

## THE REMARKABLE LEGACY OF OUR UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY CLASS OF 1945

When Admiral Arleigh Burke was the Chief of Naval Operations, he often came to visit the Naval Academy. On one visit, the Academy Superintendent, VADM Davidson, told the CNO that he wanted to show him something special in the Yard. They drove out to the seawall and viewed our **Triton Light, proudly flashing 4-5, 4-5, 4-5**. As Admiral Burke admired our Class gift, the Superintendent remarked to Admiral Burke's personal aide, our Classmate Allan Slaff, "*Allan, when I first saw that light it made me damn mad all over.*" When asked why, the Superintendent responded, "*Because my class didn't think of it.*"

**And so it has been for our Class of 1945 over the years, often contributing to our Naval Academy; often leading the way!**

**Tonight I will proudly make a compelling, documented case that our Class of 1945 is one of the truly distinguished Naval Academy Classes — admired, respected, highly visible, and Naval Academy supportive. Our record as a Class of leadership, performance, example and innovative Naval Academy "giving" is now "in the books."** Whether fighting during WW II, Korea, Viet Nam, or the Cold War, or during our time as officers and civilians, we have been measured and we stand tall — very tall— **our accomplishments etched indelibly into the history of the United States Naval Academy.**

**Let me summarize four of our Class legacies.**

### OUR PERFORMANCE

**Three of our classmates have earned a place in U.S. and world history:**

Alan Shepard, first American in space, fifth to walk on the moon.

Dick McCool, Congressional Medal of Honor winner and

Paul Shulman, First Israeli Navy Commander. .

**Five hundred and three** of the 914 of us who threw our caps in the air at graduation on 7 June 1944, had **extended active duty careers** of twenty years or more — serving our country with honor and distinction.

**Thirty four** of our classmates attained Flag Officer and General Officer Rank — 30 Navy and 4 Marine Corps. We are all proud of them.

**Our sixty classmates who gave their lives while on active duty**, serving their country, 18 of whom were killed in action during WW II. We are so proud of each one of them. Our Classmate, Bob Reynolds, was the first American casualty of the Cold War.

**Our more than 700 personal decorations** awarded to our Classmates — an impressive number — each decoration testifies to a noteworthy achievement by a member of our Class.

**Our “service reputation” as a Class!** Each of us can take great pride in the unsolicited but most moving comments of those from other Classes. The acknowledgement of our leadership and training by our two undergraduate Classes --- 1946’s Class President, “...*inspirational leadership you provided for our youngster year*” and 1947’s **President Jimmy Carter**, praising his long ago, hard-to-please task-masters from 1945, saying: “...’45 was a special Class for us & I’m proud of the way you all trained us in ’47. Best wishes, Jimmy C.”

And in the words of others: ***My congratulations on the Spirit and Contribution of the ‘Green Bowlers’ and the Great Class of 45 over the years;*** “...*the remarkable contributions of the Class of ‘45 to the Naval Academy;*” “...*may I join the Legion of Academy Graduates who admire the Class of 1945. 1945 was, indeed, a very good year;*” “*My ‘55 Class has always admired the spirit and drive of ‘45;*” and “...***humbled by the impact your Classmates have had.***”

### OUR INNOVATIVE GIFTS

**Our visionary Class Leadership in developing the prime real estate on the grounds of the Naval Academy,** the seaward corner — “***Where the Severn joins the tide.***” Our two operational, Naval Academy appropriate, gifts anchor what is now our “*Class of 1945*” corner of the Yard. Our navigational beacon, our Triton Light, and Naval Academy Seagate will remind midshipmen of the Class of 1945 for generations to come.

**Our TRITON LIGHT,** a charted navigational beacon on the most seaward point of the Naval Academy will flash forever ‘4-5. ‘4-5, the numbers of our Class — a reminder to all who observe it, from land or sea, of our Class of 1945. Built into the Light is a globe holding samples of the 22 seas through which the *USS Triton* passed on her 1960 submerged passage around the world.

**Our NAVAL ACADEMY SEA GATE,** the official sea entrance to the Naval Academy — a Class of 1945 welcome to all — dignitaries and other visitors who come aboard the Naval Academy from the sea.

