



United States Navy
Public Affairs
Association

Sightings

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Atlantic Ocean (Nov. 4, 2005) The Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69) is reflected in a set of "Big Eyes" binoculars on the signal bridge of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75). U.S. Navy photo by **Photographer's Mate Airman Ricardo J. Reyes** (RELEASED)

From the Bridge...

Dear USNPAA Members,

I'm obviously delighted to begin this newsletter with another set of congratulations to Captain Charlie Brown for his selection as the next Chief of Information. I'm very pleased, of course, that the Navy fulfilled its promise to restore a flag officer to lead our community. Having known Charlie since he was a very young junior officer, I can assure the Association membership that the Navy has made a great selection.

Personally, I'm a big Charlie fan. For one, he has all the right "tickets" – all the right assignments and all the right tools that he needs to be successful in his new position. But what has always impressed me about Charlie is his humility. I find humility a wonderful character trait. I have the fullest confidence in his success as the leader of our community.



Rear Admiral Tom Jurkowsky

As I said in my note announcing Charlie's selection, we owe Captain Greg Hicks a huge set of kudos for the job he has done in steering the Public Affairs ship for the past 17 months. Although serving in an "acting capacity," Greg has done more than keep the ship at anchor. He has moved it smartly through some very challenging issues. Greg certainly has our deepest gratitude and respect for his efforts. Leading the community as a flag officer is difficult enough, but Greg has done it as a Captain. "Well done," Greg. On behalf of the entire USNPAA organization, please accept our thanks for your superb leadership.

This issue of *Sightings* is another great effort by Joe Quimby and Tim Beecher. We're featuring stories about accreditation in the communications profession. Is it important? If so, why? What are its advantages – in both the military and in the civilian sectors? We offer several different perspectives that you will find interesting. And, we continue with the "Five Questions For..." column this month, featuring retired CDR John Alexander.



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Another piece featured in this issue is one on the importance of strategic thinking. LCDR Arlo Abrahamson, a PAO who is currently studying at the Naval War College, wrote it. It's a phenomenal piece. After reading it, you will come away feeling the community is in great hands.

One of the things our membership has been very desirous of is an updated directory. Dick Thompson has done an extraordinary job of making a directory a reality. Hopefully, all of you have received your initial copies and have provided Dick with new or updated information. He is in the process of making the necessary edits and will be disseminating the "latest and greatest" edition in the next several days.

I have said this before—and I will say it again – we all owe Dick a huge set of thanks, not for just compiling the directory, but for all the other things that Dick does to support me and ultimately support you. Many of you have sent me notes of thanks or gratitude about the information we disseminate. But it's not me – it's Dick who is doing all the heavy lifting and spending countless hours at his computer. Dick is also deeply involved in supporting the reunion, by the way. To say "thanks" for his support seems so trivial. (But I do tell him often that he should tell the president of the USNPAA that he deserves a raise).

Finally, another reminder about the reunion - several of you have already committed to joining us in September by sending in your reservations. Another one of our 'brands' is camaraderie. And I know camaraderie will abound when we meet 20-21 September in Arlington, Virginia. For those who plan on attending, go to the link shown in the block ad in this issue and download the registration form. I look forward to seeing you there.

Sincerely,
Tom



CAPT Charlie
Brown, APR+M

Capt. Charles W. Brown, a 1994 graduate of the United States Naval Academy, is the Fleet Public Affairs Officer for Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, headquartered in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Brown has served as the Fleet Public Affairs Officer for U.S. Third Fleet, the Special Assistant (Public Affairs) to the Chief of Naval Operations, the Force Public Affairs Officer for U.S. Naval Air Forces, and the aircraft carrier and battle group Public Affairs Officer for USS CONSTELLATION (CV 64) and Cruiser Destroyer Group ONE. Brown has also served as Deputy Public Affairs Officer for U.S. Fifth Fleet/U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, Deputy Public Affairs Officer for Naval Surface Forces, and Fleet media officer at U.S. Fleet Forces Command.

Our Next CHINFO

Brown has earned a Silver Anvil Award and an Award of Excellence from the Public Relations Society of America, a Thomas Jefferson award from the Department of Defense, and numerous Rear Adm. Thompson Awards for Excellence in Navy Public Affairs. He has deployed in direct support of Operations SOUTHERN WATCH and ENDURING FREEDOM. He has earned a master's degree from San Diego State University in Mass Communication and Media Studies, and is Accredited in Public Relations + Military Communication.

Strategic Thinking Skills, a Journey Not an Ends

By LCDR Arlo Abrahamson USN, APR Dec. 13, 2018 via [LinkedIn](#)

There is much conversation these days about the value of strategic thinking. The acclaimed Harvard Business School professor Michael Porter posits that 'strategic thinking rarely occurs spontaneously.' Developing strategic thinking skills is a journey, not an end point. Becoming a good strategic thinker requires life long practice and application - and yes, some trial and error! I'm writing this note through the lens of my own strategic thinking journey, which currently finds me at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, studying the works of the classical thinkers of strategy. As a Navy Public Affairs Officer, the nexus of operational strategy and strategic communication is a culmination point for success. The commanders and executives we serve need Public Affairs Officers who can think critically about complex geo-strategic challenges and offer communication counsel and strategies that align with the mission and vision of the organization. Strategic thinking requires a broad perspective about the interconnectedness of the internal and external environments in which we operate. It also requires the ability to translate ideas into cohesive strategy. The ability to provide trusted and sound counsel is commensurate with the development of a mindset that enables strategic thinking. So how does one become a strategic thinker that brings value to an organization? My strategic thinking journey has centered on three important routine practices; reading, writing, and reflection (and repeat).



