

# Ann Winters: On the 100th anniversary of Wilkinson's birth

*The author of a recent biography of Vice Admiral Dennis Wilkinson, the first commanding officer of the first nuclear-powered submarine, shares her recollections of him over their 33-year friendship.*

Dennis Wilkinson would have celebrated his 100th birthday on August 10. The life and career of the man who captained the first nuclear-powered submarine and the first nuclear-powered surface ship and was the first president and chief executive officer of the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO) have been captured in Ann Winters's book, *Underway on Nuclear Power: The Man Behind the Words*, Eugene P. "Dennis" Wilkinson, Vice Admiral USN.

Because of his inherent drive, Wilkinson was often called a cowboy, maverick, visionary, innovator, and superb leader. As the first commanding officer of USS *Nautilus*, he was a major player in revolutionizing underwater warfare. *Nautilus* and its crew were immensely popular, at home and abroad, and in the 1950s became what we now call "rock stars." *Nautilus* gave nuclear power celebrity status at a time when the United States and the world were grappling with Cold War issues.

In his post-military career, Wilkinson was chosen to lead INPO as its first CEO. INPO was established in 1979 by the U.S. nuclear power industry following the Three Mile Island accident. INPO sets industry-wide performance objectives, criteria, and guidelines for nuclear power plant operations that are intended to promote



**Winters:** "Dennis was a true 'people person'—interested in others, compassionate, and always willing to help."

operational excellence and improve the sharing of operational experience among nuclear power plants.

An inveterate storyteller, Wilkinson relished telling his "sea stories," which were entertaining, thought provoking, and full of life lessons. His stories were the basis for Winters's book, augmented by recollections of many people who knew him. Wilkinson, who was an American Nuclear Society member for more than 30 years, died on July 11, 2013, one month shy of his 95th birthday.

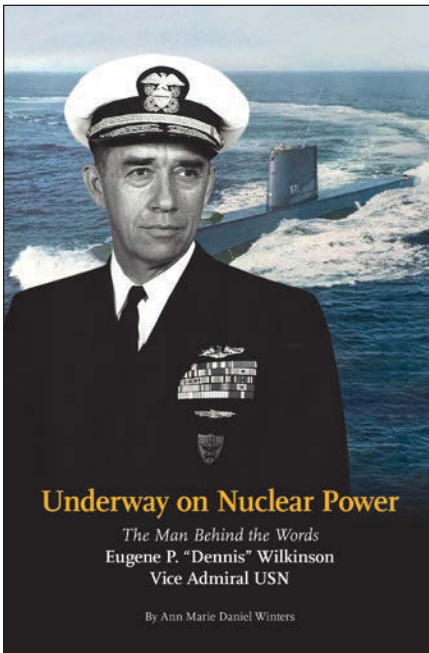
Ann Winters joined INPO in 1980 as Wilkinson's assistant, and the two maintained a friendship for 33 years. Winters was involved in INPO's early

startup activities and later managed two programs that integrated educational support into industry workforce needs. She was active in training initiatives and program development, implementation, and evaluation. An ANS member since 1994, Winters retired from INPO in 2011.

Rick Michal, director of ANS's Department of Scientific Publications and Standards, talked with Winters about her memories of Wilkinson.

*Underway on Nuclear Power: The Man Behind the Words*, Eugene P. "Dennis" Wilkinson, Vice Admiral USN is available through ANS and at Amazon.com.

*(All photos in the main text of the interview are from the personal collection of E. P. Wilkinson)*



*You worked with Dennis Wilkinson at INPO from 1980 to 1984. What was he like during that time?*

I'm not sure what INPO people or the commercial nuclear industry expected of Dennis Wilkinson, the retired Navy vice admiral who had done so much for nuclear in the Navy and was now the first CEO of this new organization. When he arrived at INPO in early 1980, we found him to be down to earth and friendly, and he had a great sense of humor. There was no question that he was brilliant, with a phenomenal memory and an incredible depth of technical knowledge, but he never tried to impress.

Dennis Wilkinson was the hardest working man I've ever known. His energy was phenomenal. He committed to visiting every U.S. nuclear power plant—70 to 80 sites at that time. He also attended every plant evaluation exit meeting. All that in addition to everything involved in setting up this new organization, recruiting personnel, and meeting industry needs. He was in his 60s, and even when he must have been exhausted, he still devoted immense effort to INPO. He was committed to making INPO a real asset to the industry.

