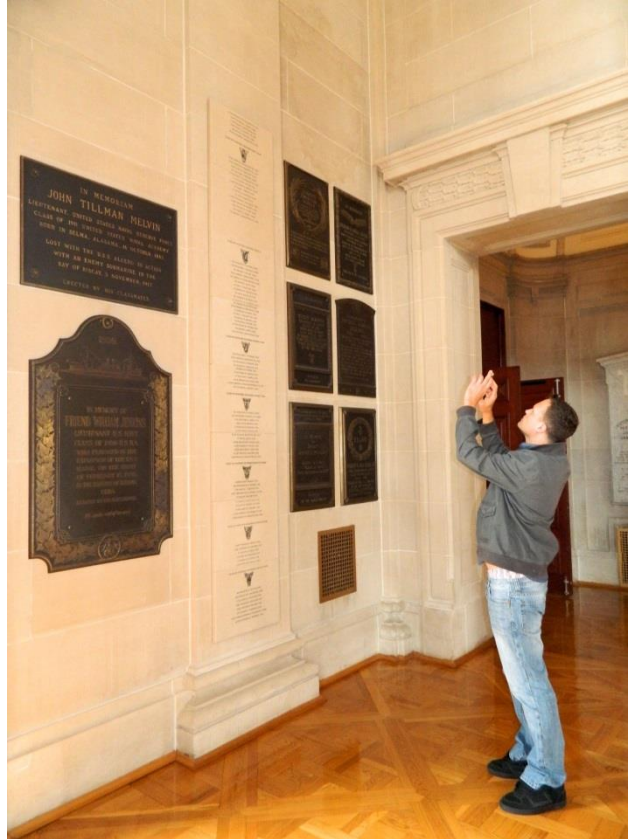
Bancroft Hall, the dormitory for all 4,000 members of the Brigade of Midshipmen. With eight, four-story wings, it's said to be the largest dormitory of its type in the world. As plebes, we would exit outdoors as quickly as possible, even in frigid weather, to avoid the grasp of upperclassmen eager to teach us what "a real plebe year" was like!



With Joe Conway from Bill's 26th Company ... during senior year, Bill lived in the room at left on the second-floor window ... Joe was in the room at right, same floor



Memorial Hall located off the Rotunda in Bancroft Hall. We showed Taylor the two plaques engraved with the names of our 29 classmates who died in the operational line of duty following graduation. Sadly, Bill is numbered in their ranks.



Taylor and Joe in Memorial Hall

Dahlgren Hall was refurbished quite a few years ago after we graduated. In addition to continuing to serve as an armory, it now boasts a restaurant and reception area for guests ... and an ice-skating rink during winter months.



The plaque with Senator Hayakawa's tribute to Bill and Pat Kilcline is at left.



Taylor is not sleeping on his feet!

