

# **The Professor and the Warrior**

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United States Naval Academy

A brief perspective on two family members, one who taught at the Naval Academy, and one who graduated from it, both of whom left their own imprint upon its history....

Virginia Dillingham Trani Peabody

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**Alexander Dillingham 1883-1960\***



**Rick Trani 1940-1968\***

**\*both of these photographs were taken when each was in his twenties.**

There is a rather obscure fact about two USNA souls who both spent time during the 20th century at the Naval Academy. They were related.

Who would know that Alexander Dillingham (math professor 1917 - 1949) and Rick Trani (class of '63) were from the same family?

Rick was Alexander's grandson.

Alexander Dillingham was a very quiet, unassuming gentle man who joined the staff at the Naval Academy in 1917. 'Dilly', as he was affectionately known by his



friends and colleagues, began his career teaching mathematics at his alumnus, Tufts College in Medford, MA.

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The following is an article, in part, from **The Tufts Weekly**, dated January, 1917. This was written of 'Dilly' as he left his post at Tufts College in the summer of 1917:

*"Assistant Professor Alexander Dillingham has had a long and pleasant connection with the college, that is, long for so young a member of the faculty (34 years old). Entering in 1903, he graduated with his class in 1907, going immediately to Dean Academy [Franklin, MA] where he became an instructor in mathematics. In 1909 he received his A.M. [Applied Mathematics] degree from Tufts, and was married in 1910 [to Alveda F. Greenwood, Tufts, Jackson College, graduate class 1909]. Since then he has been in continuous service here as instructor and assistant professor in the mathematics department in the School of Liberal Arts, the engineering School, and Jackson College (for Co-Ed students). He has continually been at work at Harvard, and received a degree of A.M. [Applied Mathematics] from that institution in 1916.*

*"Having regard for the students whom he taught, he never allowed himself to accumulate that traditional 'dry as dust' method of procedure in the classroom; and his unfailing and good-natured patience in explaining the knotty problems which are bound to turn up in mathematics, won him many admirers and staunch friends. Then, too, his unfaltering readiness to admit an error contributed greatly to his popularity.*

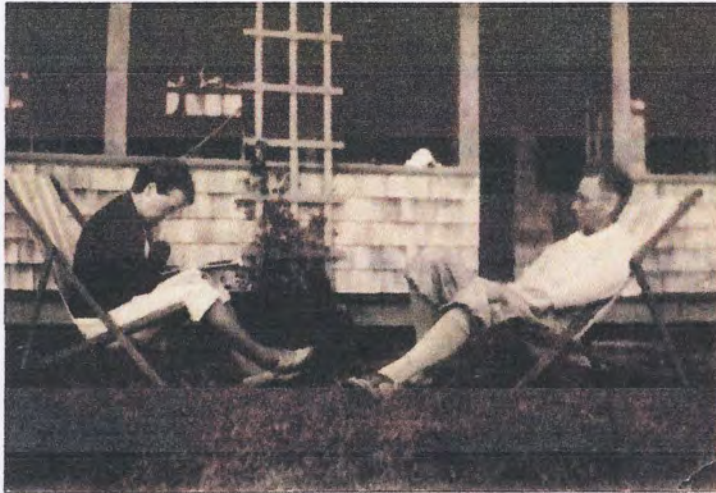
*"His appointment as civilian instructor at the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, came as a result of a competitive examination in which he scored 199 out of a possible 200 points, attaining by far the highest rank.*

*"It is with regret that we note 'Dilly's' departure; but it is with pride in his achievement, and through him, Tufts' achievement, and with the best wishes for his future success in his new undertaking, that we bid him farewell and Godspeed."*

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During the summer of 1917, the young Dillingham family, his wife and their two daughters moved to Thompson Street in Annapolis. This location made for a convenient daily walk to the USNA campus. Their third daughter was born in Annapolis in the 1920's. Alexander's career at the Academy spanned over 30 years. By the 1930's, he had made full professor in the Mathematics Department.



