



Where Operations and Communications Intersect

By. LT Chelsea Dietlin, USN
U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, Blue Angels

In the military, we often work in unforgiving environments which require an immense amount of trust in our teams. In the high operating tempo of the Blue Angels squadron, trust serves as the bedrock of all successful operations. Fostered through a culture of humility, relentless positivity, a strong work ethic, and mission aptitude while paired with a commitment to routines and procedures revolving around a constant debrief and feedback cycle; the team is able to cultivate an environment supportive of the transparent evaluation of successes and missteps while adjusting course to achieve command priorities and mitigating risks to safety of operations.

Above: MC1 Jessica Gray photographs the Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, Super Hornet signature "Delta" formation over Orange Beach, AL, during a lithograph shoot from the ramp of the team's C-130J Super Hercules.



Just as the pilots get immediate feedback on performance, so too do we look for that feedback in public affairs. Whether you are a pilot, maintainer or support crew, each and every member of our team strives daily to ensure the flight demonstration exemplifies the teamwork, professionalism and precision found in every facet of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps.

It is this long-standing investment in leadership and team development, empowering individuals in their unique areas of subject matter expertise and active participation in the feedback loop, which allowed this organization to rapidly adjust to the uncertain, dynamic, near-term environment laid before us in 2020 and now 2021 to include; reform of the community outreach program amidst a pandemic, the transition of both jet (F/A-18 Super Hornet) and logistics support (C-130J Super Hercules) aircraft platforms, and planning for the milestone 75th anniversary of the Blue Angels.

2020 - Adjusting to a Pandemic; Activating your Network

Within the first few months of 2020, every air show was cancelled as news of the pandemic worsened. Robbing the team of our primary method of community outreach, we were placed in the position of needing to re-write 74 years of how the organization operates and seek out creative engagement opportunities.

In a squadron that measures proficiency of tight formation and high-performance flying in hours verses days, weeks, or months, flight operations remained similar to that of a regular show season. With five to seven training flights per week at our home base of Naval Air Station Pensacola, the team knew this training model was not sustainable long-term in avoiding complacency. We found ourselves taking a hard look at the tools available in the team's arsenal to adjust course. Having just completed a joint training exchange a few weeks prior, we called our Air Force counterparts, the Thunderbirds, and put our heads together.

The result of the collaborative discussion was a three-month, multi-city flyover mission honoring those serving on the front lines of the COVID-19 response later titled, *America Strong*. Using CDC reports, the teams identified 30+ cities, prioritizing those deemed as the "hardest hit" as flyover communities. The next step required immense coordination among senior military leaders across branches of service, congress, state and local government officials, law enforcement and many other community members.



MC2 Cody Hendrix in the backseat of a Blue Angels F/A-18 over Naval Air Facility El Centro to document a training flight.



LT Chelsea Dietlin, Blue Angels PAO

One of the most imperative lines of communication flow was that with the thousands of local hospitals, of which the flight paths were routed, and with national representatives of the Federal Aviation Administration to ensure timely flight updates were delivered to communities. Map graphics informing the public of the planned flight path were distributed 24-hrs prior to the scheduled flight. Hundreds of organizations in each city received a call from our office with a five-minute “overhead” observation window to ensure community heroes and health professionals could enjoy the flyover with minimal impact to work commitments.

While completely unconventional, *America Strong* served as an incredible opportunity to pursue the community outreach mission at a time when it was impossible to have conventional interactions with communities. Most importantly, saluting our heroes on the frontline of this crisis is what we strive to do as servant-leaders.

Following this mission and several follow-on requests for highly visible flyovers, the team closed out the F/A-18 Super Hornet jet platform transition, the first platform transition in 34 years. This five-year project relied on the expertise of Blue Angels past and present as well as countless Navy and civilian organizations around the country. Concurrently, the team acquired our latest C-130J logistics support, affectionately known as “Fat Albert”, from the UK Royal Air Force.

In a year fraught with uncertainty and non-standard challenges, one thing remained certain and that was the squadron’s commitment to routines, processes and continual evaluation of oneself and team operations. Even when those processes were overlaid on a slightly different operational template, we unexpectedly discovered opportunities to evolve some long-standing processes to take with us in the modern environment. In an age where information is disseminated at the speed of light, the public affairs department took with it lessons learned on meeting the correct information needs of various audiences, delivering information via the most appropriate channels, managing misinformation and “correcting the record.”

2021 - New Year, New Outlook; Research, Plan, Implement, Evaluate

I came to the Navy with a few years of civilian public relations and campaign experience which I have often relied on when drawing similarities, differences and lessons learned. I have found that whether representing a client at an agency or Navy command, the “RPIE” process remains true as the leading framework for building a communication strategy. Just as pilots check in with the flight leader first thing in the morning, it is important for the Public Affairs team to conduct a pre-flight brief together as a group, execute the performance and receive immediate feedback on performance in the post-flight debrief, so too do we seek the research, planning, implementation and critical evaluation (RPIE) process in public affairs.

The more effort and energy in your research, the more informed your plans will be, leading to more effective implementation and more accurate evaluation. In my first week on the team, I met with my commanding officer (CO) to gain a better understanding of what his squadron priorities were during his tour and what his intent was with the team. He released what is known as his command ethos, which guided my understanding of command values and conduct from the start. Taking all relevant public affairs items from our CO, I then sought to nest our team messaging priorities within those outlined by our operational chain of command, CNAF and CNATRA. It was essential to align our planning and thinking with theirs.

My job in the Navy reflects my civilian agency experience. CHINFO is the “agency,” and with every tour rotation, PAOs serve as specialists embedded with our clients at operational commands. Ultimately, we endeavor to take all this operational planning and, together with our CO’s intent, align them with the strategic objectives from CHINFO. In sum, researching operator goals and priorities and aligning those with messaging priorities outlined by CHINFO us a great first step in public affairs planning.

That planning starts with robust mainstream media, social media and environmental audits. This involves gaining a solid grasp of what is the status quo of the client, determining what the desired end state is, and making a realistic road map for achieving those outcomes.

We created a log of all the media clips and coverage of the Blue Angels in the past five years, to include coverage highlights as far back as ten years. We wanted to know, where in our recent history did we peak in media engagement? What does the media care about and cover? What do people want to hear about? Who are people listening to and who has the largest share of voice? From there, we were able to identify if we are already heading towards the CO’s goals, where there are opportunities for growth, and where there are opportunities to increase to explore, etc. We also reached out fellow Blue Angels team members to gain an understanding of their expectations for the PA team. Understanding what they see as successful public affairs would provide them necessary context when pitching new ideas.



MC2 Christopher Gordon, photographs the Blues’ Delta formation from the back seat of a Team F/A-18 Hornet during Miami Beach Air Show in May 2019. (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Christopher Gordon)

After conducting these environmental audits, we put together a “SWOT” matrix, determining where the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are to achieving our communications goals. This helps inform the plan and ensures we are working toward the desired end state. From there, we determine how to leverage media engagements based on the information needs of our target audiences, showcase internal production efforts on social media, and plan for distinguished visitor and other in-person engagements. Finally, seeing what commands with lateral mission-sets additionally guides small adjustments as the show season progresses. An example of this would be how we connect with local recruiting districts to align and amplify each other’s messages in the communities we visit during the season.

