

From Navy Blue to Air Force Blue



Memorial planned for USNA role in building the USAF

By Mike Nassr '54

Today not one midshipman in a hundred realizes that over 2,300 Naval Academy graduates helped build the U.S. Air Force into the service it is today. Some of those graduates hope to change that and make the information a matter of Plebe knowledge.

A campaign to erect a memorial at the Naval Academy recognizing this fact is

underway. Details of the campaign are later in this article, but it is first important to understand the history of USNA and its linkage to the U.S. Air Force.

When President Truman signed the National Security Act of 1947 establishing the Department of Defense with the U.S. Air Force as a separate service, each service had to develop plans to implement the change. Establishing a new service was so complex it wasn't until 1949 that the transfer of functions from the Army Air Corps was complete and the Air Force could stand on its own.

According to Bob Gilliland '49, the Army decided it would not provide West Point graduates to the Air Force. The Army felt it had no more responsibility than the Naval Academy in that regard. The Department of Defense quickly settled the issue by authorizing 25% of both West Point and Annapolis graduates to voluntarily choose commissions in the Air Force.

USNA's Class of 1949 received the news only a few weeks before its graduation. Nonetheless, 57 made last minute changes and entered the Air Force. During the next decade, 25% of nearly every USNA class entered the Air Force. By 1963, the last year of a large percentage, the total had reached 2,121, exceeding the number from West Point during those same years by more than 20%. Today the USNA total stands at 2,306.

Reasons for so many midshipmen choosing the Air Force were many and varied. The new and growing service, with an ever larger part of the defense budget and without an academy of its own, offered promising opportunities. The emergence of jet aviation was a factor. Immediate entry into flight

training or choice of duty in a wide range of specialty fields such as electronics, tactical and strategic missiles, space and logistics, plus base of choice, were pitted against duty at sea.

Contributions of Naval Academy grads were especially significant during the Air Force's formative years. With the opening of the Air Force Academy in 1955, Naval Academy grads immediately and for years played major roles in building the new service academy. Seven members from USNA '53 were Air Training Officers (ATO's) who indoctrinated the first cadets entering the academy. Those ATO's were Kim Bassett, Charlie Cole, Dick Day, Bill Fredlund, George Greaves, Rafael Ortiz-Benitez, and Ed Vige. During the Academy's first 20 years, 151 USNA grads served on the faculty and staff. John Pustay '54 became dean of the USAFA faculty.

Ben Martin '46, was the Air Force Falcon football coach in its early years, from 1958–1977. On his staff were two former captains of Navy football teams, Tom Bakke '52 and John Gurski '53 plus Ned King '52 and Jim Leach '54. John Clune '54, Navy's first All-American basketball player who led Navy into two NCAA tournaments, was USAFA's director of athletics from 1975–1991. (*Ed note:* See further recognition of John Clune in "All Hands.") The Air Force Academy honored John, now deceased, by naming its basketball arena after him—the Clune Arena.

The Naval Academy's legacy in the Air Force can be shown by the number of USAF leaders who came from Annapolis. USNA grads provided the Air Force with 59 general officers, 457 colonels, and 499 lieutenant colonels from the classes of '49 through '63, the peak years of the Air Force influx until the Air Force Academy became firmly established.

Attaining four stars were Lawrence Skantze '52, Robert Herres '54, Monroe Hatch '55, and James B. Davis '58. Both Skantze and Hatch rose to the second highest position in the Air Force, vice chief of staff, and Herres became the first vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The 11 three stars were Lewis Brereton '11 (Army Air Force), James Brickel '52, Bruce K. Brown '52, Richard Saxer '52, Thomas Stafford '52, George Miller '53, Aloysius Casey '54, John Pustay '54, William Thurman '54,



General Robert T. Herres '54

Bob served in fighter-interceptors, technical intelligence, the Flight Test Center, and Space Systems before tours as a wing commander in Strategic Air Command. Later, he was commander of Air Force Communications Command, The Eighth Air Force, and as Joint Staff J-6, was promoted to general to become commander of NORAD and the first commander of U.S. Space Command. On retirement from active duty as vice-chairman of the JCS, the first to hold that position, he joined management of USAA. Bob became chairman and CEO of the company in 1993. After leading USAA through its expansion to serve

enlisted members, he retired in 2002.



Lieutenant General James R. Brickel '52

After four years flying F-86 Sabrejets and attending graduate school, Jim worked at NASA on MERCURY, GEMINI, and APOLLO programs. In Thailand he flew RF-101 aircraft and commanded the 20th TacRecSq, completing 106 missions over North Vietnam. He was awarded the Air Force Cross after suffering extensive damage on a mission but completing it and returning home on one engine. Back in the U.S. he held numerous positions in Washington, attended National War College, and commanded Elmendorf AFB, Alaska. He returned to another series of positions at Air University, Department of Defense, and

Headquarters USAF. His last three years were at MacDill AFB, FL, as Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Readiness Command.

