

Another Link in the Chain
Class of 1980 History for the Class of 2030

Welcome aboard to the Class of 2030 from the Class of 1980! You are now part of the unbreakable chain stretching back 180 years to the founding of the U.S. Naval Academy. The Class of 1980 stands ready to assist you as your Naval Academy experience prepares you for the great challenges ahead.

Following the fall of Vietnam in 1975, respect for military service within the United States was at an all-time low. Within the U.S. Navy, all the metrics were going the wrong direction - recruiting, retention, readiness, military budget, pay, drug use, number of ships and aircraft – all getting worse. At sea, the U.S. and Soviet navies were eyeball-to-eyeball every day, where a mistake could lead to a nuclear war. Despite this grim environment, on 6 July 1976, 1,301 young volunteers stood in T-Court and took an oath to bear true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution. The Class of 1980 included nine international midshipmen, as well as 66 African-Americans. For the first time in 131-years, 81 women were inducted.

Plebe summer for the Class of '80 was the same arduous struggle for survival as any other class that came before, except for the swarms of reporters and photographers. Plebes had no time to think about the historic nature of what was happening. Whether male or female, the return of the Brigade was the same shock as always, but large numbers of the upper class made clear that women were not welcome. This attitude would even in some cases turn classmates against classmates. Admiral Patrick Walsh ('77) described it as an example, "how culture can undermine and corrode the best intentions of law, policy, rules and the leadership." However, except for the presence of women, the experience of the Class of '80 was much the same as any class – challenging academics, intense intramural competition, superb extracurricular activities, informative lectures, and some amazing concerts – no one will forget Stevie Nicks of Fleetwood Mac wearing the midshipman cover. In sports, Navy beat Army three out of four times in football. The most memorable may have been 1977, the coldest in Army-Navy history (by wind chill.) Navy had great records the next two years, in 1978 going to the first post-season bowl game since 1964. In 1979, Navy's "Blue Wave" defense was ranked #1 in the nation for most of the season.

The Navy-wide challenges with manning and readiness impacted the Class of '80, such as cancelled flights during Naval Aviation orientation at Pensacola. The most significant, however, was the first-ever nuclear power-draft. Due to a shortage of submarine officers in the fleet, much of the top-half of the Class had no choice on service selection night. On 28 May 1980, 947 midshipmen were commissioned by CNO Thomas Hayward and General Robert Barrow, USMC. The graduation rates were 72.7% overall, 73.1% for men, 68% for women.

During First Class Year, the global security situation took a dramatic turn for the worse with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Hostage Crisis. As a result, graduates faced arduous record-breaking deployments to the Indian Ocean and audacious forays into Soviet waters, even in the winter. The shock of these events would lead to increased military funding, new and more ships and aircraft, even a big pay raise. By the late 1980's, despite the rigorous operational tempo, the U.S. Navy's readiness for war was the best in decades. Typical of other classes, Class of '80 graduates would reach senior ranks at rates disproportionately greater than other commissioning sources, including 24 flag officers, to include three vice admirals and one four-star. In 2022, Admiral William Lescher, the Vice Chief of Naval Operations, would be the last to retire.

The degree of sacrifice to be ready for war is high. Eleven members of the Class of '80 lost their lives in the line of duty, all but one in operational accidents. 1st Lieutenant Donald Woollett, USMC was killed in the terrorist bombing of the Marine Barracks in Beirut, Lebanon on 23 October 1983 among the 241 total dead. The first operational loss was Lieutenant (j.g.) Daryl Chen in an aircraft crash. Lieutenant (j.g.) Patrick Inglis was lost in a crash during a close pass of a Soviet aircraft carrier. Lieutenant Cynthia Grubbs was lost when the COD she was flying disappeared over the Mediterranean Sea.

In terms of metrics, the Class of '80 was little different than any other. The historic co-ed nature of the class was determined above our pay grade. Despite the profound culture shock, the men and women of the class rose to the occasion and made it work – neither the Academy nor the Navy officer corps would ever be the same. The experience of the last 45 years has shown that the Navy is better for it, and the Class of 1980 is proud to have led the way.

The Class of 1980 is excited to witness the Class of 2030's journey through the Academy and into the fleet. Unexpected, world changing events (e.g. the dissolution of the Soviet Union) occurred during the operational tenure of the Class of 1980 and almost certainly will occur during the Class of 2030's time in the Naval service. We stand ready to support the Class of 2030 with proven experience, hard earned knowledge and compassion.

Best of luck to each of you!

And to the parents, enjoy the ride and as always, remain flexible!

Important Another Link in the Chain Dates to remember:

Spring 2026	Chapter and Parent Club send off parties
June 25, 2026	I Day picnic and Oath Ceremony
August 2026	Honor Coin Ceremony
May 2027	Sea Trials
May 2027	Herndon Monument
April 2028	Bonds of Gold
May 2028	Youngster Picnic
Fall 2028	Commitment Dinner
May 2029	Ring Dance
Fall 2029	Service Community Assignment Dinner
Early 2030	Regimental Receptions
May 2030	Color Parade
May 2030	Graduation

The great Class of 1980 will be with you every step of the way!!