LCDR Arlo Abrahamson, USN, APR

#1 is Reading. Defense Secretary James Mattis once lamented, "the problem with being too busy to read is that you learn solely by experience (or by your people's experience), i.e. the hard way. In this frame, Mattis notes that developing strategic thinking skills requires leaders to look rearward to move forward. The masters of strategic thought (i.e. Sun Zhu, Clausewitz, Thucydides, etc.) keenly remind us that the nature of humanity often reveals itself through repeating patterns of behavior. As such, we can learn much about the prospects of the future by examining the past. Masters of strategy have been wrestling with the same strategic dilemmas for thousands of years. What wisdom can we extract from the mistakes and triumphs of leaders and thinkers of the ages? Moreover, the application of the lessons learned from history can help shape the development of our strategic thinking and help us look more broadly at the challenges we face. As Mattis points out, "a real understanding of history means we face nothing new under the sun."

#2 is Writing. Richard Bach notes, "a professional writer is an amateur who didn't quit." Writing is the art of translating our ideas to words. Writing well takes critical thinking and is most certainly a perishable skill. Developing strategic thinking skills requires a cogent presentation of ideas both orally and in writing. Writing is the epicenter of this cognition and it's a discipline that all strategic thinkers must routinely practice and hone. Writing is the currency of our strategic thinking. It forces us to

contemplate how we export our thoughts in a palatable manner that has impact on others. How do we frame an idea and our message for a target audience? How do we structure our presentation of words to allow key ideas to stand out? Writing regularly helps us sort through our ideas and apply critical thought and analysis. Moreover, when we use writing to hone strategic thinking skills, our oral presentation of those ideas often becomes easier. In essence, don't ever undervalue the regular practice of writing to develop strategic thinking skills. It makes all the difference.

#3 is Reflection. Socrates said, "An unexamined life is not worth living." Self-reflection seems easy enough, but it's often difficult in practice. Quite simply, self-reflection is critical thinking time. It's an opportunity to examine the "game tape" in our minds and assess if we need to make changes in our thinking or strategy. The byproduct of self-reflection is increased self-awareness and self-assessment. Awareness and assessment are incredibly important in the journey of strategic thinking development as it forces us to think about the longer-term impact of our decisions in a broader frame of mind. The practice of self-reflection requires us to be ruthless with our time and carve out space each day to think. Without regular self-reflection, we become void of the unexamined life. That affects the development of strategic thinking.

All of three of these practices are interconnected and often overlap. Moreover, by no means are these practices an end all for the development of sound strategic thinking. Everyone has their own journey in their development of a mindset that enables strategic thinking. Habits and repetition are important and translating thoughts and ideas in a palatable manner are paramount for expressing strategic thought. This requires time, patience, and dedication to the craft. Strategic thinking, after all, is a journey not an ends.

LCDR Arlo Abrahamson, USN (APR) was a Photographer's Mate First Class prior to commissioning and is currently a student at the U.S. Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island. His previous assignments include: Task Force 73, Singapore; U.S. Naval Forces Korea; U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command; USS Carl Vinson.



(This was lifted from Max's Facebook page)

Clemson Wins

Retired Navy PAO Max Allen celebrates Clemson University's win over Alabama in January after the NCAA Championship football game at Levi's Stadium, Santa Clara, Calif.

Max started his position as Vice President and Chief of Staff to Clemson University's President in June 2015. Allen had served as chief of staff at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington since 2003; responsible for day-to-day operations of the chancellor's office and managing key administrative functions and strategic initiatives. He served as chief of staff and director of university communications at Georgia College and State University from 1994 to 2003.

Editor's note: The below article was first published online in November 2018 by [U.S. Army Major Thomas Campbell on his LinkedIn page](#). Our focus in this issue is on why it is important for public affairs professionals to get out of the office whenever possible and become involved in various communications-focused organizations, even working toward accreditation. I became a member of the Public Relations Society of America in 1996; however, I never truly became engaged until 2009 by becoming an active member in the Georgia Chapter. I then worked to earn my Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) credential in 2011. This article and the associated sidebar articles will hopefully encourage you toward greater community involvement, education and personal challenge. (JQ)

APR+M: Why Does It Matter?

By Major (P) Thomas Campbell, U.S. Army, APR+M

If you serve in the military public affairs (PA) field you might have heard of [Accreditation in Public Relations and Military Communication \(APR+M\)](#). But if your experience is similar to mine, then you may have never heard of it through another Army PA professional.

In my more than six years as an Army public affairs officer (PAO), no one in the career field ever talked to me about the APR+M. Looking through a list of the 80 people who have earned the APR+M since 2010, the Navy and Marine Corps lead the way with 33 and 15 accredited personnel respectively, while the Army has only eight.



