



*Navy Communicators Answer the Call:
Share USS Bonhomme Richard Lessons*

FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!

Away the Inport Emergency Response Team!

By CDR Nicole Schwegman, USN, COMSURFPAC PAO

About 8:30 on the morning of July 12, a fire was called away aboard USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6) while it was moored pier side at Naval Base San Diego. Local, base and shipboard firefighters responded.

Before it was out four days later, more than 400 Sailors from 20 San Diego-based ships plus three Helicopter Sea Combat Squadrons, the U.S. Coast Guard, four Federal fire agencies, Camp Pendleton's Fire Department, and Combat Center Fire Department had joined the Bonhomme Richard's crew in fighting the fire. Also assisting in the multi-agency effort were the National City Fire Department, San Diego Metro Fire Department and Harbor Police fire boats.

Telling the stories of these Sailors and the response effort fell to a highly skilled team of Navy and Coast Guard public affairs officers and mass communications specialists. This team spun up immediately and worked around the clock to ensure Navy and external audiences received timely and accurate information about the incident.

Coming into the crisis with less than three days on the job meant that I had to rely on the assistance of nearly every available public affairs officer in the San Diego region. I want to be clear, while I may have been in charge of the public affairs response, I could not have done it without the help of my fellow Navy PA brethren and their support teams. LCDR Tiffani Walker and her team of public affairs experts and technicians from Navy Public Affairs Support Element (NPASE) West showed up nearly immediately. CDR

John Fage from Third Fleet Public Affairs and Master Chief Communications Specialist Denise Murray from Commander, Navy Air Forces Pacific came not only with bodies, but with much needed equipment. Naval Base San Diego Public Affairs Officer, Ms. Krishna Jackson supplied us with a room in which to set up the Media Operations Center and Navy Region Southwest public affairs provided us with environmental and Federal Fire PA support.

And in the following days, our reserve PA team answered the call for assistance, taking time off work and coming to our aid to provide relief to the public affairs officers who were standing 24/7 watch in the Media Operations Center.

In short, one of the most immediate successes was that, like the Sailors from nearly every platform on the waterfront who ran to help their fellow Sailors on the Bonhomme Richard, the Public Affairs community immediately rallied around my team and helped us to tell this incredible story.

Baptism by fire - literally: (l to r) LCDR Patricia Kreuzberger and CDR Nicole Schwegman. Schwegman was on point as the senior PAO for the Bonhomme Richard fire. Kreuzberger led the Media Operations Center



From the very first moments of the crisis, until when we finally received the report that the fire was out, there were some critical factors that I believe helped us to be successful telling the story of the incredible group of Sailors and federal civilians who fought this fire:

1. *We put out accurate information as soon as practicable.*

As with any large-scale incident, it was a challenge to process the evolving events and communicate in real time, particularly as information was beginning to trend on social media. It was critical that we put out something as fast as possible, and that we maintained accuracy in the information environment. The first report usually provides only minimal information and getting the full story out might take some time. But don't let that stop you from putting out something. When people see that you are tracking what is going on and not offering conjecture in the process, the audience will stay with you and consider you the authority on the situation. Our first message was simply, "Local, base, and shipboard firefighting teams are responding to a fire aboard USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6) located on Naval Base San Diego. More information to follow." That was enough to get the audience to follow us for more information and to stay tuned to our platforms.