Since taking on my role as a junior Navy PAO, I have been granted two important gifts from leaders, mentors, peers and subordinates. The first gift is the opportunity to shine and succeed; the second, and most important, is the opportunity to gracefully recover and learn from mistakes. In five short years, I have learned this cycle of personal and professional development takes many forms, but remains a critical process in achieving mission success and in the advancement of the next generation of warfighters. Never have I seen these two elements of the growth process more consistently ingrained in command culture than in that of the U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Team, the Blue Angels.

Flight Plan: How to Get to Pensacola

We are three MC2s, one MC1, one MCC and one PAO. This team is responsible for creating more than \$250,000 in promotional materials, media planning and digital content production for 30+ air shows annually, the distinguished visitor and backseat rider programs, and much, much more. In addition to their primary public affairs function, each team member holds a collateral duty position which supports the demonstration through maintenance or the ground safety program.

A unique component to the Blue Angels public affairs officer position is the time and responsibility given to the dedication to the safe execution of the demonstration flights. Every support officer has an active role in the flight demo. We are on the ground communicating environmental effects to the pilots or in the tower making sure that the traffic on the field is controlled during an air show. As a PAO with a non-aviation background, all that must be rapidly learned during the tail end of your “newbie” season where you will shadow your predecessor for a handful of months, then later during the annual winter season training season. A turn-over period of several months is typical, and the vast amount of aviation information you’ll learn as a PAO on this tour is surprising.

The path to the Blue Angels public affairs officer role is quite different from other 1650 opportunities, taking about eight months from initial inquiry to final decision. Typically, the application window opens in January or February and runs through April. A letter of request to apply to the team with CO endorsement is required. The application contains roughly three pages of short answer/essay questions about why you want to be a Blue Angel along with standard interview questions about your strengths and weaknesses. Finally, a current resume that reflects your work history, qualifications and experience is required.

Applicants should visit two to three air shows to gain a better understanding of the Blue Angels operating environment and team life. The show season started in March this year, and in-person visits with the team ran through June. From these show site visits the team selects two to three finalists for each open position. Finalists are invited on TAD orders to Pensacola, where they will have an immersive Blue Angels experience with current team members and their families. This includes formal and informal engagements, including community outreach. The process culminates in a boardroom-style final interview with all current team members. From there, the team will make the final selections and the report date for new team members, which is usually the beginning of September.

The path for Mass Communication Specialists is also extremely competitive. Both officers and MCs can learn more about the process at [U.S. Navy Blue Angels | Join the Team](#). Overall, Blue Angels billets are high-paced, unique, and offer some of the most rewarding, duty you can serve.



MC2 Bobby Baldock (l), and MC2 Cody Hendrix take photos during training demonstrations at Naval Air Facility El Centro in February. (U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Drew Verbis)



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Dear USNPAA Members:

Happy summer! It's great to see the emerging return to normal and shedding those masks. For me, that means travel overseas to enjoy family and greet a new grandson.

I'm also delighted to announce that USNPAA is having a reunion!

Mark your calendars now for: **April 1-2, 2022**, when we will once again gather in the D.C. area. Like 2019, reunion festivities will kick off with dinner and ceremonies at the Army-Navy Country Club. An association business meeting, mixer and more events round out the weekend. Hilton Garden Inn (Shirlington) remains our reunion home base. More details to follow.

FYI, we were initially hoping to have our next reunion on the West Coast. However, for a variety of reasons we deferred to our ready-on-deck planning, execution, and volunteer resources in the National Capital Region. So...**Heads up, SoCal members!** Given 24-month+ advance booking windows, I would like to put the challenge out *now* to those interested in planning/hosting a 2024/5 USNPAA reunion in San Diego: Start talking! (And plan to get tips and turn-over from our crack D.C. reunion team when we gather next April.)

Our editing team has done it again—another superb issue with some wonderful stories that highlight the energy and professionalism of our young cadre of active duty PAOs and our continuing support for mentorship. There are memories from our “old salt” colleagues that reach from the White House to the Suez Canal, a quick re-cap of our most recent Virtual Happy Hour with AP Pentagon correspondent Bob Burns and more.

I know you will enjoy reading Summer *Sightings*.

My best wishes to you and yours for the summer.

Sincerely,

Tom Jurkowsky



RDML Tom Jurkowsky

SAVE THE DATE!

USNPAA Reunion

April 1-2, 2022

White House News Photographers Association Former Navy Photographer's Mate Honored for Lifetime Achievement

By CDR Toby Marquez, USN (Ret.)

Robert "Bobby" Williams was 12 years old, hanging out with friends in Seattle when his buddy's older sister burst into the house all excited! She has just seen *Blow Up*, a mystery thriller film the younger kids were not allowed to see. Bobby was all ears as she described in minute detail a scene where a photographer was in the darkroom enlarging an image again and again and again to its granular level revealing an apparent murder.

He was captivated. That single moment in 1967 was forever riveted into his mind. For Bobby, that single vividly-described 35mm frame in the film would launch a lifelong journey from Navy photographer to award-winning TV network cameraman.



Fifty-three years later in October 2020, the White House News Photographers Association (WHNPA) selected Bobby for its prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award.

"The White House News Photographers Association was thrilled to award longtime member Robert Williams with our prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award in 2020," said WHNPA president Whitney Shefte. "The Executive Board agreed that his long and storied career, paired with his reputation for being an incredible colleague, made him an easy choice for this. We are so proud to have added him to this list alongside so many other WHNPA greats."



Left, Williams on the job covering a President Trump briefing at the White House. Above, Waiting for the President on the tarmac with Air Force One.

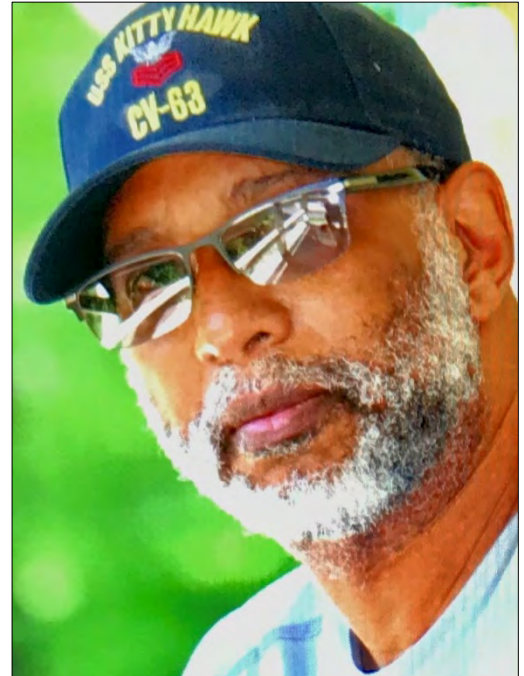
The Navy Gave Me the Skills

During a phone interview for *Sightings*, Williams pointed out that his journey had its roots in his 11-year stint as a Navy photographer. “The Navy gave me the skills, the confidence and the experience – literally, positioned me to succeed as a cameraman in network television,” he said.

