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NPS Alum Receives Distinguished Alumni Award

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By MCCS(AW/SW) Jacqueline Kiel

The Naval Postgraduate School celebrated holidays past and its rich history just prior to the Thanksgiving holiday with a lunch-time talk on seasonal observances. This particular event evolved into a ceremony honoring one of the earliest alums to attend the school in Monterey.

The talk, "History, Holidays and Celebrations at the Del Monte Hotel," was presented by Acting Director of Institutional Advancement John Sanders, who has been an employee here for the past 22 years and is an expert on NPS chronology. He spoke of Del Monte history prior to the facility becoming a naval school and gave a brief account of events leading up to the hotel becoming the nation's premier defense research university.

Celebrations were held regularly at the Hotel Del Monte, which was built by California's "Big Four" railroad tycoons. The hotel, first constructed in 1880, was a place for sports, parties and pampering guests, including presidents, kings and a who's who of famous people. At the time it was one of the most elegant seaside resorts in the world.

Back in the day, one event held by Salvador Dali was filmed. Sanders showed a snippet of that celebration. The grandeur of the event, like others held at the then Del Monte Hotel, which is now Herrmann Hall, provided a glimpse of the style and class experienced here throughout the early years.

Sanders spoke of times past when people such as Clark Gable, Oliver Hardy, Jackie Coogan, Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and the Marx Brothers among others, celebrated at the hotel, regardless of the time of year. Comedian Bob Hope regularly entertained Navy personnel during World War II, when the hotel served as a Navy training command..

It just so happened that 55 years ago to the week, NPS had ceased operations at Annapolis and those students, faculty and staff who were going to continue with NPS began the trek to Monterey, Calif.

One of those students was Donald "Red" Layton, who was honored Nov. 22 with an NPS Distinguished Alumni Award. Layton arrived at the school to view the event, not realizing he was to become a part of it. Acting President Col. David Smarsh presented the award to Layton in front of an audience of 60 students, staff and faculty.



Layton was integrated into the show, providing a first-hand account of his celebrations in 1951.

Throughout the presentation Sanders displayed

historical items via pictures and artifacts that included a dance card, a recipe book, silverware, dinnerware and a cork from a keg that was used sometime during the prohibition years. "Hotel Del Monte was not dry during prohibition," Sanders explained. "There had been a rumor that Sam Morse bought a lot of whiskey and hid it. When crews started the recent renovation of the wings, one of the first things they found was a cork to a whiskey keg that was hidden under the east wing."

The Navy requisitioned the Hotel Del Monte during World War II as part of a national program to

establish new training facilities as the country mobilized for war. Subsequently, the hotel and more than 600 adjacent acres were purchased by the Navy after the war to expand graduate level naval education.

“It’s a unique and truly remarkable history,” Sanders remarked.

Layton retook the stage after Sanders’ presentation to talk about his experiences. He reported to the school in July 1951 in Annapolis, finished the quarter Thanksgiving Eve and then headed to secondary schools that finished up classes just before the Christmas holidays. “I arrived in Monterey at six o’clock on Christmas Eve, only to turn around, deal with household goods, two toddlers and an infant, and a long drive to Ohio to celebrate the holidays before school at NPS began.”

In all about 500 students, staff, faculty and their families all made the cross-country move, according to Layton, who at the time was “a newly minted lieutenant in the Navy.”

Layton had a rich naval career that was followed by a teaching career at NPS. Still, he was surprised at receiving the distinguished alumni award. “I was shocked, because I first heard about it when the colonel presented it to me,” he said. “I was deeply appreciative. So many people put so many things into this school, and in so doing, they have helped me, particularly when I was a student here and even when I came back on the faculty. I’ve had so much help from the faculty and the students. I learned about computers from the students, because you had to do that to keep ahead of them. I’m deeply honored.”

In 1965 Layton came back as a military instructor and ran the gamut, making professor in 1971. “While I was here, I got permission to go through the management courses, so I got my degree in management just before I retired,” he explained. “I retired (from military service) and was hired on as civilian faculty. I had a rather unusual position, because I had been a student here, and a faculty member, and I was also a department head. When they founded the naval aviation school here, I was the first director of that. Most of the military instructors had the academic rank of instructor, but because I was a commander, I had the academic rank of assistant professor. I got hired on as an associate, so I’ve been through all the ranks from instructor, assistant, associate and full professor. I’ve been a student twice, once in engineering and in social sciences as a department head, so I’ve just about done it all.”

Layton received bachelor’s in aeronautical engineering and a master’s in management. Even today he is still involved with the school. “I’m a pusher,” he laughed. “The aeronautics department moved out to Wright Patterson Air Force Base. I’m still in touch there. The main thing is the fact that I’m one of the old-timers. When they had their 50th anniversary, they honored some of the faculty that’s still around, and I was one of the few students around.

“When I was first here, the Navy did not have jet engines. They didn’t have computers.” Layton exclaimed. “By the time I got back here, I left here in ’53 and came back in 65, the Navy had jet engines. They had computers. I knew enough about other things. I learned to do this, because the students were more savvy than I was, and I had to bust muscle to keep up with them.

With a strong message for today’s students, Layton said, “Go hard on the basics. Things are going to come up and you may not have the knowledge, but you know how to get that knowledge and how to expand what you do have, and then you’re going to be well off.

“Red (Layton) very richly deserved the distinguished alumnus award,” Sanders said emphatically.

A webcast of the event can be viewed [here](#).

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