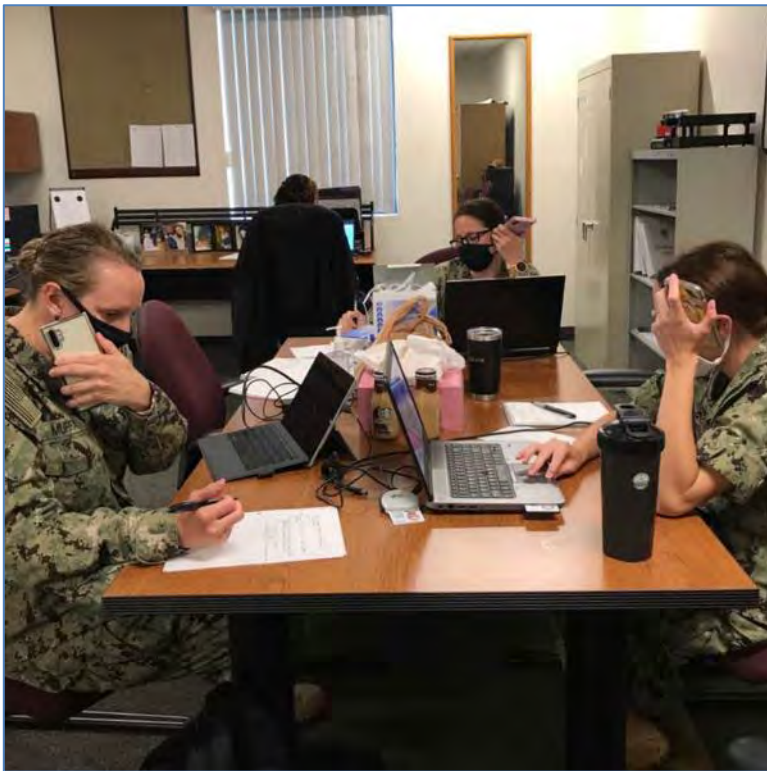
2. *Adapt, Improve and Overcome.*

Because I was so new to the command, I didn't yet have a phone or a working email address. For official correspondence, I had to work through my deputy and my media officer. I took media calls on my personal cell phone. We set up a Media Operations Center and used cell phone hot spots to power our laptops and worked on OWA* accounts because there were not enough NMCI** terminals in the crisis center. I used my iPhone the first day to livestream the press conference. It wasn't the most ideal situation, but we had to adapt in order to get information out as fast as possible on as many communication channels as possible. (*OWA: Outlook Email Web Access; ** NMCI: Navy Marine Corps Intranet)

3. *Give your commander's intent, then trust the team to execute.*

The pace of the information flowing during the crisis was relentless. It was impossible for me to look at every picture, review every story, check every talking point. I empowered my senior enlisted, Senior Chief Mass Communications Specialist Aaron Arendes to act as the clearinghouse for all imagery related to the fire effort. He trusted my guidance and I trusted his judgement. I delegated my media officer, LCDR Patricia Kreuzberger, to run the Media Operations Center when I was not there and not to wait for me to make decisions. She knew my intent and she carried forth the mission. I didn't need to approve everything and if we made mistakes, I made sure to take the blame and then corrected the mistake and encouraged the team to keep up the good work. I leaned on the Expeditionary Strike Group 3 PAO, LT Joe Pfaff, to fully take care of the on-scene commander, RDML Phil Sobeck. I sought counsel from Brian O'Rourke, the Navy Region Southwest PA media officer (a retired Public Affairs Chief) and I left public affairs work not related to the Bonhomme Richard response to my Surface Forces deputy, Mike Raney (another retired Public Affairs Senior Chief).

If you try to micromanage in a crisis, you will fail. Give your people clear guidance on what you are looking for. In our case I had one goal for every piece of information or product that we put out: tell the story of how we are making progress on fighting the fire. We needed to encourage the crew of USS Bonhomme Richard and Sailors and Federal fire fighters from around the waterfront, and we needed to show the bravery and heroism of what it took to fight the fire. They needed to know and see that Navy and the nation were behind them. And the nation needed to see the bravery and heroism of the United States Sailor. And so, everything the team did, every picture they took, every press release they wrote was rooted in that main theme.



It is important to note that the public affairs effort continues as damage assessments and the various investigations are ongoing. But it remains a team endeavor. And I am grateful to continue to receive incredible support from the Navy PA community, including our Reserve forces that provided a Reserve PAO, LT Ryan Slattery, on an ongoing basis to serve in my office as the nexus for Navy-wide communications on Bonhomme Richard. While there is still much work to do, our public affairs mission continues to be providing accurate information about the process to our internal and external audiences and ensuring the countless stories of our Sailors' efforts are told.