Dennis was the first person I knew who truly defined "multitasking." He could take a stack of paperwork into a meeting, be completely in tune with everything going on in the meeting by appropriately interjecting questions, answers, and comments and still complete the paperwork by the end of the meeting. He never missed a point or comment while doing both.

Dennis always stressed high standards, attention to detail, and commitment to INPO and the industry. He expected the highest quality work from those around him. We used to say that INPO didn't

have the luxury of making mistakes and that we had to be right the first time. He constantly reinforced that principle. While the work was grueling, with long hours, Dennis's humor was infectious and made it fun. He was always loyal to his people. One of his favorite sayings was, "It's amazing what you can accomplish when you don't care who gets the credit." He lived those words and never neglected to praise and encourage. He truly believed in positive reinforcement before it became popular.

Dennis was a true "people person"—interested in others, compassionate, and always willing to help. I've seen people new to him spend half an hour getting acquainted and come away devoted fans. Whenever he was in the office and could make it happen, he would walk the INPO halls in the late afternoon and stop in to visit with anyone who was in their office, no matter their position or rank. He would sit down and talk, expressing sincere interest, laughing, and telling a sea story or two. That had a great impact on INPO employees.

I especially like the story about Dennis, some years before he came to INPO, talking with the son of a Navy acquaintance. The acquaintance was worried about his son going in the wrong direction. As a last resort, he asked Dennis to talk to him. As always, Dennis was pleased to do so. He met and talked with the young man. Some 30 years later, Dennis received a letter from the son, now middle aged, which said in part, "Because of you, I turned my life around. I graduated from college, have a wonderful family, and a successful career. All because of the time you spent with me and your good guidance and counsel those many years ago."



Vice Adm. Eugene P. "Dennis" Wilkinson

That story is so representative of Dennis Wilkinson.

*It appears that Admiral Wilkinson had three careers in his lifetime. One of them involved his time in the Navy during World War II. Can you talk about that period and its significance?*

Dennis Wilkinson's service during World War II was filled with excitement, danger, and adventure. In early December 1941, he was on his first ship—the cruiser USS *Louisville*, which was returning from escort duties in the Philippines—when a Japanese fleet came into view. The *Louisville* crew was unaware that the fleet was on its way to Pearl Harbor. *Louisville* arrived a few days after the attack, and the men saw the devastating results. That ended Dennis's expectation to serve only one year of active duty. He signed on for another four years, and that evolved into a 37-year naval career.

Later, Dennis's service on the submarine USS *Blackfish* almost ended in disaster when it was depth charged by the Germans and sustained major damage. Only by luck or the grace of God, *Blackfish* dived to the bottom below a strong current that obscured its position from further attack. Near the end of the war, Dennis was on the submarine USS *Darter*, the first to report the presence of the Japanese fleet at the Battle of Leyte Gulf, considered the largest naval battle in World War II, and maybe in history. *Darter* performed heroically but was grounded and wrecked, and the crew barely escaped capture by the Japanese. The crew was awarded the Navy Unit Commendation for heroism, and Dennis was awarded the Silver Star. His successes and expanded technical knowledge were stepping stones to his later Navy achievements.

*His second career was his time with the nuclear Navy and Admiral Rickover. What can you tell us about that time?*

The association with then Captain Rickover was an example of Dennis's being at the right place at the right time. He often said, "They needed an operations guy on Rickover's team, and I was it." USS *Nautilus* was the first nuclear-powered Navy submarine. Being involved in the design of the first nuclear reactor for *Nautilus* was huge. Being selected as its first commanding officer was even more momentous. That was followed by being selected as commanding officer of USS *Long Beach*, the first nuclear-powered cruiser. Both vessels were enormously newsworthy and achieved great successes. Dennis followed that with additional accomplishments after achieving the rank of admiral, including setting up standards for developing and maintaining safe and reliable nuclear operations for Navy submarines and sur-

face ships. He was instrumental in forging a mutually strong post-war relationship between the United States and Japan. He had an amazing Navy career and received four Distinguished Service Awards, among many other awards.

In the early 1990s—about 1992 or 1993, as I remember—the Navy dedicated a new 50,000-square-foot training building to Dennis. Wilkinson Hall sits on a hill inside Naval Submarine Base New London, in Groton, Conn. Dennis said he was shocked, but very pleased and humbled by the great honor. I was privileged to visit the site with him in 2005 and to see his portrait and memorabilia about his career inside the building.