Rick's mother was Ruth, the eldest of their three daughters. In June of each year, Professor Dillingham and his family would travel by train, boat, ferry and train, again, to their modest summer home outside of Falmouth on Cape Cod, MA. They would own this old cottage in Davisville for more than 40 years. They moved

after retirement to Orleans, also on the Cape. The Davisville summer home was built in 1823 and would be where Rick spent many summers with his grandparents, family, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Many of life's lessons were learned on those shores in the 1940's and '50's. Seafaring and nautical ways were the life-style ingrained in all who were there.

Rick's early years began in Lowville, New York and continued in Norman, Oklahoma. Rick's dad made a career change in 1943 from a Physical Education and History high school teacher in up-state NY to a Lieutenant in the US Navy. At the Norman Naval Airbase, he taught an innovative physical fitness program to the pilots-in-training. This program would improve and maintain their physical fitness, specifically while flying. Rick's dad remained in the Navy for the next 24 years; 4 active, 20 in the reserves. Retiring a full Commander.

In early 1944, then Lt. Trani was transferred to Norfolk, VA to meet up with his ship, USS Tripoli, (CVE 64), where he remained shipboard for the duration of the war serving in both the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. Aboard the Tripoli, he continued the physical fitness program with the pilots and crew.



During mid-February 1944, Rick, age 4, and his mother, and family dog, travelled by train from Norman, Ok to Annapolis, MD. Soon after arriving, Rick's younger sister was born at the Academy's Naval Hospital. (A special wartime nursery had been set up for Academy staff and family members.)

Both Rick and his grandfather then shared the same campus grounds for more than a year and a half. While his grandfather taught mathematics to midshipmen in one of the nearby class rooms, Rick played (among other places on campus) around the statue of Tecumseh with his mother and sister.

As the years past, Alexander retired from the teaching staff at the Academy in 1949. He spent the remainder of his days on Cape Cod with his college sweetheart wife, Alveda. He continued his hobbies: building sea worthy clipper ship models, an extensive stamp collection, genealogy back to the 1400's, and mastering the reading of every book in the Orleans Public Library.

Continuing to enjoy the company of family and friends, Alexander quietly passed away in 1960 knowing that his eldest grandson had become a midshipman and would graduate in the class of 1963.

Some part of fate had come full circle.

Rick enlisted in the Navy in February, 1958. Then, Seaman Trani was Honor Man of his training company at Great Lakes Naval Training station and won an appointment to the Naval Academy Prep School (NAPS) at Bainbridge, MD. He graduated in June, 1959. That summer he enrolled in the Plebe class of '63 at the Naval Academy. It must have brought back some nice childhood memories for him. This time, however, his address was Bancroft Hall.

Rick's first task upon graduation was to wed his high school sweetheart. They moved to San Diego, CA, where he reported for duty on the USS Fechteler (DD-870) in the summer of 1963. While on board the Fecktelar, he took part in the Tonkin Gulf Incident. Eventually returning to San Diego, he had renewed ideas as to where he wished to take his career in the Navy. During their time in San Diego, Rick became very enthusiastic with the SEAL team in nearby Coronado. He requested and was reassigned to the east coast, UDT-SEAL Team 2 in Little Creek, VA. Rick moved his wife and their first born back east. Their son would be born while they lived in Virginia.



While in UDT - SEALs, Rick's career in the Navy became considerably honorable. He became the expected well-trained professional warrior. From all reports, Rick was well liked and respected by his fellow UDT and SEAL mates. This was undoubtedly received with much admiration in kind.

Rick's first mainland deployment to Viet Nam was in 1967.

He and his team were involved in untold action. For his part in particular actions, Rick was awarded the Silver Star, two Bronze Stars and the Legion of Merit for his fulfillment of duty.

During Rick's second deployment in mainland South Viet Nam, Rick died of his injuries sustained near Dinh Tuong, in September of 1968.

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Today, one can be assured that Rick's and his grandfather's spirits are mingling with many others in the halls of Bancroft, through the Chapel, wading on the shores of the Severn, or around the statue of Tecumseh at USNA.