*Major Thomas Campbell,
U.S. Army, APR+M*

The APR+M was never discussed at the Defense Information School courses I attended, nor has it been a part of any professional development session in which I was a participant. In fact, I first learned of it from a former civilian graduate school colleague when I entered the field. I researched it, learned the value of earning it, and decided I would apply for it when the time was right.

My goal in writing this blog is to do my part in educating the career field on the value of accreditation in the hopes that it will become more sought out by Army PA professionals. I believe the dearth of knowledge is due to a lack of understanding of the professional development tools available outside of the military.

So why should you work towards accreditation? It doesn't give you bonus points towards promotion. It doesn't get you your choice of assignment. The Army isn't going to pay you more money because of it. So why bother? These are all reasonable thoughts to consider. For me (initially anyway) it was more about setting myself up for success after the Army. For those of us who are on the downward slope of a 20-year career (or more for some of us), reality starts to hit that one-day we will trade our uniform for a suit. The APR+M is a way for me to demonstrate my commitment to the profession and stand out among the crowd as I apply for civilian jobs one day.

Our time as PAOs combined with our military training will likely provide most of us with much of the practical experience we need to be successful practitioners on the civilian side. However, unless you were lucky enough to be selected for the Army's Georgetown University Master's in Public Relations &

Corporate Communications program, your working knowledge of the public relations process and communication theory may be limited. The APR+M will take you to the next level. You may not earn promotion points for obtaining it, but I can assure you that you will rise to the next level of your profession, and that will be hard to miss when it comes time for your yearly performance evaluation as you are ranked among your peers.

Ready to take the next step? I have three pieces of advice:

Find two mentors. Seek out a mentor who has the APR+M and one who has the APR only. This is especially important if your panel presentation is based on a military-centric topic (as was the case with mine). I found it helpful to have an APR mentor to make sure my questionnaire and presentation were not so steeped in military lexicon that a private sector PR practitioner couldn't understand.

Be prepared for the written exam before the panel presentation. You should feel as though you are ready to take the computer-based exam (CBE) before going into the panel presentation. While the two parts of the process look at different public relations knowledge, skills and abilities, they obviously go hand-in-hand. Being prepared for the CBE will better serve you during your panel presentation.

Do not rely solely on your experience to get you through the "+M" portion. The questionnaire and panel presentation are the only opportunities to test your knowledge in joint public affairs. Your level of experience as a PAO will factor heavily on how much preparation you need. If you have served as an operational PAO during military exercises or deployments, then your experience has likely provided you with most of what you need for this portion of the process. If not, you will likely need to dedicate more time to studying joint PA doctrine. Regardless of your experience, review the APR+M study guide and work with your mentor to determine any areas of weakness.

So why does it matter? The most obvious answer is that earning the APR+M is an opportunity to improve yourself as a PA practitioner. But more importantly, it matters because we as PA professionals should be finding ways to improve the practice overall. Information, misinformation and disinformation spread in today's operating environment at the speed of light. PA professionals must be able to perform the mission of providing timely and accurate information to key publics at the same speed in support of the commander's operational objectives, grounded in the public relations process and communication theory.

#TheAPRdifference - For more information, visit www.praccreditation.org

Thomas Campbell is an Army Public Affairs Officer with more than six years of experience currently serving as the Director of Media Relations at U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. The opinions stated in this article are his own, and do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

"I've been accredited since 2011 and can't imagine being a successful practitioner without it." Heather Paynter, APR+M

PRSA and APR/APR+M Accreditation

The Benefits of Membership

By LCDR Barbara Burfeind, USN Ret., APR+M, PRSA Fellow

I've been a member of PRSA (Public Relations Society of America) since 1998 when I was an instructor at the Defense Information School (DINFOS) at Fort Meade, Maryland. I wanted to be a better Public Affairs instructor and the Accredited in Public Relations (APR) certification was a great way to get into the PR process and gain more knowledge of applications for real world situations. Two other instructors and I formed a study group and met once a week for several months prior to taking the APR exam. The experience was challenging, but the success and camaraderie helped me to grow in my confidence, knowledge and most importantly, in my abilities as a PAO.



Barb at the Defense Media Activity, Fort George G. Meade, Md. in Feb 2019.

I continued as a member these past 21 years for many reasons. The following are what I believe are some of the best benefits of membership:

- **Professional Connections** – Whatever association you choose to connect with, you are a part of a professional continuum in which you can take what you learn in practice and share with others through mentoring, teaching, giving presentations, coordinating events and more. The profession evolves and improves through this cycle of connection, allowing members to avoid reinventing the wheel by sharing best practices and subject matter expertise with one another. This is a ready resource, a professional network available for whatever challenges you encounter in your own work, not to mention the lifelong friends I've made along the way.
- **Being Involved** – and then staying involved over the long term. Early on I joined the APR committee to help coordinate training, such as the weekend APR Jump Start courses and weeknight study groups for candidates. I still do some of this. I later served as committee chair and over the years became the PRSA National Capital Chapter president, and a chapter delegate. It was also a great way to learn leadership and governance skills.
- **Lifelong Learning** – The training resources are endless with PRSA. You can participate by attending or presenting. One of my best jobs in the Navy was as a DINFOS instructor. I've found you learn as much or more than the students you teach. It's a great way to give back, serving as an active role model and mentor.
- **Professional Standards** – The PRSA Code of Ethics and APR provide a career standard that can guide you in your goals and career. Check them out at: <https://www.prsa.org/?s=code+of+ethics> and <https://www.prsa.org/accreditation-in-public-relations-apr/>
- **Transition Point** – Since retirement is a misnomer, my membership and involvement in PRSA helped me to transition to my next professional chapters, be it a new job or getting involved in new ways.