*Then came his time with the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations, which was his third career.*

Yes, that's right. Dennis didn't expect or solicit his involvement in INPO, yet it became the capstone of his nuclear career. His career spanned the birth of nuclear propulsion through its infancy and on to its major place in the military and adaptation to worldwide commercial power, and ended with outstanding contributions to the commercial industry following its most devastating challenge up to that time, which was the Three Mile Island accident in 1979.

Over time, INPO became the service of which Dennis was most proud. He was

always proud of and grateful for his Navy career—it was the reason he was selected as INPO's first CEO. But it was his unique abilities that established a viable INPO and resulted in significant improvements for the commercial nuclear power industry. His brilliance, relationship skills, dedication, and commitment to the highest standards became his legacy in this new arena. He received a number of prestigious industry awards for his dedication and service.

*What made Wilkinson able to work so well with Admiral Rickover? Why was he able to take Rickover's nuclear Navy and "make it run?"*

## Remembering a mentor

I had the great honor of knowing and working with Dennis Wilkinson through the early days of INPO and helping to shape it into the great organization it is today.

Although I knew of his legendary history in the U.S. Navy's nuclear power program, I had not met Dennis during my career as a naval officer in the submarine service. I completed my naval career in the aftermath of the accident at Three Mile Island and decided to reach out to Dennis as he was staffing up INPO. I called INPO and asked for Admiral Wilkinson. His assistant, Ann Winters, put me right through to him. It was soon clear that while I had not met Dennis, he knew all about me, my career, my family, and so forth. I'm sure that I got no more than 10 words in during that three-minute conversation. Dennis told me what he wanted me to do, when to do it, when I needed to be in Atlanta, etc. It was a short call but, like Dennis, was focused and direct and completely thorough. My decision to join INPO and my desire to work for Dennis were solidified through that first short interaction with him.

The early days of INPO in the 1980s were challenging as the industry tried to improve all nuclear plant operations after TMI and as INPO worked to become fully effective in its mission. All of the nuclear utilities in the United States were members of INPO, and their chief executive officers expected INPO to fix all of the industry's problems overnight. Dennis decided that he needed to visit every plant and attend each of INPO's plant evaluation exit meetings to ensure that the utility's CEO attended and fully understood the evaluation results and the significance of INPO-identified problems at the CEO's facilities. Dennis's participation in these plant visits gave him deep insights into the overall nuclear industry and established his credibility as INPO's CEO. This travel was a great personal burden on Dennis, but one that he relished. Traveling with Dennis was always exciting. He traveled with only a small briefcase but somehow got all his papers, clothes, and personal items in the small bag. Heaven forbid that Dennis would have to wait for one of the INPO team members to retrieve a checked bag!

Dennis probably shaped my life and career more than any other single person. He was a mentor to all those he touched. His thoughtful but firm management and leadership style, coupled with a wonderful sense of humor, taught me lessons about managing people and organizations that clearly helped me throughout my career in the nuclear industry.

In the mid-1980s, the industry decided to establish the Nuclear Management and Resources Council (NUMARC) as a permanent organization in Washington, D.C., to integrate the

nuclear industry's efforts in working with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. While still at INPO, I was tasked to form NUMARC, find office space, and staff the organization. As a result, I spent many days in Washington, D.C., but I had no plans to leave INPO. It soon became all too clear that I was to be leaving INPO to head NUMARC, but it wasn't until a year later that I found out that Dennis, with some help from Adm. Lando Zech, was the force behind the decision. This unexpected and unplanned shift in my career path turned out to be the right one for me, as we ultimately evolved NUMARC into the Nuclear Energy Institute, integrating all the regulatory, communications, and political elements into a single, focused organization. I had the honor to serve as its president and CEO for nearly 20 years, and I credit Dennis's foresight and vision in seeing the future needs of the nuclear energy industry and formulating the essential ingredients for its success.

In a larger sense, Dennis brought to the commercial nuclear energy industry the understanding of the need to strive for excellence in all aspects of plant operations and the recognition that every nuclear power plant is a captive of every other nuclear plant, in that a problem at one plant is a problem at every plant. Dennis's vast experience in the development of naval nuclear power programs, from the first submarine nuclear plant to surface nuclear power, and his close personal relationship with Adm. Hyman Rickover gave him the fundamental tenets of safety and management programs necessary to ensure the success of this demanding technology. He was relentless in ensuring that those same fundamental tenets were integrated into all aspects of commercial nuclear plant operations. The results of those efforts are clearly demonstrated by the significant increases in the safety of plant operations over the last several decades.