Working the phones: MCCS Denise Murray, LT Courtney Callaghan and LTJG Molly Fresher deal with the flood of media calls about the USS Bonhomme Richard fire pier side in San Diego.

From the Bridge...

Dear USNPAA Members:

First and foremost, Merry Christmas and Holiday Greetings to all of you and your families. Despite the frustrations and challenges of 2020, the wonder of the season has kept its luster.



RDML Tom Jurkowsky

Earlier in December I had the privilege of having lunch with Secretary of the Navy Ken Braithwaite—also a USNPAA member. I was totally impressed with his enthusiasm, energy and many ideas on how to make the Navy/Marine Corps team better.

I continue to also be impressed with the Rear Admiral Charlie Brown. As guest speaker during USNPAA's *Fall Virtual Happy Hour*, he provided an incredible update on the PA community. He shared that the community is in a good place and has the strong support of flag officers. Charlie emphasized that the flags rely on PAOs and trust them. Be sure to read the overview article in this issue about his presentation. (A detailed summary will be emailed to membership.)

Speaking of virtual happy hours, Jamie McIntyre of *The Washington Examiner* has agreed to meet with us in February. Jamie, as many of you know, was the Pentagon correspondent for CNN for many years. He has a great perspective of defense issues. With a new administration assuming office and all that entails—a new Secretary of Defense, new service secretaries, a revised set of foreign policy objectives, and some tough budgetary challenges, to name just a few issues—we look forward to hearing from Jamie. Details to come via email.

Sightings continues to highlight the talented efforts of our active duty PAOs. CDR Nicole Schwegman shares leadership and public affairs lessons learned just days after arriving in San Diego as the new SURFPAC PAO. Her team's response to the *BONHOMME RICHARD* fire is this issue's inspiring lead story.

As some of you know, after our successful 2019 reunion, there was a lot of interest in the next one—where and when. We had been looking at San Diego, but then the pandemic hit, and plans came to a halt. The board met several weeks ago and agreed it makes sense to suspend planning until the pandemic is over, hotels are up and running, and people feel safe to fly. When planning resumes, we will let you know.



Tom Jurkowsky

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I'd be remiss if I did not note the passing of Dorothy Thompson in early December. Dorothy was the widow of RADM Bill Thompson, the Navy's first 1650 CHINFO. Dorothy lived a full life filled with energy and a love for the Navy public affairs community. I know her family appreciates the thoughts and prayers the community is extending to them.

As we look forward to 2021, I am optimistic. I could not have been prouder as I watched trucks filled with COVID-19 vaccine pulling out of a production plant just a few days ago. To me it symbolized one of the largest national mass mobilizations since factories were repurposed to help fight World War II. What a great indicator for the year ahead.

Wishing you and yours a very Merry Christmas and a wonderful holiday season.

Tom Jurkowsky
President

Lean on Me: U.S. Navy Memorial Musical Message



Sightings would like to pass along the U.S. Navy Memorial's star-studded music video tribute to Bill Withers, one of the Memorial's 2020 Lone Sailor Award recipients. The themes of the 2020 Lone Sailor Awards Program were the ideals of Service to our Nation, the same lessons and ideals invoked by the Bill Withers' song "Lean on Me." This beautiful tribute includes The U.S. Navy Band, Aloe Blacc, Ray Parker, Graham Nash, Kori Withers and more. View & sing along at:

<https://vimeo.com/458702347>

“Overall, the Navy PA community is really strong right now. Most importantly, we’re getting stronger....”

Navy Chief of Information RDML Charlie Brown



Rear Admiral Charlie Brown’s support for USNPAA is strong and unwavering. In late September he joined us on our Fall Virtual Happy Hour. Moderated by USNPAA president and former CHINFO Tom Jurkowsky, RDML Brown shared a comprehensive overview about the state of Navy Public Affairs. Here are some highlights.