Williams enlisted in the summer of 1975. After boot camp in Orlando, FL and Navy Basic Photo School in Pensacola, FL, Bobby was headed to his first permanent assignment in February 1976: Fleet Photo Lab, Cubi Point Naval Air Station on Subic Bay, Philippines.

The 20 year-old PHAN’s first time overseas began with a 15-hour flight from Travis AFB in California (via Hawaii and Guam) to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. There Williams joined all the other newly-arriving Sailors and Marines for a memorable bus ride – through scenes of rice paddies, coconut trees and domestic water buffalo – to Subic Bay.

When, as the newbie in the Photo Lab Bobby was put through the wringer, he considered it an opportunity to *master the basics of photography*. “I told myself ‘I can do this!’ . I learned how to shoot with various cameras from 35mm to 4x5 and even 9-inch formats. I shot, processed and printed black-and-white and color photos 24/7.”



PH1 Bobby Williams (2nd from right) directs Navy News This Week in the early 1980's.

The go-getter embraced jobs with a zest that amazed his CPO. The young Photographer’s Mate was sent to fly in P-3 *Orion* ASW aircraft, photographing Soviet ships and subs in the Indian Ocean – a job normally assigned to more senior photographers.

The following year, the now-qualified all-around photographer, was assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk (CV-63) operating with the 7th Fleet in the western Pacific. Williams was promoted in quick succession to PH2 from PHAN in two years – becoming the LPO (leading petty officer) of the ship’s night shift B&W and color printing.

“I left the Navy in December 1979 to take a job at a nationwide photo finishing company in Texas. But the deal fell through. I was back on active duty in three months -- retaining my E-5 rate plus a \$2,000 re-up bonus -- with orders to report to Yokosuka, Japan. I was familiar with Japan from my time on the Kitty Hawk and I loved the land and culture. I became the staff photographer for RADM Lando W. Zech, Commander Naval Forces Japan (CNFJ), with collateral duty working with the PAO,” said Williams. At CNFJ, Williams’ team produced videos that aired on base, and a half-hour monthly show called *NAVY*

SCENE JAPAN that aired on AFRTS Far East Network. "Working on those projects is where I got my basic training and love for motion picture work," Williams recalled.

"My work got the attention of CHINFO and Navy Internal Relations Activity (NIRA) in the Pentagon. The next thing I knew I was on a flight to Los Angeles with orders to attend the Navy's one-year *motion picture and script writing* program at the University of Southern California -- the same cinematography school attended by famous film director George Lucas and others. USC had instructors who were working professionals in Hollywood. Under their tutelage we were immersed day and night in camera work, editing and writing.

"*Storytelling* was the operative word in USC's Cinema Department. And storytelling is what I brought with me when I joined the crew of Navy Internal Relations Activity's (NIRA) fast-rising *Navy Video News*. The new program spotlighted the Navy's important role in national defense and featured personal stories of Sailors stationed on ships and shores in the U.S. and around the world," explained Williams, who shot, produced and directed for the unit.

The video unit subsequently became part of the Navy Broadcasting Service in the Pentagon. "I worked on a weekly news show for personnel in all branches of the military. With my camera I got to travel to Scotland, Bermuda, Barbados, and Grenada," Williams described.

A Leap of Faith

It was while working at the Pentagon that PH1 Williams came to know many camera people who were working at commercial news organizations. He decided it was time to move on and go to work in the civilian news media. "I was scared at first," remembers Bobby. "But, after leaving the Navy in 1986, I enrolled at the University of Maryland and earned a BS in RTVF (Radio, TV and Film) while working as a freelance camera operator for small independent news organizations."

"Cox Broadcasting, which owned seven stations coast to coast, hired me in 1988. I shot, edited and did live shots three times a day for eight years. I covered the 1988 Democratic convention in Atlanta and watched a young Arkansas governor Bill Clinton give the keynote. I also covered the campaign and inauguration of George H.W. Bush and Senate confirmation hearings for Justice Clarence Thomas."



In a crowded White House briefing room, Bobby Williams shoots NBC White House Correspondent Kristen Welker's report.

NBC Years

In 1996 NBC News hired Williams as an editor/camera person for its new 24-hour cable network, MSNBC. His 22 years at NBC took him to 40 countries on five continents. He traveled throughout Africa with Presidents Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama. The former Navy Photo Mate covered Obama's presidential nomination and subsequent inauguration. He documented the tragic Virginia Tech shootings and the joyous opening of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial.

From all the highlights of his time at NBC, Bobby chose June 4, 2009, as the one to remember:

"I was part of a press pool that accompanied President Barack Obama on his first trip to Egypt as president. Athena Jones, who later become CNN National Correspondent, was producer. Rodney Batten was on camera, and I ran audio.

"POTUS was to deliver a highly anticipated address to the Muslim world from Cairo University. The speech was the first stop on the trip, and it went off without a hitch. Later the president would tour the Great Pyramids and the Sphinx.

"We were pre-positioned along the president's tour route inside a pyramid. There had been talk of a hieroglyph that resembled Obama. We found the large-eared hieroglyphic that resembled the 44th president. Rodney took a few shots. Within minutes, Obama arrived. Athena, Rod and I were the only press in the tomb. We were rolling film when the president saw the hieroglyphic. 'He looks like me ... look at those ears!' Obama exclaimed. We handed our tape to a runner and within an hour the president and his ancient look-a-like were seen and heard around the world."

An Un-retiring Retirement



Following his retirement from NBC in 2019, Bobby was elected President of the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians, Local 31, a part of the Communications Workers of America.

"Bobby is a true broadcast professional," observed Joe Shalhoup, chief NBC audio engineer. Shalhoup attributes Williams' effective leadership of Local 31 to his time in uniform, stressing that the unique leadership skills Williams *acquired in the Navy* now benefit his fellow broadcast sisters and brothers. "I am proud to call him a friend."

Bobby is married to the former Vicki Carter. They have three sons: Carlos, Chris and Ryan. Currently, he is "*under way and running*" for his second term as President of NABET-CWA 31.

A Far Reach

Re-defining Social Media Culture Aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt

By ENS Luka Bakic, USN,
USS Roosevelt Deputy PAO

When Nike or Adidas launch a communication campaign, they have a simple objective in mind: sell more shoes. Whether they're talking about how their brand is becoming environmentally conscious or committing to supporting social progress, their ultimate concern is how their



MC3 Nicholas V. Huynh, right, takes a photo on Roosevelt's flight deck while MC3 Alexander Williams acts as safety observer. (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Casey Scoular)

efforts will impact the bottom line. This approach naturally takes companies to social media where the majority of their customers reside for several hours each day. They critically examine what sort of content drives customers to buy and find creative ways to give them opportunities to do so.