IN MEMORIAM

LCDR WILLIAM C. MATTHEWS, USN, '68

LTJG PATRICK KILCLINE, USN, '75

LOST AT SEA JULY 16, 1978

VF-211, USS CONSTELLATION

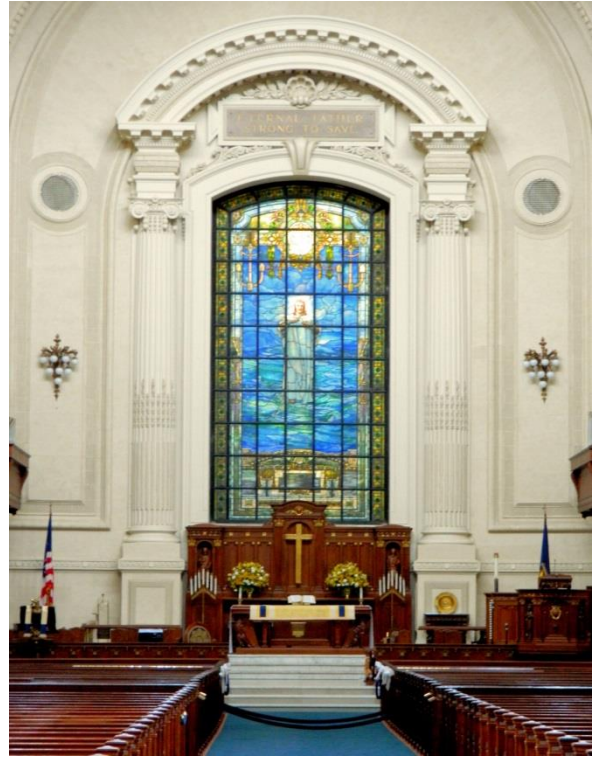
"THERE ARE ALL SORTS OF MOTIVATIONS WHICH DRIVE OUR COMPLEX SOCIETY. ONE OF THE INDISPENSABLE ONES IS THAT WHICH SEEKS TO PRESERVE THAT SOCIETY, ITS VALUES, PEOPLE, AND INSTITUTIONS FROM THE DEPREDATIONS OF THOSE WHO WOULD UNDERMINE, CONQUER, OR DESTROY THEM. THE FULFILLMENT OF THAT ESSENTIAL TASK INCLUDES THE NEED FOR MEN WHO ARE WILLING TO TAKE UPON THEMSELVES PERSONAL HARDSHIP, DANGER, SEPARATION FROM THEIR LOVED ONES, AND A MYRIAD OF OTHER DISCIPLINES ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR UNIQUELY IMPORTANT CRAFT. THERE IS NOT AND NEVER WILL BE IN OUR FREE SOCIETY A SUBSTITUTE FOR SUCH MEN OR THE JOB WHICH THEY MUST DO. SOMEONE MUST ALWAYS HAVE THE WATCH, SOMEONE MUST ALWAYS BE THE SENTINEL, AND SOMEONE MUST CLIMB INTO A COCKPIT AND LAUNCH INTO THE MORNING SKY."

Senator S. I. Hayakawa
Congressional Record
July 19, 1978

The Naval Academy Chapel ... attendance was mandatory during our years at USNA.



Many visitors consider the Chapel to be one of the Academy's most beautiful buildings. The magnificent crypt containing the sarcophagus for John Paul Jones is located in its basement level beneath the altar.



Our Class will fund the restoration of the Chapel's massive bronze doors as part of our Class gift tied to our 50th anniversary of graduation in three years. The doors originally were a gift from the Class of 1868 when the Chapel was built during the early years of the 20th century.



MacDonough Hall ... home to Navy boxing, gymnastics, wrestling, squash, and fencing ... in 1968 and today!



Mahan Hall's bell tower ... in our day the building served as our library. It also features an auditorium and stage still used for theatrical productions and other events. Its two wings, Maury Hall and Sampson Hall, were home to the Department of English, History, and Government and the Science Department in our day. Sampson Hall now houses the Department of English and History. Maury Hall now contains weapons and systems-engineering classrooms and laboratories.

This self-orientating sundial was invented by one of our classmates; it was our Class graduation gift to the Academy in June 1968. Fittingly, it is located adjacent to Michelson Hall, named for USNA graduate Albert Michelson. He was awarded our nation's first Nobel Prize for his scientific achievements, including experiments using optical devices that resulted in the first calculation of the speed of light. At the time, Michelson was teaching physics at the Academy in the 19th century. His experiments were conducted not far from the sun dial along, what was then, a sea wall.



Construction of Michelson Hall, shown here ... and its neighbor Chauvenet Hall ... commenced during our final year at the Academy. Tennis courts were here during our time as midshipmen.



Before leaving the Academy for National Airport, I could not miss getting a photo of Taylor in front of an F-4 Phantom like one Bill flew off USS Midway during combat deployments to Vietnam with VF-151.



That concludes a short walk through the yard. Diana and I hope you will visit again!