Why do some PAOs become members, and others not? It boils down to time and commitment. You have to make a personal choice to do more than just sign up, but to attend events and get involved. That's where one receives the real benefits and professional connections.

Why have I stayed a member all these years? My participation in PRSA is my personal commitment to the communication career field, to make it better and to give back in appreciation for the many mentors that have been so generous to me along the way.

We should never be "done." There are endless opportunities to stay involved!

Barbara Burfeind, APR+M, Fellow PRSA, USN retired, is currently the director of the Defense Imagery Management Operations Center at the Defense Media Activity, Ft Meade, MD, managing and preserving the Department of Defense' visual history. She has conducted outreach through education initiatives, online information-sharing and collaboration with interagencies and combatant commands. She was a Journalist Chief Petty Officer when commissioned in 1991 and retired in 2004 with the rank of Lieutenant Commander. Ms. Burfeind has more than 30 years' experience as a communication professional, including as a Navy public affairs officer. She has a master's degree in communication from the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, and a bachelor's degree in mass communications from Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. Ms. Burfeind was the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) National Capital Chapter 2009 president. She received her accreditation in Public Relations + Military Communication (APR+M) in 2010 and was the 2011 APR+M Council chair. She has been a chapter board member, APR committee chair, and was inducted into the [PRSA College of Fellows](#) in October 2012, recognizing her career contributions to public relations. She continues to be an active PRSA member.



Barb Burfeind, APR+M is joined in 2014 by Navy PAOs – retired Captain Bob “Pritch” Prichard, APR and active duty Captain Brook DeWalt, APR+M. All three wear the distinctive medal that acknowledges each as members of PRSA’s College of Fellows.

IABC

A “Measured” Approach To Communication

By CAPT Ned Lundquist, ABC, IABC Fellow

I learned a most valuable communication lesson when I was director of the Fleet Hometown News Center. I thought our command was doing a great job telling a bigger and better story about our Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard men and women, so I decided to enter the PRSA Silver Anvil Awards program. But when I looked at the entry requirements, I was challenged to put our accomplishments into a four-step process of Research; Plan; Execute, and Results.

I had the “execute” and the “results” figured out, but I could see that the plan had to be based on the research, and I hadn’t been thinking that way.



Captain Ned Lindquist at his retirement ceremony in 2000.

But in hindsight I had done research into how our 10,000 media customers want and use our stories. So I had to restate what we had been doing as addressing a need or opportunity. Then, based on our survey of media and our analysis of our processing of forms, we decided that what we were doing was the right thing, and our objective was to do it better, more effectively and with better productivity. We had set an unofficial goal of increasing our annual output of between 500,000 and 750,000 individual news releases to a million. I say unofficial, because we couldn’t control all

the variables, and I certainly didn’t want any of our people to feel that we failed if we didn’t reach a million.

I learned that our effort must be based on reasonable and time-bound measurable objectives, with the results measured against those objectives. And I was able to see we had many things we could measure, such as number of forms submitted; numbers of commands participating; reduction of forms rejected, and the number of media accepting our stories. We made our plan, identified our messages and markets, and commenced communicating.

When the week came to enter our submission I started furiously building the narrative and assembling the enclosures, then editing it down to fit the required number of pages. That was a valuable lesson in itself by forcing me to really consider what we did and why. When I shipped the package off by FEDEX the night before it was due in New York I was not confident we would win, but I was glad we at least tried. But we did win. And at the awards banquet in New York, there was applause recognizing the feat of generating 1.13 million individualized good news stories.

When I called my Air Force counterpart in San Antonio to gloat just a little, he suggested I enter the IABC Gold Quill Award. I admitted that I had never heard of the International Association of Business Communicators (www.iabc.com). But I entered Gold Quill in the next award cycle, updating our effort following another million-plus year.

This time we not only won a Gold Quill, but also received the “best-in-show” Jake Wittmer Award for excellence in communication research. Our homegrown research was pretty good, after all.

When I attended the 1994 IABC International Conference in Boston to receive the award I was immediately introduced to many IABC leaders anxious to meet the “Navy guy.” I met a number of people that very first night with whom I have kept in touch with over the years, and I still value their friendship and professional mentorship.

What really struck me about IABC was how friendly everyone was, and how they were all willing to help each other, even if they were working for competing companies. I would frequently consult the directory to find people who might be able to help me, and was never disappointed. I owe so much to them.

When I returned to Norfolk, the local chapter reached out to me to come and share my award-winning program with the members. I had never been to a local IABC chapter meeting, but was quickly assimilated into the group. In fact two meetings later I was elected president, and a few meetings after that I assumed the leadership of IABC/Hampton Roads. That also made me a member of the U.S. District 3 board of directors, which was a great opportunity to learn about delivering value to our members, but also a rich networking opportunity with other top communicators.