Exploiting existing social media algorithms, these companies put their weight behind boosting posts and increasing the amount of time their



GULF OF ALASKA - MC3 Terence Deleon Guerrero edits a social media video aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) May 14, 2021. (U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Nicholas V. Huynh)

advertisement is on a consumer's screen. Profit as a primary mission creates a singularity of focus that is unique to working in industry. Working in government precludes one from operating by those same principles. Our audiences and stakeholders do not spend money on a product we offer by pulling out their credit card and pressing buy. The nature of our profession is so different that industry principles cannot apply. Or can they?

In Navy public affairs, we talk a lot about the idea of strategic communication. We want all that we release to be intentional and to contribute to competition in the information environment. Despite this intent, quantifying success is often difficult so we rely on experiential methods to reach our critical audiences and stakeholders. Rather than focusing on individuals as consumers of information and their support of our mission as currency, we think about our releases as ends in and of themselves.

During the USS Theodore Roosevelt's 2021 deployment, leadership empowered our team to redefine our approach to the information environment and assume tactical risk for potential strategic gain. This latitude was further supported by our ability to access Wi-Fi throughout the deployment. With the right baseline conditions, *we directed our focus on our flagship social media account - Facebook.* The approach hinged on abandoning preconceived notions of what success on social media looks like and purely relied on a quantitative approach

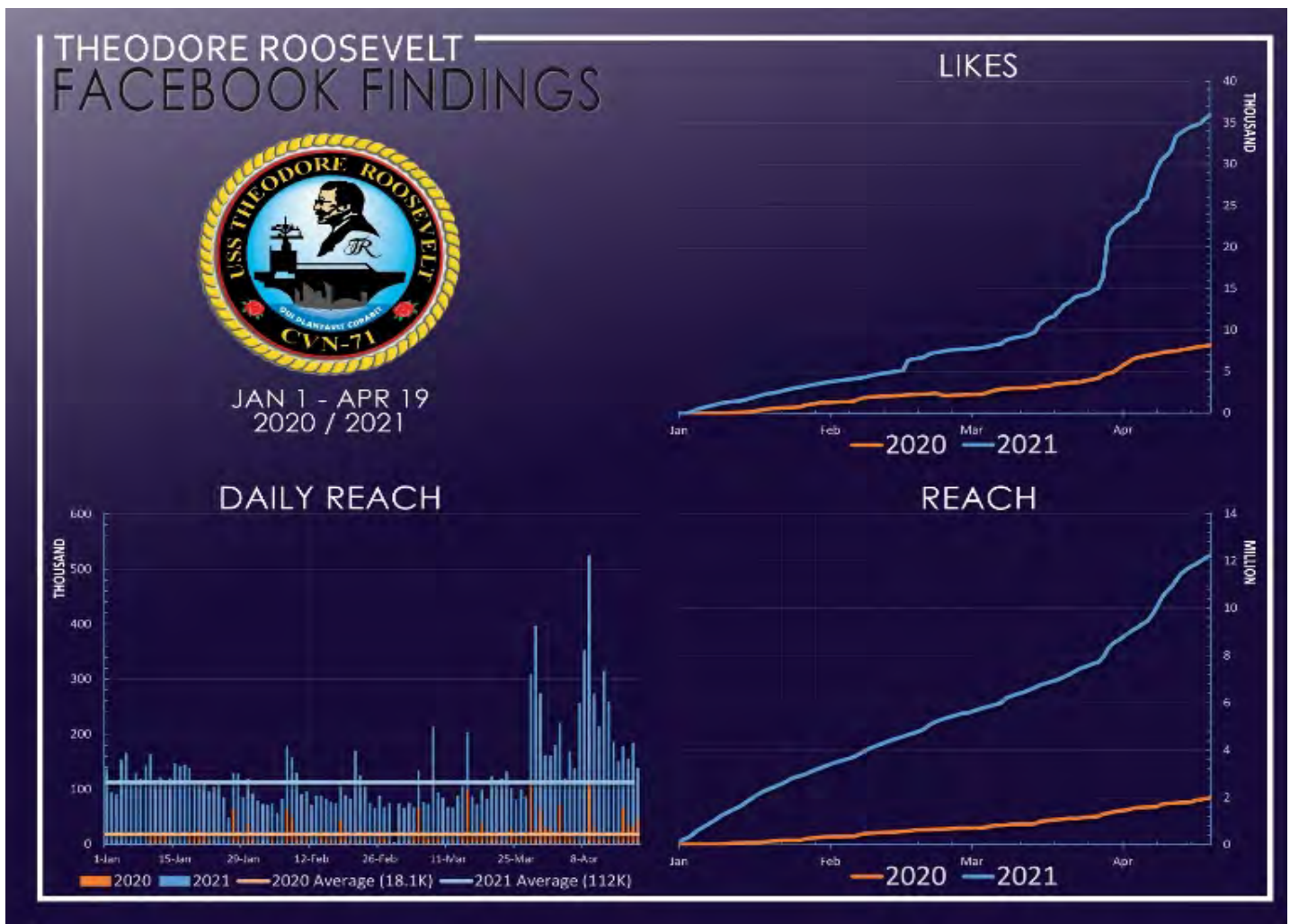
based on data that can be retrieved from Facebook.

The goal was simple - determine what sort of content drives meaningful engagement and build a TR brand that would appreciably increase followership using that content.

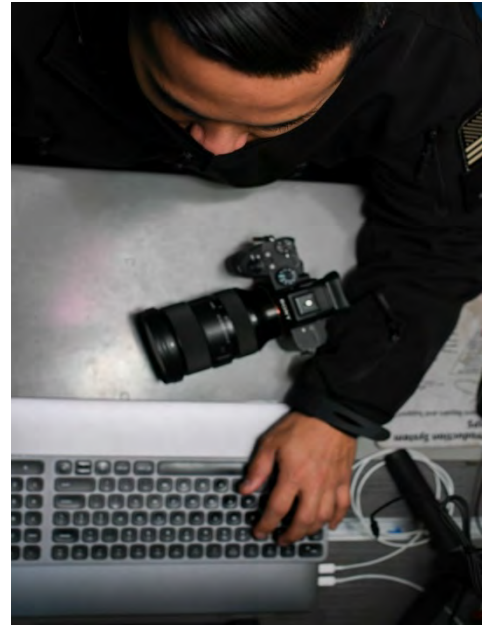
The scope of data analysis was from January 1, 2020 to December 23, 2020. Out of available metrics, we defined six as essential: daily new *likes*, daily *unlikes*, daily page engaged users, daily total reach, daily page consumptions, and daily negative feedback. Additionally, we used the following calculations to provide more context to these metrics:

- *Daily engaged users divided by daily total reach*; provided us with the percentage of users that engage with the TR brand on the page after having been exposed to the content.
- *Daily page consumptions divided by daily total reach*; provided us with the percentage of users that click on any TR content after having been exposed to it.