And, our other Class gifts of significance:

**Our Capstone Essay Contest,** \$1,000 prizes for the four best choice of service papers submitted by every First Classman every year then published in the *Institute Proceedings*. An Earl Fannin gift has funded this program in perpetuity.

**Our Halsey Field House Scoreboard,** featuring the Class logo of a “*Green Bowler*” hat with 45 thereon and our class slogan ***Look alive with ‘45.***

**Our 5<sup>th</sup> Company Wardroom in Bancroft Hall,** filled with classmate memorabilia from sea and space.

**Our ‘45 Wing of the Crown Sailing Center** and our “*Alan Shepard, America’s First Astronaut*” portrait on display in the Naval Academy Museum.

**Our Class gifts of almost 4 million dollars** ranking us in the top half of all classes in giving.

**Our 137 Honor Chairs in Alumni Hall**, honoring our Classmates, the most of any Class.

**Our 65 candidates who entered the Academy as Naval Academy Foundation Honor Scholars**, our program funded in perpetuity.

### OUR CLASS SPIRIT

Since graduation, our ingenuity in dress, rhetoric, and spirit has caught the attention and earned the respect of generations of other classes. At Homecomings, our unique ***“Green Bowlers”*** with our initials 45 emblazoned on the front made ours the most visible, well known, and admired class.

**And our class slogan, “Look Alive with 45,”** is one of the catchiest, most widely recognized and remembered of class mottos! How many of us have been asked, *“What’s your Class?”* As we answer, with more than a little pride, *“Class of 45!”* so often we have noted the questioner’s acknowledging smile and words, ***“the ‘Look Alive’ Class!”***

Years ago I was introduced, as a Naval Academy graduate, Astronaut Jim Lovell '52, at a ceremony honoring our classmate, Alan Shepard. Jim asked, *“What’s your Class?”* I responded *“45.”* Jim replied, *“Oh, the ‘Look Alive’ Class!”*

Our innovative Class slogan. Class logo and our *“Green Bowlers”* have brought us even closer together as a Class, an example for other classes.

### OUR CLASS CLOSENESS

In addition to our Admirals and Generals, we have another very special group with us, the Shipmates-by-marriage of our Classmates no longer with us. Your presence has added so much to our Reunion. We share with you our pride in our Class and we remember your loved ones, our Classmates, with fondness, admiration, and respect. We send to each of you Shipmates the love of our Class of 1945.

So much of who we are and what we stand for, we learned while midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy. As a wartime Class, we had a sense of urgency and purpose that brought us so closely together — spawning and nurturing remarkable friendships — friendships as precious, as meaningful, and as lasting as any we have ever known.

**What memories we all have of our classmates — those who are here and those who are not** — our Class of 1945 --- our midshipmen days; the WW II December 7<sup>th</sup> lock

down; a classmate not quite making it as he leaped across the moat; “*shoving out,*” “*fire in the paint locker;*” our three wins over Army; “*Uncle Beanie,*” “*Grandma McCombs,*” and the other officers who provided us with smiles and amusement, yet helped mold us into the officers we became.

These past three days, still another memory — our moving walks in the Yard, down nostalgia lane. I am sure that each of us has been reflecting about our Class and our Classmates — a little choked up from time to time; eyes moistening, perhaps even a tear or two during Chapel Service or at the Columbarium; a warm greeting or embrace from a long ago Classmate — **as we treasure our memories and savor these very special days together, one on one — each to the other.**

As we now “*stand down,*” one — by one — by one, each of us can take enormous pride in knowing that there will always be a very special corner of the Yard — the Class of 1945’s corner — our corner “*Where the Severn joins the tide.*” **And in that corner, far into the future, perhaps forever, there will be our magnificent navigational beacon, our Triton Light, continuing to salute, yes salute, each one of us and our Class of 1945 as it flashes: “*forty five,*” “*forty five,*” — “*forty five,*” “*forty five,*” — “*forty five,*” “*forty five,*” — “*forty five,*” “*forty five,*” (on final, voice dropped to a whisper).**

**Robert Beresford Williams  
Class President, Emeritus**