Written by Alexander's granddaughter and Rick's sister, Ginny Peabody

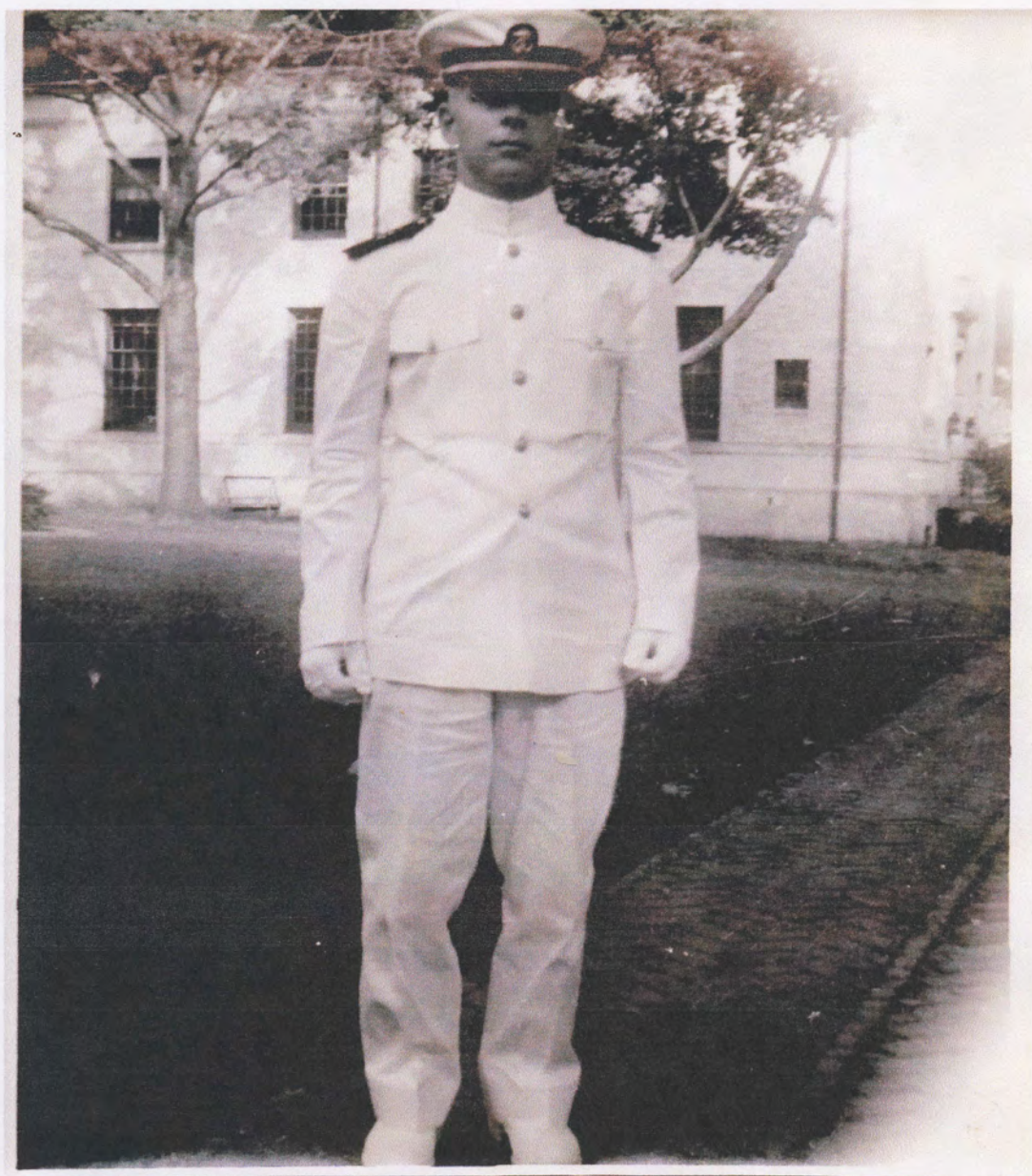
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USNA Mathematics Department photo from 1935 Lucky Bag





**Rick USNA Class of 1963**









1967



1967

To Rick's teammates and friends:

Know that you have never been forgotten.  
After a life-time of ill-placed silence,

there are now two more generations of Rick's family who honor and respect you for your service and your  
friendship.

Please keep in touch.

Ginny  
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