Comparing these two calculations provides insight into consumers' affinity toward the different types of content. We defined any



USS Theodore Roosevelt's social media data from Jan. 1, 2020 to April 19, 2020, and from Jan. 1, 2021 to April 19, 2021. (U.S. Navy graphic by MC1 Chris Cavagnaro)



Left, ENS Luka Bakic, CVN 71 deputy public affairs officer, left, goes over social media planning with MC2 Casey "Face-Boss" Scoular, center-left, MC2 Marqueeon "Tweet-Boss" Tramble, center-right, and MC2 Zack "Insta-Boss" Wheeler in the ship's Media Department. Right, MC3 Terence Deleon Guerrero edits a social media video aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt. (U.S. Navy photos by MC3 Nicholas V. Huynh)

difference above 5% as a "critical day." Prior to focusing on these 36 critical days there was no point at which we looked at the content of a post that helped us decrease personal bias about what success looked like.

Following the identification of days to focus on, a qualitative look revealed actionable findings included insights like: Post more than five photos in an album; Focus the majority of photos on operations; Small consistent engagement builds momentum while a few missed days tanks engagement, and more.

These findings allowed us to see critical vectors that increased engagement, such as *changing our approach to video, creating a distinctive type of content that is unique to Facebook, and redirecting the effort of our MCs to products that create growth*. As we applied these findings and created a way forward, we defined the most critical aspect of our strategy to be *malleability*. If the way our audience reacted was not in keeping with our expectation over a sustained time period, we took a look at the data and redefined our methods. *Our approach was never static*.

The success we experienced after implementing our new social media strategy is unprecedented and a true testament to the power of a data-driven approach to building a brand. On Facebook, over a roughly four-month period from January 1 - April 19, 2021, followership on the platform grew by 43,000 users. Additionally, the total reach was a staggering 12.2 million users and we gained 35,900 likes. As a point of reference, compared to TR's previous deployment in 2020, *this is a 614% increase in reach and a 438% increase in likes*.

Why does this growth matter?

The answer is simple. If we do not effectively vie for the time and attention of our audiences and stakeholders, our adversaries will. And they already are. The onus is on us, as public affairs professionals, to treat this time as our critical moment to embrace social media or accept missing our window of opportunity. We're certainly not selling shoes, and no one will get fired if we fall short of optimizing the reach of our message, however, if we fail in this critical line of effort, we will cede ground in a competition whose outcome has far graver consequences.

"Bob Burns has an incredible reputation, and he reinforced that with his remarks. He's a rock solid journalist who serves the public so well with his deep knowledge of national security issues."

RDML Tom Jurkowsky, USNPAA President



Spring Virtual Happy Hour

AP National Security Correspondent Bob Burns

USNPAA virtually welcomed and toasted long-time AP correspondent Bob Burns May 12. Remembered by many as the "dean" of the Pentagon Press Corps, our spring happy hour guest has covered national security in one form or another for over 30 years. Burns reflected on the press corps-military relationship and how it has evolved since his long-ago, first assignment to the Pentagon

"Dick Cheney was my first SECDEF. He and Pete Williams welcomed and encouraged visiting more often," remembered Burns. *"During those early years there was time and availability for reporters and military PAOs in the building to develop relationships and get to know each other."* Reporters were routinely provided opportunities to see how the military functions and makes decisions, just as military PAOs made efforts to understand reporters' requirements and deadlines. (Navy CHINFOs welcomed new press corps members and showed them how to be reporters in the Pentagon.) Background conversations and frequent briefings were routine. *Resulting relationships of trust and mutual understanding laid a solid foundation for better reporting of military stories, particularly during crises.* When 9/11 forced the military and the media together, all of the Joint Chiefs hosted media during their travels. Such access became the norm up and down the chain of command. Both reporters and media came to know and trust one another.

Reduced Access Evaporates Trust

Fast-forwarding to more recent times, Burns is less complimentary of recent DoD spokespersons. Briefings were seldom conducted, informal access to reporters was rare and public affairs officers avoided the press. "It was extremely difficult for casual off-the-record conversations and *impossible* to build trust." "I've found to really understand, you must be out in the field. Jim Mattis would ask: 'Why do you want to travel with me?' I told him it is the best way to get a feel for how the military functions and makes decisions. (Yet, Gen. Mattis made little effort to get reporters on his plane.)"

To be clear: There is no cabal! Burns reminded us that reporters each maintain their own schedule with their own deadlines. "We are competitors." And, contrary to many military sentiments, most reporters are NOT looking for a 'gotcha' moment. "Most reporters want to find good, interesting stories and tell them in an engaging way," explained Burns. That said, he recognizes the confusion in today's media environment. "Who are reporters? What is a journalist? Who are those people yelling on TV?"

Remedies in Progress

The return of RADM John Kirby as Pentagon Press Secretary, daily DoD briefings and media access signals an about-face in the military's relationship with the press that is already beginning to resonate throughout the chain-of-command and within the press corps. But it's not a one-way street. This seasoned journalist believes *reporters* must help bridge the gap too. "We have to meet in the middle," stressed Burns, who considers participating in USNPAA's *Virtual Happy Hour* and forums like it a step in the right direction. Even in this virtual environment...

"Getting to know one another is the best way to develop trust."

Crucial Conversations:

How PA Mentoring Went Virtual to Adapt in a Covid World

By LCDR Theresa Carpenter, USN, APR+M

Joint Planning Support Element PAO

It's my lunch break. I'm at my kitchen table with my laptop open waiting to go on a Zoom call. The table where we eat is our makeshift office. (Since we moved into the home a month before, my actual office is functioning as a storage space, filled with moving boxes and Navy memorabilia.) It's a warm fall day in Ocean View, a beachside community in Norfolk, Virginia. My husband has stepped outside with our Boxer so I can facilitate the call with minimal distractions.

As I wait for the call to begin, my heart is racing and my palms are clammy. I'm about to interview one of our community's most senior Navy public affairs officers, CAPT Scott Miller, and I'm nervous. We're doing a mentoring call about how the Navy runs promotion boards. Up to this point, I have remotely interviewed three or four people, and only two live and recorded. I hope I don't screw this up.

As people start to join in, I realize the gravity of the topic. There are numerous public affairs officers calling in who are up for promotion and want to hear from our subject matter expert on what the board considers when deciding candidate selections; CAPT Miller has graciously agreed to give us an hour of his time. As I wait for him to join, I read over my prepared questions, review his impressive biography, engage in a bit of small talk for those joining in and we get started. Anticipation is high.

Turns out CAPT Miller made my job easy that day. A seasoned professional communicator, he adeptly answered all the prepared questions we gave him. Most importantly, he painted a detailed picture of what his personal experiences were like in the rooms where board members gather to pick who is selected for promotion. As he described the rules of the board and how that week in Millington, Tennessee takes place, I felt like I was in those rooms with him. I felt the gravity of what he was entrusted to consider. He described how our service records are briefed, how the voting takes place, and how much a soft breakout or a reporting senior's trait average plays into promotion consideration. The interview highlighted how sharing personal experiences is a powerful way to learn. Despite Covid limitations, with many unable to gather in person, regional co-lead CDR Charlie Drey and I ran a successful mentorship session adapting to the challenges by exploiting technology.



Carpenter is passionate about mentoring and highlighting the contributions of others.



