William McKnight Pardee

William McKnight Pardee, (Captain USN, retired) former naval aviator and CO of aircraft carrier USS Hornet (CVS-12), died March 13, 2016 at the Valle Verde Retirement Community, where he had been a resident since 2012. Prior to that, he resided in Alexandria Virginia since 1969.

Born September 20, 1920 in Atlanta, Georgia, Will was the 3rd of 4 children born to Emily Purvis and Robert McKnight Pardee. He graduated from Boys Prep Academy in Atlanta with a scholarship and went on to a year at Georgia Tech followed by an appointment to the US Naval Academy, class of 1943. His was the first class to be graduated in 3 years during WWII so in 1942, he joined the destroyer USS Ingersoll (DD 652) in the Pacific. After the war, he transferred to naval aviation, earning his “wings” in 1948.

He had four major commands during his career including the Antisubmarine Air Group CVSG-53 in 1961, CO of oiler USS Mispillion (AO-105) in 1964, and CO of the Hornet. He also served on the Hornet earlier in his career as the CO of squadron VS-37 in 1960 and as the ship’s XO in 1961. It was only natural when offered his “big ship” command, he chose the Hornet, and one of his proudest accomplishments was commanding the Hornet in 1965-66. He retired from the Navy in 1972.

Will was an avid gardener and tennis player. Long before it was common, he had a disciplined workout schedule and lifted weights 3 times a week at the Pentagon Officers Athletic Club. He had a chin up bar installed on the bridge of the Hornet so he could stay in shape while on a ship at sea. It is still in place on the Hornet, which is now a museum in Alameda, California. He could still do chin ups on visits to the ship in 2012 and 2013.

Will married the former Jane Stewart Tupper in 1947 and they were married 62 years, until her death in 2009. Jane was a loving and supportive wife and mother and they had a good life together. Will is survived by their 3 children: William McKnight Pardee, Jr. (Judy) of Virginia Beach, VA; Catherine Kennedy (Robert) of Santa Barbara; Diana Grater (William) of Clayton, NY and 4 grandchildren: Anne Kennedy Crosby (Matthew), Elizabeth Grater, William "Lars" Grater and Amanda Pardee. His brother Jack, his sister Connie and grandson Christopher Pardee predeceased him. He is also survived by his brother Robert and many nieces and nephews.

During Will’s 3 plus years at Valle Verde, he shared happiness and friendship with JoAnne Ando.

William will be buried at Arlington Cemetery with a memorial service held there. Remembrances can be made to the Hornet Museum, Pier 3, Alameda Point, PO Box 460, Alameda, CA 94501.

Published in The Santa Barbara News-Press Online Edition from Mar. 23 to Mar. 27, 2016