Spence Armstrong '56, and Donald Cromer '59.

Twenty-four USAF major generals came from USNA: Hugh J. Knerr '08 (Army Air Force), Philip Conley '50, Howard Estes '50, Lovic Hodnette '50, Leighton Palmerton '50, Daryle Tripp '50, William Maxson '52, Richard Collins '53, Stuart Sherman '53, Richard Boverie '54, John Brashear '54, Kenneth Burns '54, William Hoover '54, Joe Morgan '54, William Anders '55, Peter Odgers '55, Emil Block '56, Thomas Brandt '56, Ralph Jacobson '56, Melvin Alkire '57, Robert Rosenberg '57, Julio Torres '57, Samuel Swart '58, and Donald Hard '62.

There were 20 brigadier generals from USNA: Robert Berg '49, Dennis Sullivan '50, Edward Mendel '50, Thomas Conlin '51, Dave Mullaney '51, William Dunn '52, Bob Foster '53, Harold Gross '53, Charles Lamb '53, Thomas Pochari '53, Donald Vogt '53, Gene Lueker '54, Bud Poe '54, Pinter Dyer '55, Charles Duke '57, Dick Toner '57, James Pierce '58, Cecil Powell '59, Donald Smith '59, and Charles Vickery '59.

In addition to those who rose to high ranks in uniform, others attained supergrades in the Air Force Civil Service. One such person is Jim Gallagher '57 who became the top civil servant at Wright-Patterson AFB in Ohio and for 20 years led our Alumni Association's largest Air Force Chapter.

Using the Class of 1954 as an example, 221 choose the Air Force. Of that group 114 became pilots and 37 navigators—a total of 68% as rated flying officers. The remaining 70 (32%) served in a wide range of specialty fields including missiles, space, and special weapons.

The class produced 11 Air Force generals. Full military careers were completed by 158 (71.5%) who served until military retirement or death on active duty. Of 12 who died on active duty, one was killed in combat in Southeast Asia, seven in aircraft accidents, and four from other causes.

Those USNA grads who became fliers took assignments in fighters, bombers, and transports of the Air Defense Command, Strategic Air Command, Tactical Air Command, and Military Air Transport Service. They all faced the high hazards of flying military aircraft in the 1950s. Four members of the Class of 1950 were Killed in Action (KIA) in Korea and ten others in aircraft accidents. The Class of 1951 fared no better with two KIA's in Korea and 13 killed in aircraft accidents.

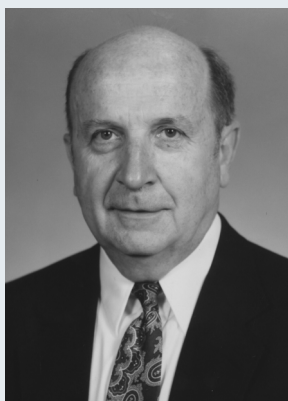
After the Korean War ended in 1953, Air Force flyers had a 12-year respite from outright wartime operations, but flight operations continued to take a

heavy toll. A total of 72 members from the classes of 1949 through 1961 were killed in Air Force aircraft accidents, most involving jet aircraft.

The Vietnam War once more brought back the heightened hazards of combat operations. From classes of the 1950s, 23 Air Force officers were killed in action. As a group they constituted 22% of USNA graduates for those years, but suffered 50% of USNA's combat losses. Numerous grads in the USAF were awarded Silver Stars (SS's) in the Vietnam War. Included are Jim Brickel '52 (also USNA's only recipient of the Air Force Cross), George Hall '53 (a POW who received two SS's), Jack Hart '53, Chuck Deppish '54, Wayne Frye '54 (two SS's) and who also shot down a MIG, Albert Millay '55; C.S. "Bud" Summers '55 (three SS's), John Collins '56, Norman Frith '56, Robert Greene '56, Lawrence Bustle '57, Donald Couture '57, Jerry Gentry '57, Donald Carty '58, John Haney '58 (two SS's), and Barry Howard '58. Bill Hoover '54 was the last wing cCommander at Danang AB in Vietnam and flew 97 combat missions in the F-4E.