LCDR Carpenter hosting an Eastern Region Navy PAO Mentoring Group on Zoom in March. This session featured Blue Angels PAO, LT Chelsea Dietlin,

Public Affairs Mentorship Program in Today's Navy

The Navy Public Affairs Mentorship Program is a CHINFO-led initiative established August 10, 2018 and guided by CHINFO instruction 1040.1. However, the program got its start two years earlier when CAPT Thurraya Kent and a few other senior PAOs recognized that, while doctrine addresses the skills required of a successful communicator, essential parts of our craft are nuances — such as having emotional intelligence. “We wanted to prepare our officers for the public affairs skills that are not in writing. There are parts to our craft that you cannot codify, but you learn by doing,” said Kent in a recent interview.

Navy PA Eastern Region Mentoring Group

Here’s how CDR Drey and I put together the eastern region’s program: Knowing that in-person gatherings were out of the question due to the pandemic, we polled those in the area to see what electronic meeting platform would be most accessible and at what time. The results were overwhelming, with nearly 75 percent voting that the lunch hour on Zoom was the most beneficial time and platform. Next, we set up Zoom Pro. We wanted recording capabilities, the ability to show speakers on video, and no set limitations regarding time period or number of attendees. (At the time Microsoft Teams, DoD’s primary remote meeting tool, did not offer all these features.) I decided to use my personal funds for a Zoom Pro account. We considered it a small investment to make a difference and give back to the community.

Next, we conducted social media listening to research what topics were resonating with the Navy public affairs community. The Facebook groups for PA helped in picking topics, along with subjects explored during the 2017-2018 CHINFO-led mentoring working group. We stayed attuned to media trends that impacted our community, such as when military public affairs has a win and when things go terribly wrong, as well as what initiatives are taking place throughout our craft. Every session is recorded and available in a playlist on YouTube.

As of May 2021, we have conducted seven professional development sessions. We learn through these interviews, and our guest speakers offer so much information and expertise. We’re always looking for speakers and topic ideas in the eastern region, so if you have a story to share on your military public affairs experience, let us know and we could include your idea in a future Zoom call.



Guest speaker CDR Ben, Tisdale responds to questions during a recent Eastern Region PAO Mentoring Group session.

Connecting Individual Mentors to Mentees

Not only are we charged with putting together professional development sessions, our regional public affairs professional development group also serves as a resource to help PAOs find mentors. We connect those wishing to share their own time and expertise with those who desire a mentor themselves. It’s as easy as sending us a note explaining what you might desire advice about. Then we can match with

someone who has experience navigating a specific issue or can provide general professional insight, depending upon the request.

None of us should ever face a career struggle alone. We have people who can and want to help. When we are in service to each other through peer support networks, we raise the collective expertise of the group, make each other better and advance the community forward.

"We rise and fall together. No one should feel like they are on an island, and none of the situations that we face as public affairs officers are completely new. We have so much to learn from one another," said Kent. With a formal process now established to help one another throughout the community, the incredible vision of people such as CAPT Kent lives on.

It's an honor to have served our community in this capacity.

Theresa Carpenter has served in the Navy for 25 years. She is currently assigned as PAO to Joint Planning Support Element in Norfolk, Va, where her unit supports joint task forces in contingency operations. She has prior aviation community enlisted experience, qualified as a surface warfare officer, and has served on three joint staffs. Also a storyteller, Carpenter recently co-authored a chapter in the book Complicated Alliances by Dr. Karen Hills Pruden (see related sidebar Book Review) and launched her free podcast – S.O.S. (Stories of Service) highlighting ordinary people who do extraordinary work.



LCDR Carpenter on the job during a recent trip to El Salvador: A selfie moment with US Chargé d'Affaires ad interim Jean Manes (above) and with an El Salvadoran police officer assisting during the visit (left).

Take off the Armor

&

Drink Some Tea

By Ben Tisdale, CDR, USN, APR+M,
Commander, Navy Reserve Force PAO

Sipping my third cup of green tea, I was sitting comfortably in the office of an Afghan National Army one-star general and spokesperson. We began our meeting catching up on family, then we touched on the history of the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, discussed the threat of the Taliban, and enjoyed a few laughs about American cultural oddities. Finally, before he left for lunch, we discussed real business for only 10-15 minutes. After a two-hour meeting, we said our goodbyes, knowing I would return tomorrow.

During my first deployment to Afghanistan as an AFPAC Hand, I found then-Brig. Gen. Dawlat Wazari to be light-hearted with a wonderful sense of humor yet a pragmatic survivor. Over the past 40 years of military service, he had been overseen by the Soviet Union, the Taliban, and now NATO and the United States. He didn't share everything with me at first. In fact, it took seven months before he finally started to trust me.



LCDR Ben Tisdale, PAO and AFPAC Hand, prepares to depart for an advising mission at the Afghan Ministry of Defense. The AFPAC Hands program trained roughly 1,000 servicemembers from different services to be advisers on four-year commitments, with overseas rotations aimed at bolstering counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan.



Brig. Gen. Dawlat Wazari, Afghan Ministry of Defense spokesman, presents LCDR Ben Tisdale, USN, a farewell gift upon completion of his 10-month tour to Afghanistan. Tisdale served in 2015 as Wazari's public affairs advisor on behalf of NATO and US forces operating in Afghanistan.

Trust: the ultimate aim of every military advisor, and something I believe every PAO strives for in their relationships with their fellow PAOs, shipmates and commanders.

During my advising training, I learned relationships with Afghans require a very long time, significant investment, and patience to maintain. I took time to study my general officer and learn as much as I could. My relationship with him was critical to my mission and responsibility to NATO and US forces. Eventually, my patience and humility paid off. He started to value my opinions, and began to share details invaluable for my commander, advising team, and various leaders at headquarters.

It took more than drinking green tea. Growing relationships that matter involves intentional investment. As a PAO, it is very much the same when building a trusting relationship, both with the people you serve with and the people you

serve. Whether as a foreign military advisor or as a PAO, establishing trust quickly can be accomplished by:

1. **Focus.** If you really want a relationship that matters, study the person with whom you need to connect. This may sound a little weird at first but consider, do we take time to understand and learn about the people in our lives just as equally as we would a good book, movie, or hobby? As a professional communicator, we often advocate for the need to understand our audience, so it follows logically that we should also understand the people we work with. “Read” your colleagues as if you were reading a book; give them your full attention and focus.
2. **Competence.** As a PAO serving as an AFPAK Hand, it was a given I would be advising my general in public affairs. However, I quickly learned that my assigned general already knew how to communicate effectively. What he really needed was not only someone who was smart in public affairs, but also someone competent in other fields, such as information technology and military budgeting. Therefore, I had to “get smart” in other areas I wasn’t familiar with, but eventually proved my worth and provided invaluable help.
3. **Encouragement.** There were times my Afghan general was obviously having a rough week, so giving him encouragement was sometimes the best thing (and only thing) I could provide. We can easily do the same for each other, especially given the stresses of COVID-19.
4. **Openness.** My advising team and I would often take off our body armor when meeting with our Afghan counterparts. It demonstrated our trust in them and went miles to improve our relationships. In much the same way, sometimes it’s ok to drop your own armor with your colleagues and allow them to get to know you. If you never give them the opportunity to learn about your fears, dreams, imperfections and concerns, they may never feel totally comfortable around you.



