

Remarks by Doug Leland  
Arlington National Cemetery Ceremony  
10/5/23

Good morning and welcome to all participants and supporters of the two historic cross-country cycling events to be completed this day – the Class of 1973 Ride-2-Remember and the Class of 1983 Charity Ride. I thank you all for being here and offer a special welcome to three members of the Class of 1983 – Vice Admiral, Dixon Smith, United States Navy (retired), Vice Admiral, Luke McCollum, United States Navy (retired), and Vice Admiral, Sean Buck, United States Navy, and so recently retired that he's probably still having a hard time beginning each day without a POD (Plan of the Day). And I extend a very warm welcome to our distinguished guest and speaker for this ceremony, the Honorable Carlos Del Toro, Secretary of the Navy and proud member of the United States Naval Academy Class of 1983.

On August 4th of this year, five members of the United States Naval Academy Class of 1973 assembled atop Navy Heights in Astoria, Oregon at the intersection of Halsey, Spruance, McCain, and Nimitz Boulevards to begin a 3,250 mile bicycle ride to Annapolis, Maryland. Our purpose, our mission has been to carry the memories of our deceased classmates back to Annapolis for our 50th reunion. Each day of our ride has been dedicated to one or more of our deceased classmates. The last day that we rode for an individual classmate was two days ago when we rode for Fred Minier.

Fred was more than just a classmate. He was also a company mate and for a short period of time, my roommate. The last time I spoke to Fred was in March 1975 while conducting an underway replenishment operation in the Mediterranean Sea. Fred was the DCA (Damage Control Assistant) aboard the USS Sampson, home-ported in Athens, Greece. I was the DCA and Liquid Cargo Officer aboard the USS Mississinewa, home-ported in Norfolk, Virginia. It was my job to send fuel to the Sampson and Fred's job to receive it. While the fuel flowed we had the opportunity to speak by ship-to-ship communication and get caught up

on our activities since graduation. Two months later, while anchored off the coast of Taormina, Sicily, Fred and two shipmates went over the side to inspect the underbelly of the Sampson. The Officer of the Deck was supposed to secure the main condenser intake pumps, but had not. One of Fred's shipmates was sucked up against the intake grating. Fred swam to him, freed him from the grating, and sent him to the surface. In the process, Fred became pinned against the grating and had his breathing apparatus ripped away. Fred's other shipmate began moving towards Fred to assist. Fred tried to wave him off, but he kept coming. When within arms reach, Fred pulled the emergency buoyancy tab on his shipmates vest, forcing him to the surface. Moments later, Fred succumbed, still pinned to the grating. Posthumously he was awarded the Navy Marine Corps Medal for heroism. Two days ago we rode for Fred. We ride for him again today.

We also ride today for Wille McCool, Class of 1983. He was an outstanding student – second in his Class, a talented and courageous long distance runner, a loving husband and father, a gifted aviator, the heroic pilot of Space Shuttle Columbia and a gift to humanity. We ride for Willie today.

We ride for Jim Johnson today – Class of 1934, my wife's dad. Before the United States was ever engaged in WWII – while London was being pummeled and leveled, Jim Johnson led a Squadron of PBYS to Northern Ireland, supposedly to train RAF pilots, but in reality, he was freeing up RAF pilots by flying reconnaissance for the British. When the German battleship Bismarck slipped its mooring in Hamburg, Germany and stealthily made its way up the Norwegian coast; when the Bismarck confronted and sank HMS Hood, sending more than 1300 British sailors to the bottom of the sea; when the Bismarck disappeared into the fog of the North Atlantic, it was Jim Johnson and another Navy pilot, who went out to find her – and they did, and stayed with her until the British fleet could get organized and begin tightening a noose around the Bismarck. Jim Johnson spent 22 1/2 hours at the controls of his PBY that day, much of the time while receiving anti-aircraft fire from the Bismarck and her escorts. We ride today for Jim Johnson.

We also ride for Jim Johnson's brothers, Classes of 1924, 1932 and 1938. His older brother died on active duty while assigned to a gun boat on the Yangtze river in China. His other two brothers were Navy fighter pilots who somehow managed to survive the entirety of World War II. We ride today for the Johnson brothers.

We ride today for Spruance and Kincaid. We ride for Nimitz and Halsey. We ride for McCain ... and we ride for McCain. We ride today for anyone who has ever taken the oath of office to become a Midshipman at the United States Naval Academy and is no longer with us ... each a link in the chain of Naval Academy history.

The links of those no longer with us are now hidden beneath the surface of the sea, still tethered to the anchor set in 1845, still taking a strain, yet no longer seen or heard. At the other end of the chain are an untold number of links freshly painted and neatly laid out on deck ... links yet to taste salt and awaiting their turn to be tested. In between the links below the surface and those within the chain locker are the links that today confront the brunt of Mother Nature and human nature – the salt-sprayed links that are covered with seaweed, and spotted with red lead and rust. Classes of 1983 and 1973, we are those links and as such we have a responsibility to carry forward the memories of those who have gone before us, and to raise the bar and set an example for those who will follow.

The two unprecedented and historic cross country bicycle rides that will be complete by day's end have checked these boxes – preserving the memories of our fallen while showing the way to those who follow. I am grateful to all who have participated in and supported either of these rides. I am particularly grateful to the class of 1983 for all the support you have provided the Class of 1973 Ride-2-Remember team.

And now, for one more time, I will lean on the Class of 1983 and ask John Hults to come forward and introduce our distinguished guest and guest speaker, the Honorable Carlos Del Toro, Secretary of the Navy.