At that conference in Boston I attended a session on accreditation, so I could see that what was expected in an accreditation portfolio and exam. The portfolio was similar

to a Gold Quill submission, including the analysis, plan, execute and evaluation. I already had the required five years of professional experience, and my Gold Quill winning entry counted towards part of the portfolio requirement. All I needed to do was take a 4.5 hour written and oral exam. I had to go to Richmond to take the exam, where I met an enthusiastic group of communicators who had been preparing together as a group to take the exam. I envied them. I figured I either knew this stuff or I didn't. The exam was hard, but fair, and based on a global standard. The time went by so quickly. We all passed, and my new friends “adopted” me as an honorary member of IABC/Richmond. I would go up to their meetings whenever I could.

Most people don't win a Gold Quill, the Jake Wittmer Award, become chapter president, get on the district board, and become an Accredited Business Communicator (ABC) in their first six months of becoming an IABC member. But that slingshot start got me heavily involved. When I moved from Norfolk to Washington I joined the chapter there and became president-elect and then president. I ran “fun shops” to help our members with earning their accreditation. I became the district director and a member of the IABC international executive board. I became an accreditation exam evaluator and exam proctor, then a member of the International Accreditation Council, then council chair. I



Ned on assignment.

frequently spoke at the international, district and chapter conferences and meetings from Singapore to Dubai to London to San Diego.

In each of these roles I was reminded of something the IABC International chair told me when I first became a chapter president. It's a better experience to be an active participant and contributor than to be a voyeur watching from the sidelines. I took that to heart. And each of my roles in IABC I was able to network with scores and scores of talented—brilliant, actually—professionals from around the world. It was through all of these experiences that I learned the principals of effective and ethical communication are universal. While the tools and means by which we communicate evolve, the underpinning processes have not changed.

IABC has evolved accreditation into two new certification programs: the Communication Management Professional (CMP) and Strategic Communication Management Professional (SCMP), based on the Global Standard guiding principles for the communication profession developed by IABC. I have not pursued the certification, but I'm sure it is a worthwhile progression for one's professional career as a communicator.

In 2016 IABC recognized me as a Fellow, a sort of lifetime achievement award and the association's highest honor. I don't see it as an end-of-career award, because I'm not done with my professional career, so I stay engaged. There have only been 91 IABC members who have earned the Fellow designation. We meet once a year, and I'm proud to join them.

And just as senior IABC members helped me when I was a new member, I hope to pass along my knowledge and experience—and maybe some of my enthusiasm--to other aspiring communicators.

Captain Edward Lundquist, U.S. Navy (Retired), is a principal science writer at MCR Federal in McLean, Virginia, and chief engagement officer of Echo Bridge LLC, in Springfield, Virginia. He served on active duty with the Navy as a surface warfare officer and public affairs officer and has a B.A. in Journalism from Marquette University and a master's in journalism and public affairs from the American University. He is an IABC Fellow and an accredited business communicator. Captain Lundquist is the communications chair of the Surface Navy Association and a member of the SNA executive committee. He writes on naval, maritime, defense and security issues for international trade and professional journals.



Brooks in Europe

It seems that Navy public affairs people are everywhere. At left are retired LCDR Jim Brooks, APR+M and his wife, Karyn Begin in Höllentalklamm, Germany. An active member of PRSA when he lived in Florida, he took an assignment in 2015 as the Director of Public Affairs at the George C. Marshall Center, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. Since Sept. 2017 he has been the Army's civilian PAO at U.S. Army Garrison Italy. (Also lifted from Facebook.)

Government Comms Professionals Better Together

By JOCM John Verrico, USNR-R Ret.

Former President, National Association of Government Communicators (NAGC)

Opportunities for networking and learning from our fellow professionals are paramount to a successful career. There is nothing more beneficial than the ability to reach out to a colleague and ask, "Hey, I am facing an interesting challenge. How did you handle this type of thing?" As a public affairs and communication professional in government, we can learn a lot from each other across agencies. I found this so valuable because of my prior experience as a Navy Journalist (for those of you new to the field, this was one of the precursors to today's Mass Communications Specialist). During my entire 10 years on active duty and my first Navy Reserve assignment, I was the only public affairs professional for my organization. I did not work with another person in my career field, had no one to ask for advice when faced with a challenging issue, and had nothing to measure my performance against. I had no idea if I was doing things correctly, if I could improve what I was doing, or if I was making major mistakes. It was nearly 12 years before I worked in a Navy organization that had more than a one-person public affairs shop.

My first civilian public affairs position was with state government in Maryland, and even though there was a small communications team, I had an independent duty assignment in a field office for the first couple of years.

Always seeking some form of continued professional development, metrics, and networking opportunities; I would put in for training offered by other organizations and attend communication-related conferences, but found that most of their material did not apply to what I did in my government job. The majority of the courses were focused on types of organizations with much larger "marketing" budgets and larger staffs dedicated to generating leads for sales – not what government organizations do.

I finally stumbled upon a conference put on by the [National Association of Government Communicators](#) (NAGC) and was instantly enamored. Everyone there was a government communicator of some type, serving in federal, state or local government agencies or various branches of the military.