Dennis was a leader, a visionary, and a wonderful friend and mentor. I miss him immensely.—*Joe Colvin*



*Joe Colvin is president emeritus of the Nuclear Energy Institute, for which he served as president from March 1996 until his retirement in February 2005. While working at INPO in the 1980s, he helped found the Nuclear Management and Resources Council (NUMARC) in March 1987. He served as president and chief executive officer of NUMARC from February 1991 until March 1994, when it was merged with three other nuclear industry organizations to form NEI. Colvin also served as the 2010–2011 president of the American Nuclear Society.*



## The admiral always found a way

While serving as a vice president of MDM Engineering in the 1990s, I had the opportunity to work with Admiral Wilkinson, as he was chairman of the company's board of directors. This was one of the most interesting and exciting times of my career. Admiral Wilkinson was truly a humble leader in the nuclear industry, and he always introduced himself as "Dennis" to everyone he met, whether in business or at social events.

Dennis would often tell us stories from his career in World War II and his later times in the Navy with Admiral Rickover. There were also tales about USS *Nautilus* and the beginning of nuclear energy for naval and commercial purposes. And I remember that whenever we were on a business trip to visit utility and vendor customers, we always had to stop for ice cream at whatever airport we were going through, because Dennis loved his ice cream!

Dennis always took an interest in anyone working in nuclear science and technology, and he paid special attention to young people starting their careers. When he served as honorary general chair of the ANS Meeting in San Diego in the early 2000s, he was personally involved in recognizing all attendees and sponsors, including giving out awards and recognitions at the special events.

Because of his experience in starting INPO, Dennis was well connected with all levels of management at nuclear utilities. He had the ability to ask probing questions and get right to the bottom line in whatever discussion was being had. He also had an incredible talent for getting people to "do the right thing" in whatever task they were assigned.

The enduring legacy of Admiral Wilkinson has come from many examples, as brought out in the Ann Winters book. The story told is much more about true leadership and team building during his decades in the nuclear industry than it is a documentary of technical facts. Dennis always found a way, no matter how difficult the task, to work hard and enjoy it at the same time. —*Ted Quinn*



*Ted Quinn has more than 40 years of experience in managing nuclear and fossil utility contracts and personnel in support of both project and supplemental assignments at various utilities in the United States. He is a past president of the American Nuclear Society (1998–1999), president of Technology Resources, and currently serves as chairman of the International Electrotechnical Commission SC45A Working Group A9 on Nuclear Instrumentation Systems.*

Dennis used to say that he worked well with Admiral Rickover because Rickover wasn't the one who signed Dennis's fitness reports for the Navy. The result was that Dennis was able to "tell it like it was," with no fear of retaliation. I think it was more than that, however. I think that Admiral Rickover recognized in Dennis Wilkinson a man of comparable intellect, sound judgment, high standards, and integrity.

Rickover's focus at the time was on "selling" the nuclear Navy. His activities were mostly directed at the Atomic Energy Commission, Congress, other members of government, and the industry in order to ensure the proper support for developing nuclear. Rickover certainly understood operations and was involved in developing the nuclear Navy, but Dennis Wilkinson was an operator at heart. His focus was on making things run the way they should and being sure that high standards were met. In addition to helping design the first reactor, he learned about the entire boat, thanks to all of his submarine experiences. After reaching command rank, he spent lots of time in the engine rooms of all the ships that he commanded, including *Long Beach*, which was a large cruiser with more than a thousand personnel. When he inspected ships later on during his higher command positions, he never failed to visit the engine rooms, talk with the crew, and discuss operations, which was a forerunner to his visits to commercial nuclear power plants where he did the same thing.

When Dennis became director of the Navy's Submarine Warfare Division, he

was instrumental in setting up a comprehensive plan for the review and evaluation of operating nuclear plants on submarines and surface vessels—not only before the reactors went critical and the ships went to sea, but also periodically throughout the operating lives of the ships. Those structures are still in place today to ensure safe and reliable operations for the Navy.

While Rickover may have tested Dennis as he did everyone else, I think he appreciated a man who held his own verbally and technically and with strong integrity. With what I have learned of both men over the years, I think I can comfortably say that each was likely better because of the other.

*Why was Admiral Wilkinson chosen as the first commanding officer of Nautilus? Did then Captain Rickover personally select him for this important role?*

Rickover was definitely in favor of Dennis Wilkinson as the first CO of the *Nautilus*. I'm sure he wanted someone who thoroughly knew the submarine's nuclear plant. He wrote a "confidential and personal" letter to Dennis urging him to apply for the position, but Dennis chose not to. If selected, Dennis wanted it to be because he was deemed the best choice and not because he actively sought the job.

As Dennis used to tell the story, part of his selection was good luck—he was again at the right place at the right time. He was number one in his age group on the list maintained by the Submarine Detail Desk. As he said, "I was the right age,

seniority, background, command, and technical/operating experience, all at the right time." He had excellent command and operations credentials and the required nuclear knowledge. Rickover's influence was, I'm sure, another major factor in Dennis's selection, although Rickover wasn't as powerful at that time and didn't control nuclear personnel selections as he did later on. Dennis was truly grateful and recognized the assignment as a great achievement and a huge challenge.

*At the time Nautilus was launched, it gave nuclear power "celebrity status." What did that mean in the 1950s?*

It's hard for us today to comprehend the enormous impact of *Nautilus* in the 1950s. Dennis often told stories of media crews and large crowds that lined riverbanks and harbors whenever *Nautilus* arrived or departed a location, seeking just a glimpse of this new "nuclear" submarine. School classrooms, Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, clubs, civic groups, and others named themselves *Nautilus*. There were *Nautilus* fan clubs throughout the United States. There were long lists of dignitaries who sought visits and short rides, including senators and congresspersons, members of the Atomic Energy Commission, the secretary of the Navy, Navy representatives, scientists, government representatives, mayors, and business leaders. Wherever *Nautilus* traveled around the world, it received warm welcomes, keys to cities, special citations—and the list went on. Members of royalty were also eager to experience this new technological marvel. Those must have been heady times. I can

only imagine the excitement of being on *Nautilus* and interacting with its crew as the men demonstrated its wonderful new capabilities.

*When Admiral Wilkinson became the first commanding officer of the Navy's cruiser Long Beach, was nuclear still as newsworthy as with Nautilus?*

From what Dennis told me, *Long Beach* was certainly newsworthy, although maybe not quite as well known to the public as *Nautilus*. Within the Navy, *Long Beach* was the first nuclear cruiser and was very well known. It was another huge effort for Dennis, since he took charge during the final stages of construction, with all that that entailed. Dennis was not as formal as most cruiser captains unless the situation called for the pomp and ceremony. Then he might tell his men, "Help me put on this damned uniform with all the medals." Changes of clothes could happen several times a day when VIP visitors came aboard. During routine operations, he could be found all over the ship dressed casually in khaki shirt and shorts. His men loved to see his interest in all areas of the ship. He carried forward another routine from his submarine days: He was determined to know every man on board by face and name—all 1,000-plus crewmen. So each day, he pulled out a photo of one or two men, along with some details about their lives, and memorized the information. When he made his walk-throughs, he called everyone by name and frequently recalled personal facts about the individuals. What an impact!

One of the most popular PR features of *Long Beach* was giving honors. When visiting new places or hosting important dignitaries, honors included firing two 40-millimeter guns, one round from one gun and then another round from the other. He said everyone loved it. Imagine, there was this huge cruiser of 1,000-plus personnel with the most current and up-to-date weaponry, firing those guns. How impressive that must have been! The list was long of people who wanted to visit and ride on *Long Beach*, just as it had been with *Nautilus*. When I was going through Dennis's memorabilia at his home, I found several files of thank-you letters from people who had visited *Long Beach*.

*The title of your book includes the phrase "Underway on Nuclear Power." Why did you pick that for the title?*

Nuclear power is almost everywhere today, so it can be hard for us to comprehend the enormity of accomplishing it for the first time in the 1950s and the importance of *Nautilus* to that time. Dennis Wilkinson and his men worked around the clock to prepare for the first underway of the submarine. It had to go right the first time. Recognizing the momentous occasion, the Navy directed its communications people to draft a suitably important message to be broadcast just as *Nautilus* got underway for the first time. Keep in mind, again going back to that time, that broadcast messages were sent from the deck via flashing lights, typically letter by letter.

Dennis often told the story of Navy PR

officers coming on board just before underway with an impressive message more than a page long to be broadcast as *Nautilus* first got underway. Gracious as always, he thanked them, but said the message had to be shorter so that it could be easily sent via flashing lights. The PR people left and returned with two paragraphs. Dennis thanked them again, but he knew that his men could not send two paragraphs by flashing lights—the message had to be succinct and easy. So he turned to his communications officer, Ned Dietrich, and told him to condense the message further. Dietrich reduced the message to several lines, but it was still too long. After additional direction from Dennis to make it short and simple, the message was finally culled down to "Underway 1100 on nuclear power." Dennis looked at the short message, said to himself that people would know the time and didn't have to be told, and he struck through the "1100." The short, succinct message, "Underway on nuclear power," was successfully, quickly flashed at 11 a.m. on January 17, 1955, and ever since it has been the byword for Navy nuclear power.

I picked *Underway on Nuclear Power* as the title of the book because it best represented Dennis Wilkinson's place in Navy history and nuclear power. He truly was the man behind those words. Without that "first" there could never have been all that has come after.

*Admiral Wilkinson was the first president and CEO of INPO, serving from 1980 until his retirement in 1984. How and why was he selected for that position?*

Bill Lee said it best back in 1980. Bill was chief operating officer of Duke Power. He was a leader in the industry's response to TMI and was instrumental in the establishment of INPO following TMI. Bill also was INPO's first chairman of the board and was head of the search committee to find INPO's first CEO. The selection activity was time-urgent during the fall of 1979. More than 100 qualified individuals were considered for the position, but the search committee realized that the right fit was not available from the commercial nuclear industry. Bill recognized the potential of retired Navy nuclear personnel who had depth of knowledge and experience, and he began aggressively searching those possibilities.

Bill loved to tell the story about contacting Admiral Rickover each time a retired Navy admiral was being considered as INPO's CEO. All of the early calls to Rickover ended with his shouting into the phone, "He's no damn good!" followed by his slamming down the receiver. The list was finally pared down to two highly recommended individuals—Vice Admiral Eugene Parks Wilkinson and Vice Admi-

U. S. NAVAL DISPATCH		SND GEN 1007	
FROM:	USS NAUTILUS SSN 571	CLASSIFICATION	PRECEDENCE
ACTION:	COMSUBLANT	UNCL	ROUTINE
INFO:	NJOF DE NWCL -T-YZZF -R-171601Z -FM NWCL -TO YZZF GR 5 BT		
UNDERWAY <del>1100</del> ON NUCLEAR POWER BT....			
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	17 JAN 55		171601Z
X 1	X 2	3	X 4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12
13	14	X 15	16
17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24

First transmission of the historic message "Underway on nuclear power" (January 17, 1955)



ral Dennis Wilkinson. Bill laughed about discovering that they were one and the same man! Eventually, when Bill called Admiral Rickover and asked about retired Vice Admiral Eugene P. “Dennis” Wilkinson, Rickover screamed into the phone, “He’s too damn good for you!” Slam! Bill was delighted.

Bill Lee was convinced that Dennis Wilkinson was the right man for INPO, but each time he offered the job to him, he declined. After all, Dennis had retired after a long, distinguished Navy career and was comfortably settled in California. And he was soon to become CEO of the engineering company where he worked. While he was concerned about the impact of TMI on the nuclear industry and was sought out by Admiral Rickover and others for advice and counsel, he wasn’t interested in taking on another startup project that would be all-consuming.

Bill perceived that offers of money, prestige, and career building would not attract Dennis. As Bill said later, “The only way to attract Dennis Wilkinson to INPO was by appealing to his service to his country—and INPO was a major service to the country—and by his again being the first in new territory.” It still took a lot of convincing, but Dennis finally relented. And the rest, as they say, is history.

*Can you talk about Wilkinson’s “Xerox box” while he was at INPO?*

Dennis Wilkinson was never one to flaunt his status or fame. In fact, he did just the opposite. He once said that instead of telling people what he had accomplished, he preferred to let his actions and achievements speak for themselves. So he never demanded special treatment—although there were times he did receive it, but it was instigated by others for him, not by him.



Wilkinson and his ubiquitous Xerox box (1984). His wife, Janice, is at left.

It wasn’t long after he started work at INPO that we began seeing him carry a Xerox box into the office each morning and carry it out each evening. We soon learned that he loaded the box with paperwork before leaving the office, took it home and completed it that night, then brought the completed work back the next morning. While the box itself generated

smiles, knowing what it meant and the volume of work he completed caused head shaking and marveling at his abilities.

