

Annapolis

Forgive the musings of an old man, but Doris and I just returned from a trip to Annapolis. I keep wondering what keeps drawing me back to the Academy so many years after graduation. It can't be my Navy career since I took my commission in the Army. And it can't be any love that I had for the Academy since I could hardly wait for graduation and release from the high standards of discipline that I never grew accustomed to or accepted. I also have no attachments to organizations or institutions and would not allow myself to be so attached. So, what was it?

During the visit we saw the Plebe parade by the Class of 2008. We also went to Mass at the Academy Chapel. The service was good, but the most dramatic moment was the singing of "Eternal Father." We stayed in the BOQ where the appointments were very good. I even liked the blue and gold towels and the clock ringing the eight bells of the Navy watch. So many times in my life I haven't been able to get behind this level of definition of my feelings.

All of these incidents were good and brought back memories of my times there. Although with time my remembrance of my own experience of these events is fading into the background and is even more difficult to bring back my memory. So what is it that has such an emotional attraction to me?

I believe that the parade, the singing of "Eternal Father", and the other symbols of my time there stir up some emotional feelings that lie below the surface. As I dig deeper what I come to see is the following:

1. Service – Belief in God, Duty, Honor, Country, and Service were strongly imbedded in all of us. We live in a world where these values are foreign to most people, even incomprehensible. It feels good to be where people understand and to be reassured that we are not alone in harboring these beliefs. A big part of my life has been driven by service to my country and to my fellowman. This drive to service was based on a firm foundation of high ideals that were brought to the foreground during my four years at the Academy. The tour in Vietnam and the numerous separations from my family were given because I felt a higher calling to serve my country. This service was apolitical and not driven by the right or wrong of a cause but solely by the desire to serve. The parade made me realize that these young men and women will be driven by this same desire to serve and that it will have a major effect on their lives as it has had on all the previous graduates from the Academy.
2. Comradeship – The singing of "Eternal Father" brings tears to my eyes and makes me realize how many in my class and all the classes of the Academy share a common set of values. As we grow older we may tend to separate from our fellow man, whether it's caused by organizational position or differences in values held, yet when we were together in Bancroft Hall we

came to love one another and to recognize the values we held in common. Over time we come to miss the brotherhood. Our roommates and classmates were and remain what we have given our lives for and bring to mind what life is all about. We miss them and yearn for a time of reunion. Revisiting the past is a revealing and emotional experience. I suppose any college grad returning to the alma mater feels much the same, but I suspect the gut-wrenching travails of Plebe Year (and later) formed a stronger bond between us.

3. Fickleness of Life's Choices – As we made choices in our lives we come to see how our life's trajectory was changed. I went to the Academy because I couldn't afford college and it seemed like an easy way to complete my college education. Certainly I couldn't have foreseen the impact such a decision would make on my life. I don't think any of us could have foreseen the impact of this choice and this too we hold in common. Remembering who we were then in light of who we are today is sobering. Perhaps the common measures of success do not adequately address our successes in life. I believe that success in life is measured by how well we have used our gifts for the betterment of ourselves and fellow human beings. Now is the time to focus on our successes and our gifts and to help ourselves and others to recognize their gifts and to make room in our lives for the use of their gifts.

Finally, I believe Annapolis played a major part in forming us. The institution enhanced our good attributes, and subdued or eliminated the bad. The institution, most of all, made us forever aware of our shortcomings, and taught us to deal with these faults, having amply demonstrated that we all are similarly burdened. This gave most of us the ability to understand the shortcomings in others. And we are the better for it.

Army DuPont, USNA '60

Note: Above is a slightly edited version of a paper send to me in the fall of 2005 by LtCol Arnold (Army) R. DuPont, USA (Ret), USNA '60, that I used as "Reflections" at our 50th reunion Memorial Service in the Naval Academy Chapel on October 15, 2010. Army had passed away unexpectedly in the fall of 2007. His widow, Doris, was one of many class widows in attendance at the Service.

Ed Clextan, USNA '60 Class President, 2000 – 2010.