They all understood the issues I faced on a daily basis, had the same budgetary and staffing limitations, the same ethics regulations to comply with, and the same goals. The quality of the training at the annual [NAGC Communication School](#) was excellent, covering the entire spectrum of communication disciplines, with case studies, keynotes, and workshops on policies and practices. And because the material was so much more applicable to my job, I found it all incredibly valuable and was able to use what I learned right away.

I signed up to become a member on the spot and continued to get more and more involved with the organization, serving in several positions on the Board of Directors and ultimately as the President 2014-2016.



JOCM John Verrico, USNR-R Ret.
"The uniform still fits."

NAGC has developed partnerships with other related organizations, and those interested in pursuing their APR or APR +M certification can now do so through NAGC. The association has drawn prestige and interest around the globe, such as with the European Union's [Club of Venice](#) – the informal organization of Europe's top communication directors -- and served as a model for the formation of the South Eastern European Public Sector Communications (SEECOM).

NAGC is working to define our profession, and has conducted surveys and joint projects with the [Society for Professional Journalists](#), several universities and our counterparts in Canada on media access, online and social media tools, and other polices impacting government communications. One of the greatest benefits is the annual awards competition where we get to measure our accomplishments against our peers in more than 40 different categories encompassing the span work we do on a daily basis. NAGC also acknowledges a single individual each year for the prestigious *Communicator of the Year* award. Coast Guard Lt. Donnie Brzuska was named the top communicator for 2018. Members get discounts on the award entry fees, discounted registration for the annual Communication School, free webinars, and access to all the previous training materials.



John Verrico addresses the inaugural meeting of SEECOM in Montenegro

Oh, and by the way, if you are currently serving in any branch of the military, you get a discount on annual membership -- only \$75, which is about half the full membership rate. If you want a rewarding professional experience as a communication professional in a military or government agency, check out NAGC at <http://www.nagc.com>.

John Verrico retired as the last Master Chief Journalist in the Navy Reserve in 2005, and has more than 38 years combined experience as public affairs professional in federal, state, and military organizations.

Currently he is Chief of Media and Community Relations, Science & Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and also an infotainer, providing engaging trainings in leadership and communication to corporate, non-profit, government and education organizations.

He is former President of the National Association of Government Communicators. From his early childhood, John was taught by his father, John Fiore Verrico, to experience everything life has to offer and learn something new every day. Taking this advice to heart, John has worked across a broad spectrum of fields, including journalist, janitor, stand-up comic, [motivational speaker](#), electronics technician, short-order cook, disco dance instructor, and media spokesman, to name a few.

John earned a master's degree in organizational leadership from Norwich University and a bachelor's in communication from the University of the State of New York. John's spare time is devoted to reading, occasional cruise vacations with his wife of over 33 years, bad-movie parties with an eclectic group of friends, and collecting classic monster movie memorabilia, which he displays in his bizarre version of a man cave.

Five Questions with CDR John W. Alexander, USN (Ret.)

1. How I happened to join the Public Affairs Community.

Due to what I was convinced to be an administrative error, it was my great fortune when the Navy awarded me a full, four-year ROTC scholarship at the end of my sophomore year at Florida State University. No college or university in my home state of Florida offered NROTC in the late 1960s and I wanted to pursue a Journalism degree. That led me to transfer to the University of Missouri, which in 1967 had the most prestigious “J” School in the nation. I graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in Journalism in 1969 and a Master’s in Journalism in 1971. Commissioned at graduation, I served on two different ships and was automatically selected to be the collateral duty PAO on both. During my third deployment in three years, I earned my Surface Warfare Officer specialty while serving as both the ship and squadron navigator during UNITAS XIV. During that deployment I applied for a transfer to 1650 from 1110 and was selected on my first try. When my ship, USS Tattnell (DDG 19), returned to its homeport of Mayport, Fla., I transferred to Washington, D.C., as Production Manager of the Print Media Division, Navy Internal Relations Activity (NIRA).

2. My Most Formative Assignment.

That first assignment in NIRA’s Print Media division was my most formative because it matched so well with my education. As a graduate assistant working on my master’s degree, I taught typography and magazine design. That helped me bring considerable skills to the media we produced. My first assignment was to help design the public affairs materials supporting our Navy’s 200th Birthday, complete with the International Naval Review and Parade of Ships in New York Harbor on July 4, 1976. I oversaw production of the monthly Navy Public Affairs magazine, *Direction*, and before that posting ended, I had “fleeted up” to become the Print Media Division Director. When I arrived in 1974, the Navy’s premier feature magazine, *All Hands*, was still a black and white publication with spot magenta, cyan, etc. color blobs for accent. The only process color was on the front cover. The top three civilians on the magazine’s staff had been at the top of the magazine’s masthead for decades, going back to when it was published by the Bureau of Naval Personnel. I began asking questions. “Why doesn’t *All Hands* have process color? Its Army and Air Force counterpart magazines do. The managing editor replied, “It’s not in the budget.” When I asked, “Why isn’t it in the budget?” His reply, “It’s too expensive; we can’t afford it.” I asked, “Have you ever requested a larger budget so you can print in color?” The reply, a heated “NO!” So I went on to completely redesign the magazine, incorporating color and making the magazine contemporary. The first example of the redesign is the [November 1976](#) issue. It was one of the reasons the division’s three top civilians all marched into my office one Friday afternoon and stated that they were retiring, effective immediately. RADM Dave Cooney credited me with cleaning house at *All Hands* – something he said he’d been trying to do for a very long time.