Left to right: Edward Buczek, LCDR Ben Tisdale, USN, Capt. Nick Plante, USAF, Col. Mohammed Ishaq Paiman, ANA, and Yousef Homayoon meet together before Plante’s end of tour departure from Afghanistan in July 2015.

If you take away just one idea from my experience, it is this:

Trust is the key for effective relationships, whether with your colleagues, subordinates, or commanders. If people are confident that you are trustworthy and true to your word, they will feel comfortable speaking with you and listening to your advice.

If you execute these recommendations with a genuine heart, you will reap substantial benefits not only for yourself, but also for our entire community.

IABC: Another Path on the Development Continuum

By LT Emily Judstra, USN, CMP, USS Abraham Lincoln Deputy PAO

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both*

Most of us are probably familiar with Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken*, the poem where a traveler comes upon a fork in the road and must choose his path forward. When the continuum of professional development for our community grew to include certification and accreditation, I found myself at a similar fork in the road.

My mentors, those who had played pivotal roles in my development as a public affairs officer, had yet to choose their path toward accreditation. While I had heard from peers and several senior officers about Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) through the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), I hardly knew anyone with firsthand experience of this process.



USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN -72) Media Department is 25 strong and led by LCDR Jesse Uranga, SCMP & LT Emily Judstra, CMP.

As I sought information and opportunities for professional growth, I noticed on our promotion board precepts and community values slides several sets of unfamiliar letters – CMP/SCMP from GCCC. It turned out Googling those letters and trying to find out what they meant for a professional communicator was not easy. After some key word refining, I found the Global Communication Certification Council (GCCC) and their *Communication Management Professional* certification program sponsored by the [International Association of Business Communicators \(IABC\)](#).

Three months later, I tested for and earned my Communication Management Professional (CMP) certification. For me, the path made sense; I was a capstone project away from finishing my Master of Arts in Strategic Communication Management

and the topics covered on the CMP exam directly aligned with my course of study.

(Pro Tip: Gaining CMP or SCMP certification also provides military accreditation via Additional Qualification Designator (AQD) Codes. See [MyNavyHR AQD Codes](#) (Scroll to page D-575 for Public Affairs.) After updating my own AQD record, I wondered why more PAOs were not choosing the path to certification through GCCC.)

In my case, it was retired PAO Nancy Harrity (former long-time CHINFO Policy and Doctrine Branch head) who opened my eyes to the world of the IABC. The global network for professional communicators provides a forum to collaborate, share ideas, and develop professionally with the goal of advancing the field of communications.

Its vision is for all organizations to see the role of strategic communicators at the core of their business's success - not unlike how we as a community are often trying to rewrite the narrative where PAOs are seen as relevant only in times of crisis and media availabilities.

As I began to seek information about a local chapter, my current department head, LCDR Jesus Uranga, joined IABC and contacted the president of the San Diego chapter, attending several Zoom trainings in preparation for his SCMP certification exam.

"Joining the IABC exposes you to what professional communicators are doing outside of the military, Uranga said, "and how we can take their best practices and apply it inside of our organization." Uranga earned his SCMP certification in May.

At an organizational level, Navy public affairs is also represented within IABC leadership: CAPT Wendy Snyder, U.S. European Command's Director of Public Affairs, serves as International Executive Board (IEB) member representing the IABC Europe, Middle East and North Africa (EMENA) Region.

So, I challenge you to find the path that works *for you*, grow as a professional communicator, and push yourself to seek accreditation or certification. For me, that road was CMP.

For more information, visit:

[The Global Communication Certification Council \(GCCC®\)](#) and [IABC](#).

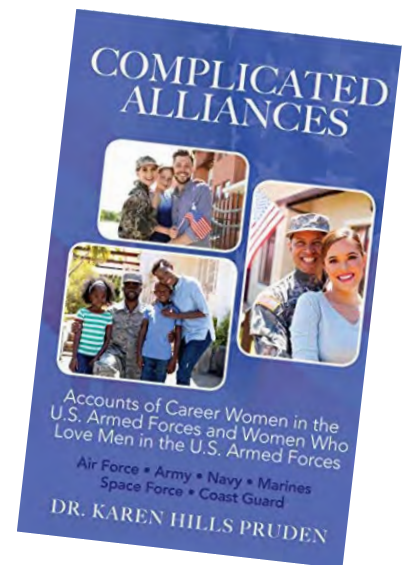
Book Review:

Complicated Alliances

By Sandy Duchac,
Former MC1, USN & Navy Civilian PAO

Complicated Alliances tells the story of the resiliency of nine women who are connected to the military in different ways. A passion-project by Dr. Karen Hills Pruden, a military dependent and human resource executive, the anthology comprises first-hand accounts by women sharing their journeys to find professional fulfillment in the midst of complicated lives.

Pruden seeks to bring awareness to what she describes as "the bias that spouses experience due to resume employment gaps because of the



military lifestyle." In her role as a human resource executive, she has seen many military spouses passed over for consideration simply because of their ties to the military... military moves that is. She effectively illustrates the

similarities between “protected” and “unprotected” employment groups by showcasing the similarities in hardships, relationship challenges, leadership and sacrifice of four military spouses, four service members and one veteran married to someone still on active duty.

Regardless of background, education or professional experience, each woman was often called upon to make significant sacrifices in service to our nation. The disparity existed in how that sacrifice was honored by the American employer – or not.

While the law protects the employment of reservists and veterans, there is no such protection for military spouses who often suffer professionally due to employer discrimination.

The anthology highlights the plight of the military spouse with wit and humor. The women provide anecdotes about running family “logistics missions” without key information or help, more times than not. Each of the co-authors emphasized learning to find the good in every situation and credit the support networks they created over time with their success at finding balance.

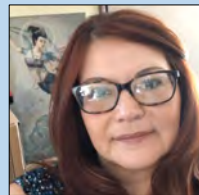
I’ll admit to a tiny bit of bias of my own when I say I particularly enjoyed fellow Navy public affairs professional LCDR Theresa Carpenter’s chapter.

Carpenter’s account of coming back full circle to her great passion of writing is inspiring and entertaining. Her nonchalant portrayal of how a lonely childhood led to a life of service and adventure is a great example of how to share your military experiences without coming close to toeing the line of “profiting” from your active-duty status.

What can PAOs learn from this anthology?

- Military spouses and veterans are a great resource! Seek them out when filling available positions to get dynamic talent.
- Active duty and reserve military public affairs professionals can write about their military journeys... if appropriate precautions are taken. As a group that interacts with the public more than others, it is important to remain cognizant of the example we set as public affairs professionals to both the Fleet and the American public.