After a number of months of the Xerox box, several of us tried to convince Dennis that he needed a briefcase, but he always answered “No, the box is fine.” When a box became ragged or torn, he went to the copy room and found a replacement. An

## A proud INPO legacy

The Institute of Nuclear Power Operations owes its creation, methods, and long-term success in influencing nuclear industry performance to Admiral Dennis Wilkinson’s vision and leadership. The genesis of INPO was not easy, and it required profound leaders and leadership to convince the commercial nuclear power industry of its need to embrace INPO and its message. Admiral Wilkinson’s ability to influence industry leaders, set and enforce the highest standards of nuclear safety and reliability, and guide INPO’s evaluators to uphold those standards in both their work and their own personal conduct enabled INPO’s success.

At the end of each year, INPO presents awards to INPO members and teams whose work has defined excellence. The highest single honor for an INPO employee is to receive the Wilkinson Award, which is reserved for an individual whose contributions to the nuclear power industry are befitting of Admiral Wilkinson’s legacy.

I think that Admiral Wilkinson would be proud to see his

legacy hard at work, influencing nuclear industry performance. He would certainly recognize the high standards that are being upheld every day, and he would be impressed by the dedication of INPO employees to their mission. But mostly, Dennis Wilkinson would be awed by the nuclear industry that INPO has helped to shape. He would be amazed at its professionalism, mutual support, and incredible safety and reliability.—*Bob Willard*



*Robert F. Willard has been president and chief executive officer of INPO since May 2012. He retired with the rank of admiral in March 2012 after 39 years of service in the U.S. Navy. During his naval career, he served in many capacities, including as commander of the U.S. 7th Fleet in Yokosuka, Japan; vice chief of naval operations; commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet; and his final assignment as commander, U.S. Pacific Command, Camp H. M. Smith, Hawaii.*



## Interview: Winters

important industry meeting was coming up in Washington, D.C., and we feared he would take a Xerox box or something similar along for his papers. Finally, after a lot of pleading, he let us buy him a small leather attaché case that held just a few papers. As soon as he returned to the office, he was back to the Xerox box.

I think he liked the Xerox box because it was efficient—he could carry a large amount of papers easily—and it demonstrated that he was a professional who worked just as hard as everyone else in the company. He never asked people to do more than he himself was willing to do. When people saw him with his box, they knew he was taking home lots of paperwork that would be completed that evening and that he was working as hard as or harder than they were. I don't think he was trying to impress but rather to set an example of dedication and commitment.

*What do you think would have been Admiral Wilkinson's reaction to his biography?*

Over the years, I had often urged Dennis to write his autobiography—his life was filled with exciting adventures and accomplishments that should be recorded. He was adamant that he would never do that. He wasn't shy about his achievements, but I think he viewed an autobiography as self-promotion, which he would never do.

Finally recognizing that Dennis would never write his memoir, I began asking him about a biography. He still refused. After several years, I finally said to him,



Photo: INPO

Vice Adm. Eugene P. "Dennis" Wilkinson, USN (retired), next to his portrait during the dedication of Wilkinson Hall (July 9, 1993)

"Dennis, you need a biography—the world needs your biography. I'll write it." He still said no. After more time passed, I said, "Dennis, I'm going to write your biogra-

phy. Other people are enthusiastic and will help. Don't you want to be involved to be sure the right people are involved and we get it right?" He reluctantly agreed. Several months later he gave me a long, well-organized list of people who had known or worked with him during the different phases of his life: youth, college, Navy, each vessel, government, INPO, commercial industry, and so on. By this time, he was okay with the effort and I think even eager to see what developed.

I was able to contact more than 50 individuals from the list. Their memories added so much.

The interviews and research took a long time—much longer than anticipated—followed by the actual writing and publishing, which also took a long time. I sent several versions of early chapters to Dennis that he reviewed and on which he made corrections. I soon recognized that I had little leeway to add or improvise—he wanted the facts to be correct. The book was published by ANS in 2016. I was extremely saddened and disappointed that my effort was not completed before Dennis passed away in 2013.

Based on feedback from people who knew him, the book does a good job of presenting Dennis Wilkinson. His family was especially pleased to have his history captured in print. I like to think that Dennis would have been pleased, too. **NW**



William S. Lee presenting the Henry DeWolf Smyth Nuclear Statesman Award to Wilkinson (November 1994)