



In 2024, *Shipmate* is commemorating the service, sacrifice, professionalism, and leadership of Naval Academy alumni during World War II.

This is the first in a series of stories *Shipmate* will publish this year featuring interviews with four living alumni WWII veterans.

To follow this series and access digital content, visit [www.usna.com/Shipmate\\_WWII](http://www.usna.com/Shipmate_WWII).

Complementary coverage will be posted at: [www.facebook.com/USNAAlumni](https://www.facebook.com/USNAAlumni), [www.youtube.com/@USNAAlumni](https://www.youtube.com/@USNAAlumni) and @usnaalumni on Instagram.

# AGELESS ADVICE

## WWII VETERAN ALUMNI SHARE WORDS OF WISDOM TO FUTURE GENERATIONS OF MIDSHIPMEN

**L**ieutenant Commander William S. Berkshire Jr. '45, USN (Ret.), absorbed many lessons through observation during his time as a newly minted ensign.

Berkshire and his classmates graduated early, on 7 June 1944, to join American forces in the battle against the Axis Powers in World War II. His first post-commissioning assignment was to a supply depot in Bayonne, NJ. He was ordered to a destroyer where he was the supply and dispersing officer. As an ensign, he was commissioned as paymaster.

During the lead up to his deployment to what would be the Battle of Leyte Gulf, also known as the Second Battle of the Philippine Sea, Berkshire was committed to learning how his new shipmates conducted business. He modeled his behavior after theirs.

For future junior officers preparing to commission into the fleet or Marine Corps from the Naval Academy, Berkshire offers simple yet sage advice.

"Watch your peers, your rank or slightly more senior, to see how they do," said Berkshire, a Los Gatos, CA, resident whose career as a supply corps officer included service during the Korean War.

Berkshire and three of his fellow Naval Academy alumni shared words of wisdom for future generations of midshipmen. Their lives of service continued beyond World War II and their time in uniform.

Lieutenant Commander Charles G. Sobel '45, USNR (Ret.), has faithfully worn his ring since his Ring Dance. It is a reminder of the incomparable education he received and the opportunities it has afforded him. He attributes much of his success in uniform and in the insurance industry to the rigorous academic and military instruction he received in Annapolis.

The 100-year-old New Jersey resident served in volunteer service roles until age 99. Sobel said the Naval Academy's structure positions junior officers on the path to success.

"The discipline and the value of following the rules followed me the rest of my life," said Sobel, who served in the submarine community. "Learn as much as you can and follow the rules. The rules are pretty much the same (in the fleet).

"Everything I learned at the Academy put me in good stead for civilian life."

Commander Russell Dawson Taylor '46, USNR (Ret.), grew up watching ships and sailors from his hometown of Virginia Beach, VA. He was enamored by Navy service and his path was set the day an older cousin took him aboard his cruiser.

It took Taylor multiple attempts to earn his place among the Brigade of Midshipmen including a year at the Cochran-Bryan Preparatory School in Annapolis. This came after spending his senior year in high school as a member of the Navy Reserve.

Determination and perseverance were rewarded when Taylor entered the Academy with the Class of 1946. His class graduated on 6 June 1945. Taylor was aboard the Essex-class aircraft carrier HANCOCK in Yokosuka Harbor on 2 September 1945. He leaned over the ship's railing to witness the surrender of the Japanese Empire which occurred aboard MISSOURI.

Taylor said working hard to get into the Naval Academy gave him a greater appreciation for the institution. He was sure to maximize his opportunity. He said the friends he made and the leadership skills he learned while in Annapolis were the two most enduring elements of his time at the Naval Academy.



LCDR William S. Berkshire Jr. '45, USN (Ret.)

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—LCDR Berkshire—



LCDR Charles G. Sobel '45, USNR (Ret.)

**"Learn as much as you can and follow the rules."**

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CDR Russell Dawson Taylor '46, USNR (Ret.)

**"I felt a great responsibility not to let down those who had supported me."**

—CDR Taylor—



CAPT Jack Gillooly '45, USN (Ret.)

**"Do what you're told to do at the Academy, you're going to have to do that when you get to the fleet anyway."**

—CAPT Gillooly—

"I felt a great responsibility not to let down those who had supported me," said Taylor who celebrated his 100th birthday in 2023. "That applied to school, my service in the Navy and what I chose to do afterwards."

#### 'STEP UP AND DO YOUR JOB'

Captain Jack Gillooly '45, USN (Ret.), is the oldest living former Navy football player at 103-years-old. He credits his time at the Naval Academy for instilling in him the values and lessons needed to serve and lead others. Gillooly encourages midshipmen to soak up all the knowledge they can in Annapolis. He said the basic duty of following orders and fulfilling your job requirements goes a long way toward building trust with shipmates.

While not every moment may seem critical, being a dependable shipmate is essential to the team's success, Gillooly said.

"Learn all you can learn. It will be of use to you when you get to the fleet. Don't just push things aside. Learn what you can, it will be easier later," said Gillooly, who served aboard COLUMBIA in the Pacific Ocean during World War II and was a naval aviator during the Cold War.

"Do what you're told to do at the Academy, you're going to have to do that when you get to the fleet anyway."

Gillooly said the Academy experience puts midshipmen under stress for a reason. The ability to perform under duress is an invaluable skill, he said.

"That prepared us," Gillooly said. "You're under stress when you get aboard a ship particularly if you get in battle.

You better be able to control your emotions. A little bit of that at the Naval Academy will help prepare you."

His advice for the Naval Academy's future junior officers is to follow the last order. He said training at the Academy can't give new officers a full taste of what they will experience in the fleet but it does give them a preview of what to expect post commissioning.

"Nothing can really give you the flavor of the fleet, you have to be with the crew," said Gillooly, a two-way tackle for Navy's 1942 and 1943 football teams. "You have to get to know the feel of the crew and men you are serving. That comes. You have to be ready to accept it. Your first tour aboard ship, is going to be a big learning curve."

During the Battle of Leyte Gulf, Gillooly was an ensign manning the light cruiser COLUMBIA's forward five-inch director. He survived one of the earliest Japanese kamikaze attacks.

Gillooly said learning to control your emotions during times of high stress and anxiety is paramount to doing your job effectively.

"You're trained to do a job, you must control your emotions," said Gillooly, who lives in Tallassee, TN. "You can't let that get in the way of your job. Just step up and do your job. Those guys that are right with you are doing their jobs. If you don't do your job, they don't think much of you.

"Each of you has a different part of this puzzle. You're relying on your shipmates to do their jobs. Your life is dependent on that, so you damn well better do your job." ⚓

Shipmate's 2024 coverage and commemoration of alumni experiences in World War II will include the following content:

#### JANUARY-FEBRUARY

- WWII veterans offer advice to future generations of midshipmen
- A look at the National WWII Museum, the Naval Academy alumni featured in exhibits and exclusive WWII-themed travel program offerings

#### MAY-JUNE

- Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of D-Day by preserving the stories and legacies of WWII veterans for future generations
- Naval Academy Medal of Honor recipients from WWII

#### JULY-AUGUST

- Stories of service of Naval Academy alumni WWII veterans
- Naval Academy families share the stories of their WWII veterans