A large number of USNA/USAF officers graduated from the USAF Aerospace Research Pilot School—the breeding ground for test pilots and astronauts. Among them are Jay Hanks '50, Bob MacIntosh '51, Frank Liethan '53, Bob Herres '54, Lachlan Macleay '54, Wayne Frye '54, George Knutkowski '54, Tom Strader '54, Greg Neubeck '55, Jerauld Gentry '57, George Thompson '57, and Cecil Powell '59. The home of the school, the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards AFB, CA,

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Colonel George Mushalko '56

George is initiator and project coordinator for the USNA/USAF memorial project. After graduate school George entered Air Force Systems Command (AFSC) where he held increasingly responsible positions such as director of program control for the Air Launched Cruise Missile program and director of Acquisition Programs, DCS/Comptroller at Headquarters, AFSC. His last four years were in the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force as director of programs and congressional relations for classified Air Force space programs. He retired in 1983 after 27 years of service. George is co-chairman of the executive committee

of the Class of 1956 and very active in Class and Academy affairs.

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was commanded by three different Annapolis grads: Tom Stafford '52, Phil Conley '50, and Pete Odgers '55.

Another USNA test pilot of lore is Bob Gilliland, one of those first grads to join the Air Force in 1949. After serving in Korea, Bob became a test pilot at Lockheed and rose to chief test pilot for Kelly Johnson's famed Skunk Works. Bob was the first person to fly the SR-71 Blackbird supersonic reconnaissance plane, the world's fastest operational aircraft.

Seven astronauts were USAF officers from the Naval Academy: James Irwin '51, Donn Eisle '52, Edward Givins Jr. '52, Tom Stafford '52, Ted Freeman '53, Bill Anders '55, and Charles Duke '57. Only 12 men have walked on the moon. Three were USNA graduates and two of those three were Air Force officers: Irwin and Duke. George Abbey '54 headed NASA's astronaut office for many years and was director of the Johnson Space Center until 2002.

The effort to memorialize contributions of the Naval Academy to the Air Force was initiated by George Mushalko, who is serving as project coordinator and is also co-chairman of the Class of 1956.



became vice chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force.

General Monroe Hatch '55

Monroe was a guided missile officer, then entered pilot training and flew B-47s and B-52s. In Vietnam he was a T-39 courier pilot. He next worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and attended National War College. After working at Headquarters USAF in Operational Requirements and R&D, he moved to Strategic Air Command (SAC) as assistant DCS plans and operational requirements. He was air division commander at Beale AFB, CA, and then returned to SAC as DCS/Plans, and later, chief of staff. After serving as inspector general of the Air Force, he returned to SAC as vice commander, and in 1987

The campaign is chaired by Bob Herres '54, now retired from his positions as chairman and CEO of USAA. Other

"Sam" Armstrong '56, Cliff Schoep '56, Gordon Gerson '58, and the author.

The memorial will become a reality with a major renovation to Navy-Marine Corps Football Stadium that will turn the stadium into a true memorial to all who have served. A USNA/Air Force arch will be located in the North Memorial Plaza, taking its place amongst 16 arches that will honor other chapters in the long and proud history of the Naval Academy.



retirement he was commander of Air Force Systems Command.

General Lawrence A. Skantze '52

Larry was a Navy radioman for two years before entering the Naval Academy. After AF pilot training he flew B-26's in Korea, served in R&D at the Pentagon, and worked on the Manned Orbiting Laboratory (MOL) in Los Angeles. He was director of the AGM-69A Short-Range Attack Missile (SRAM) at Wright-Patterson AFB, OH, and then director of the E-3A Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) program at Hanscom AFB, MA. He was deputy for systems at Headquarters AF Systems Command, commander of Aeronautical Systems Division, DCS/R&D and vice chief of staff at Headquarters USAF. At

members on the Campaign Committee are Monroe Hatch '55, Jim Troutman '52, Bill Maxson '52, Bob Bicknell '53, Spence

The Air Force arch will commemorate over 2,300 grads and former midshipmen who served as Air Force officers and will especially be dedicated to the 113 who gave their lives in Korea, Vietnam, and other operations around the world.

The project is on schedule for completion by August 2004 with formal dedication planned for Homecoming on 30 October 2004.

Mike Nassr, a retired Air Force colonel and pilot, has long had a keen interest in USNA grads who served in the Air Force. Through his research he has become the historian of this group. He has written prior articles for *Shipmate* and has published two histories on his Class of 1954.

William A. Anders '55

A fighter interceptor pilot before becoming an astronaut, Bill Anders became a national hero as lunar module pilot of APOLLO 8, the first mission to orbit the moon. Since those astronaut days he's been chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Ambassador to Norway, vice president of General Electric, executive vice president of Textron, and chairman and CEO of General Dynamics. He has received dozens of major awards, including selection as one of USNA's first six Distinguished Graduates. He is a retired Reserve Major General and still an active flyer with over 9,000 hours flying time. He has established the philanthropic Anders Foundation to support education and the Heritage Flight Museum.



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