In that job I worked with an extremely close-knit, small group of professionals: an 8148 photojournalist Terry Mitchell (went on to make Master Chief then directed the Department of Defense Multi-Media Division); two young artists, LTJG Bill Ray and LTJG Doug Gray; a Navy Draftsman (Butch Marshall) and a gifted journalist (Daniel S. Wheeler who is Adjutant General of the American

Legion). Together, we transformed *ALL HANDS* and brought it up to current standards and practices. We could do anything. We were frequently called upon to produce quick turn-around print projects in



John Alexander

support of the CNO and SECNAV. We earned the reputation of magicians who could “pull rabbits out of hats overnight” ... and often did.

3. My Mentors and Lessons They Taught Me.

I had three mentors: two in my early 1650 days – CAPT Ralph Slawson and CAPT Howard Loving, both of whom remain close friends; and VADM Jerry Miller, whom I first met after his retirement. Ralph was running NIRA when I reported to Print Media in 1974. He was a gentle, patient and reassuring hand. No question was stupid and he taught me to follow my instincts, tackle big projects by taking small steps. Ralph *always* backed up my decisions. He lived by the motto, “Steer your own course but stay within sight of the fleet.” He was relieved by CDR, then CAPT Howard Loving, a Surface Warfare Officer, who was a taskmaster with phenomenal attention to detail. With impeccable military bearing, he should have been on recruiting posters. He challenged me from his first day on the job. He would routinely call me well after 1700 every day to chat about some insignificant thing, just to reassure himself that I was still on the job. He frequently played devil’s advocate to force me to look at alternative options. He would often raise his voice and appear very angry. Before he arrived on scene, the Print Media Division had already moved out of the Pentagon to office space in Crystal City. That complicated the “chop” process for approving articles, monthly magazines and myriad other print products. I made a thousand trips to the Pentagon. After working for Howard for six months, I was summoned to his office. I walked in and he stood up, as he always did. I opened with, “Captain Loving, do you know what your problem is?” Stunned, he stiffened, taking a combative stance and his eyes growing large. “What is my problem, Lieutenant?” “You never smile. My staff is scared to death of you. You never relax. You never visit our office in Crystal City. All of us would run into a burning building for you but you never let your guard down. Just smile once in a while and come visit us.” He visibly relaxed, smiled broadly and said, “Thank you John. I thought I had to live up to my reputation but you have taught me an important lesson today.” After that, Howard came to our monthly potluck lunches, contributed to them, but most importantly, met and interacted with my entire team. Years later when he stayed in my home for a few weeks, his guest bedroom and bathroom looked the same 24/7 – not a single article of clothing in sight, polished shoes stowed in the closet. No razor, shaving cream or even a comb on the bathroom sink. You could bounce a dime off his bed -- it was almost scary.

CAPT Gordy Peterson flew the flag helicopter when VADM Gerald “Jerry” Miller Admiral served as COMSIXTHFLT, his final assignment before retirement. I met Admiral Miller through Zachary Fisher, the most generous individual on the planet. It was Fisher who brought the aircraft carrier *USS Intrepid* out of mothballs and turned it into a superb sea-air-space museum in New York City. I met VADM Miller in an office overlooking Central Park when he served on the board of Gulf and Western when I was Deputy Director of NAVINFO East. Paramount Pictures was a Gulf & Western Company and produced the movie *Final Countdown*. VADM Miller gave me an advanced, unreleased copy of the movie that I was to ship to the aircraft carrier that supported the production. Security was tighter than at the Pentagon, but what a nice gesture to give the ship’s company first viewing privileges before the movie was in theaters. That was the admiral’s idea and says wonders about his character. We remained in contact throughout the rest of my Navy career and while I was at the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society. His passing was a tremendous personal loss. Admiral Miller re-taught me that it doesn’t cost anything to be nice and that doing something for someone else, without any expectation of what you might get in return, is a good thing.

4A. My Toughest Public Affairs Challenge.

About six months before the end of my first Washington tour, I had CHINFO watch duty and RADM David Cooney called me into his office one afternoon. I had accompanied him to Pearl Harbor on a

week-long assignment. He asked me, "How would you like to go to Pearl Harbor for your next job?" My response, "No, thank you." He couldn't believe my reaction. He said, "Do you know how many junior officers clamor – beg me to send them there?" I said, "Well, you can strike my name off that list." He said, "Why won't you go?" I said, "I didn't say I wouldn't go. If you send me to Pearl Harbor, I promise to do the best job I am capable of doing. But you asked me if I would like to go and I declined." He said, "Why don't you want to go?" I could tell my response really surprised him. I said, "I've taken time to study our community. A tour at Pearl Harbor would likely be followed by an assignment to Guam or the Philippines, and I would prefer not to get into that rotation." His response: "Where would you like to go next?" I said that I wanted to be the Atlantic Fleet spokesman – Media Officer. He said the assignment was mine. In preparation, he moved me to the CHINFO News Desk so I could get comfortable dealing with reporters.