LCDR Theresa Carpenter did all the right things. First, she told an engaging story that furthered the Navy’s communication missions. Then she did her due diligence by running her chapter up the appropriate flagpoles prior to submission for publication (for this particular project, she started with her joint command JAG and Navy Office of Information East). Carpenter followed operational security directives and is not receiving any profit for this project. However, she sets a great example for fellow military story tellers with inspirational tales to tell.



Sandy Duchac serves as Vice President and spokesperson of Veteran Sisters, a non-profit that advocates for the unique needs of Female Veterans. Previously, Sandy served as official spokesperson and PAO of Naval Base Coronado in San Diego. She began her Navy career as an enlisted Mass Communications Specialist after working for years as a television producer in Hollywood.



SUEZ CANAL MINE CLEARING 1974

By CAPT Gene Wentz, USN, Ret.

Sixth Fleet PAO & Director of Public Information
Suez Canal, 1972-74

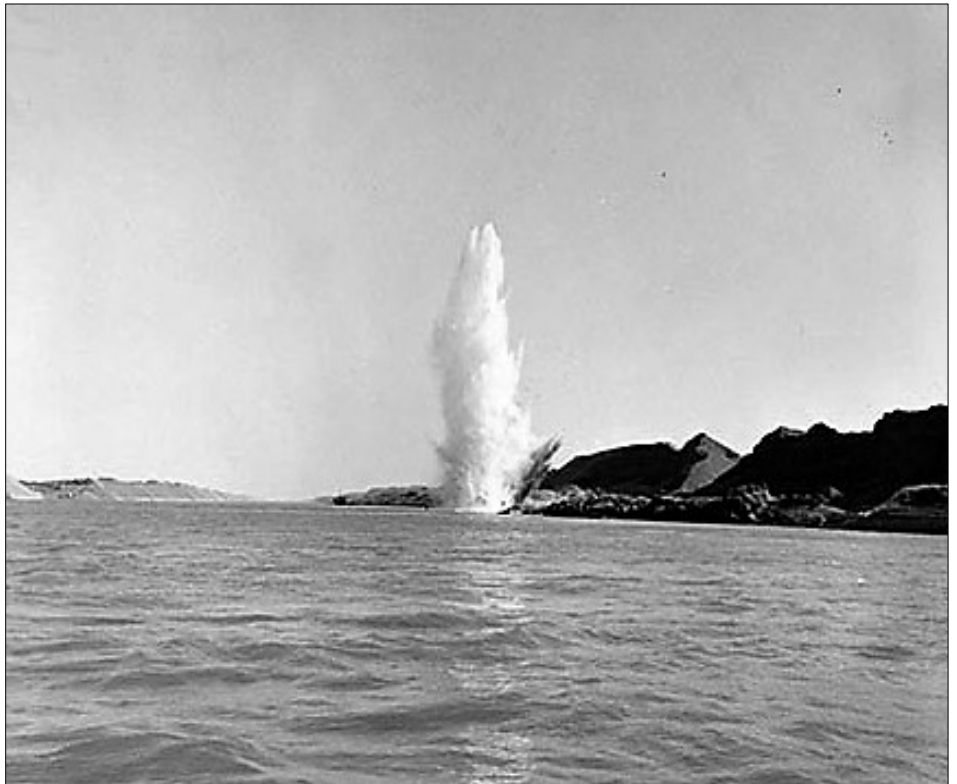
With 34 people under my supervision, I became a 6th Fleet Task Unit Commander in Egypt. This was no big deal for warfare officers, but for a PAO it meant instant stature and credibility.

It was late 1973 after the end of Yom Kippur War. By international agreement, the Suez Canal—closed since the 1967 Six Day War— was to be reopened to commercial shipping. US, British and French navies commenced the multi-phased demining and dredging operations that would bring that goal to fruition. These operations, named Nimbus Star, Nimbus Moon and Nimrod Spar, were led by the U.S. Sixth Fleet.

The Navy numbering system for operational organizations begins with the fleet number, followed by the number of the task force. CTF 65, for instance, means the fifth task force under the Sixth Fleet commander. I was CTU 65.1.1. As such, I began sending weekly SITREPS to Admirals Brian McCauley (my boss in Egypt) and Dan Murphy (COM6FLT) that summarized our PA activities and future intentions. In a calculated move, I included CHINFO, CNO, State Department and the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (OASD-PA) as information addressees.

I tried to freshen these dry and boring dispatches with human interest items such as describing *Los Angeles Times* correspondent Jack Foisie's failed attempt to commandeer a helicopter--and an

Agence France Presse newswoman's press convoy stoppage along a desert road to heed the urgent call of Mother Nature. (When a scrawny cactus tree proved too small to screen the activity, still and mopix photographers in the convoy recorded the moment for posterity.)



Operation Nimbus Star explosion set off by Royal Navy divers on the eastern side of the Suez Canal in 1974, (NHHC Photograph Collection, Navy Subject Files)



April 1974 Press Conference at Port Said, Egypt—The Royal Navy minehunter group arrives for duty. RADM Brian McCauley (far right) greets the British commander as CDR Gene Wentz, CTU 65.1.1 (2nd from left), UK press officer (staring into the camera, 3rd from left) and others assist.

After several weeks of these "zinger" insertions I got a telephone call from Captain Lee Baggett, then Sixth Fleet chief of staff: "Your messages are being read by everyone in OPNAV and DOD, and I mean *everyone*. Make sure you don't include anything that might be controversial or political. Save that kind of stuff for Admiral McCauley and us. UNDERSTAND?" I barely had the first eye of "Aye aye, sir" out of my mouth when he hung up.

I followed his orders to the letter, but in a display of shameless self-promotion I began adding

"Commander Wentz sends" to the end of my SITREPS.



Sixth Fleet —VADM Dan Murphy farewells CDR Gene Wentz in ceremonies aboard USS Little Rock (CLG-4) in June 1974.



Sightings

USNPAA's quarterly newsletter

Navy public affairs team past and present, let us hear from you!

Send your stories and photos to Sightings c/o:

Tina Tallman at ttallman1650@gmail.com or

Tim Beecher at beechert@icloud.com

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the web at <http://www.usnpaa.org>

Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/usnpaa>

Fall 2021 issue deadlines:

Story/article proposals

15 August

Final copy submission

31 August

U.S. Navy Public Affairs Association (USNPAA)

was established in 1994 to:

Foster and enhance cordial relations and mutual understanding among former and current active duty personnel and civilian employees of the U.S. Navy who were, or are, engaged in performing public affairs functions.

Support and promote the professional growth, education, and development of individuals engaged in all aspects of U.S. Navy public affairs.

Stimulate and promote a broad acquaintance and a spirit of fellowship among members and others interested in an effective U.S. Navy public affairs program.

Our name changed to *U.S. Navy Public Affairs Association* in 2013 to better focus on all three areas of purpose, and to send a strong *signal of inclusiveness to all Navy public affairs communities: active, reserve, retired, civilian, officer and enlisted*.

JOIN US: If you are, or ever have served in Navy Public Affairs, become a member for free at www.usnpaa.org/membership.html to receive access to USNPAA events and community.

The U. S. Navy Public Affairs Association is a
501(c)(19) nonprofit Veterans organization headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia.