

## Leighton Smith Oral History Is Available

The Naval Institute has released the oral history of Admiral Leighton W. Smith Jr., who served as Commander-in-Chief U.S. Naval Forces Europe/Allied Forces Southern Europe before retiring from the Navy in July 1996.

In his oral history, Admiral Smith discusses his life and career to date. In the following excerpt, he recalls a visitor to the USS *America* (CV-66) while he commanded the carrier in the mid-1980s:

I got a message from my friend Captain James “Red” Best who was CO of the Naval Air Station at Key West. He wanted to send someone out to see me. This was a pretty standard thing. Well, it was the singer Jimmy Buffett, and I don’t know why, but we just happened to hit it off. Jimmy came up on the bridge and we got to talking—turns out he’s from Mobile, Alabama, and married a girl from Columbia, South Carolina. I had done exactly the same. I am a few years older than him, but we were able to talk local high schools and other things like that. He was just a nice easygoing guy.

Before he left, Jimmy said, “Look, there’s not much I could do for you, but I give concerts all over the place. If I’m ever anywhere and you want to come to a concert, all you need to do is call me and I’ll make it happen.”

Well, fast-forward a few years, and I’m in the Pentagon as a fresh-caught one-star. A young family friend tells me how disappointed she is because Jimmy Buffet is coming to town and she can’t get tickets to his concert at the Patriot Center at George Mason University. I said, “Well, I’ll get you tickets.” She laughed and said, “You can’t do that.”

So I called Red Best, who was now chief of staff at Second Fleet, and told him I needed to get in touch with Jimmy Buffet to get six or seven tickets. (I figured if I was going to ask, I’d also get tickets for my family and a couple of their friends.) Red wasn’t too sure about it, but I told him Jimmy Buffett had said to call if I ever needed tickets, so Red said he’d take care of it.

It’s the day of the concert. We lived only a couple of miles from the Patriot Center, so I planned to go down early



mand of a carrier. I’ve been selected for admiral. But the first time I really impress my kids is when I get them tickets for a Jimmy Buffett concert.”

For information about purchasing a copy of the entire Smith history (approximately 1,000 pages) in hardbound, paperback, or CD versions, contact USNI Member Services at (800) 233-8764 or [customer@usni.org](mailto:customer@usni.org).

The Naval Institute produces oral histories solely through charitable gifts received by its

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and pick up the tickets at the will-call window. When I got there, no tickets yet. No problem; I went on home. The concert was at something like 8 o’clock, so by 7:30 we were back at the arena. At the will-call window, with the kids all around me like a flock of chickens, I said, “Hi, I’m Admiral Smith. Do you have tickets for me here?”

“No, we don’t have any tickets for Admiral Smith.”

I thought, “Hmmm, this is not going to be fun.” I turned around and looked at all the disappointed faces. I took about a half-step away and then a thought occurred to me. Years ago, despite my wish for a sexy call sign, I’d been dubbed “Snuffy” and it just stuck. I asked, “Would you, by chance, have anything back there for ‘Snuffy Smith’?”

“Oh, yeah! Jimmy brought these tickets down himself—and, by the way, here are some backstage passes.” Well, the kids just lit up. Our seats were in the second row. When Jimmy Buffett came on stage, he found me in the audience and smiled and waved. When we went backstage after the concert, a guy came up to me and said, “Admiral, Jimmy would like to see you and your guests back in the dressing room,” so off we went.

Jimmy says, “Snuffy, come on in here. How you doing, boy? Can you believe they pay me to do this stuff?”

I said, “Let me introduce you to my family and friends.” But all of them were speechless.

That night in bed, as I was about ready to go to sleep, I looked over at my wife, Dottie, and said, “You know, I’ve been to Vietnam, and I’ve got all the proper decorations. I’ve had com-

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