That is preamble to my toughest Public Affairs challenge – being the Fleet spokesman in Norfolk. In the mid to late 1970s, Navy morale was at a low point. Sailors didn't want to deploy so they would sabotage their ship by setting small fires, usually in an engineering space, thinking that this would postpone or cancel their ship's deployment. Arson at any time or place is a very serious issue that compels media attention. And I was THE voice responding to their queries. Simultaneous to the arson was another, highly visible act of vandalism. Disgruntled Sailors would spray paint derogatory words and abbreviations in feet-tall letters on the smoke stacks on Navy ships in port. No sooner would these signs be painted over that they would reappear. It was a sad time in our Navy and a real challenge addressing the problems as fleet spokesman. But it certainly wasn't all gloom and doom. I was responsible, in November 1978, for planning and conducting the international press conference introducing women serving on Navy ships, other than hospital ships. Six women, newly minted ensigns, stood on the bow of USS Vulcan (AR 5) and responded superbly to questions from nearly 100 reporters. Three months later, I escorted a gaggle of media for an "embark" in Vulcan to Earle, New Jersey from Norfolk. It was completed without incident and provided phenomenal positive coverage of women in the Navy aboard ships

4B. My Most Satisfying Public Affairs Assignment.

Three assignments tie in this category. First, as Commander, Naval Base Norfolk PAO, I coordinated the public affairs aspects of Navy support to both the annual *Harborfest* and the city's *Tricentennial* celebration. Second, from there I became Deputy Director, NAVINFO East in New York City. That meant wrangler duty for frequent visits by the Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations, among others.

These visits were speaking engagements, editorial boards with the *New York Times* and *Forbes* magazine, and guest appearances on morning talk shows. Most memorable was escorting RADM Grace Hopper to an



For CDR John Alexander the Navy is indeed a family affair. His wife Theresa served four years on active duty as a Navy Nurse. Her brother and John's brother-in-law is RDML Steve Pietropaoli, CHINFO from 2000 to 2003. John's father and father-in-law saw Navy duty during WW II.

appearance on *Good Morning America*. During my tenure, I coordinated 27 *Good Morning America* "Faces" appearances. That assignment ended with the *Statue of Liberty Centennial*, which allowed

an up-close and personal opportunity to support an International Naval Review and Operation Sail featuring the world's tall sailing ships. With CHINFO's and SECNAV JAG approval, I produced my first of six "coffee table" books, documenting all the events surrounding that July 4th holiday weekend. Third, my Navy PAO career ended on another

high note when I was assigned as Deputy Director, Navy Broadcasting Service. In that capacity I oversaw production of the television program, *Navy News This Week*, working with a host of gifted broadcast journalists and cameramen and women.

My predecessor had made a series of trips to many of our 31 Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) stations at overseas locations. They were inspections, however, I changed the term to *Headquarters Assist Visits* and sought ideas and input from each of the offices months before my arrival. The composition of the HQ Team would vary depending on the needs of the offices we visited. We provided professional broadcast radio and television training if it was needed; met with the base leadership when the local staff had been unable to interest the local commanding officer in conducting televised *Captain's Call*; hauled underground cable at one location where the rooms in Chiefs Quarters all had televisions but no service. This was a wonderful, rewarding assignment, and Dick Hiner could not have been a more supportive boss. He, and the entire NBS staff, taught me so much.

5. What I'm Doing Today and What's Next.

Before retiring from the Navy I was interviewed by VADM Jimmy Pappas, USN (Ret.) for my next chapter: director of communications for the [Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society](#). It's a worthy, well respected charity that provides millions of dollars of financial assistance to active duty and retired Sailors, Marines and their families. I was promoted to Vice President, Chief Communications Officer, responsible for both public affairs and fundraising/development. I remained there for 20 years, retiring on my 65th birthday. Although no longer working, I serve as Vice Chairman of the Board, [Young Marines National Foundation](#). My wife and I celebrated our 46th wedding anniversary in August and are blessed that our two grown children reside in northern Virginia. We are enjoying our two grandchildren from our son and his wife, and look forward to the arrival of a new grandson in March – our daughter and her husband's first child. I published my first children's book and am working on a second. I am playing more golf. Our health is excellent, all things considered. Life is good.



USNPAA Reunion 2019 Registration

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To make your reunion reservation, mail your completed Reunion Registration Form and your check to: USNPAA, 12040 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-1215. Check should be payable to "USNPAA." Your completed Reunion Registration Form and check must be received no later than August 30, 2019. No refunds will be given after September 6, 2019. An Adobe Reader reunion information and registration form that includes hotel reservation instructions is available at: [2019 USNPAA Reunion Form](https://gallery.mailchimp.com/caec02db210b7efac977f5e96/files/3090ae5b-7f9f-4f46-87d2-162d68151a79/USNPAA_2019_Reg_form_V5.2.pdf) or https://gallery.mailchimp.com/caec02db210b7efac977f5e96/files/3090ae5b-7f9f-4f46-87d2-162d68151a79/USNPAA_2019_Reg_form_V5.2.pdf

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