“Overall, the Navy PA community is really strong right now and getting stronger. That’s true in the “E” Ring, in the fleet, from the deck plates up, at the Schoolhouse, at DINFOS, and even down in Correspondents’ Corridor. It’s a credit to the team. What gets me excited about this job every day is the incredible young talent we have; officers, enlisted, civilians alike.”

Three Priorities: *Professionalism, Alignment and Leading the Fight*

Alignment - In messaging AND outcomes

How do we ensure we are all driving towards that one picture of success?

“If we can help align our Navy PA community towards trying to show our value to the American people, to tell the Navy story and how we provide value to the country and why we are important to national security, then we are doing our job.”

Professionalism - Officers, Enlisted and Navy Civilians

New OI-08 (Resource Requirements, Policy, Professional Development), CAPT Dave Werner, USN, Ret.

- ✓ Navy Civilians – new civilian professional development plan
- ✓ 1650s – career path, education and training milestones that prepare for any four-star staff and develop well-rounded O6’s
- ✓ Enlisted – training and opportunities that create strong independent duty mass communications specialists

“MC2s for example, are deployed as independent MCs aboard destroyers. That MC2 is responsible for telling the Navy’s story in routine operations up to a crisis. We need to do everything we can to make sure they are positioned for success.”

Leading the Fight

CHINFO sees Navy Public Affairs as *owning public communication*. It's a mindset shift for the Navy public affairs community.

"We are not only worried about getting our piece on the evening news. Now we are worried about *competing with another country* telling their side of the story. We need to strive to be as *effective and compelling to audiences around the world as we are to our own domestic audience*. We need to be ready to tell our side of the story in a way that remains truthful and full of integrity and honesty."

An example of one of those "shifts" is the way Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) information is now shared. For decades, these operations were not discussed beyond annual State Department lists or an infrequent incident. Today real time disclosure puts Navy in the position to drive the strategic international narrative. Supporting operational commands with talking points, imagery and more, Navy is also better prepared for FONOP challenges.



RDML Brown addresses USNPAA luncheon at National Press Club.

"For the Navy that means the MC2 on a destroyer in the South China Sea when a Chinese fishing vessel cuts across her bow will be the first "to the chalkboard" to explain what happened to the world."

The Navy Public Affairs community has come a long way in a relatively short time... "When I started out as a junior officer at AIRPAC and then on a carrier, there were no social media platforms; we were just getting email. So, how do we prepare junior officers today for the unknown? It boils down to some of the same skills we've always valued. What's changed is the demand signal and expectations from commanders are different. When I was a junior lieutenant on the carrier with six or so people working for me, I reported to the admin officer and the embarked one-star did not ask me for strategic advice. Today, we send seasoned O-4s to carriers who have 25-30 people working for them, including other PAOs. And that one-star on board is looking to that senior PAO for strategic guidance. They are asking about how messages will help operational commanders achieve their goals, how this is going to be viewed back in the Pentagon, how this supports the national defense strategy. It's eye-watering to see how well our PAOs are doing with that.

"In sum, you should be really proud of the young PAOs, enlisted sailors and Navy civilians all around the Navy doing this incredible work. It's amazing. I am glad I don't have to compete with them, because they are way smarter and more talented than I ever was. It is a privilege to have a chance to help set them up for success."

Editor's note: Extended RDML Brown Virtual Happy Hour comments will be forwarded to USNPAA membership via email. (Make sure your USNPAA membership email is up-to-date or become a member at <https://usnpaa/membership.html>. Membership is FREE to all current and past Navy public affairs officers, enlisted and civilians.) Send your VHH feedback and suggestions to RDML Jurkowsky at: tjurkowsky3@comcast.net.

SDSD Grad Student Campaign: Museum of Public Relations Highlights Navy Public Affairs

By Devin Arneson, LT, USN, San Diego State University

"This first-of-its-kind webcast provided a spirited discussion about public affairs and pursuing a career in communications within the Navy, and largely the U.S. Armed Forces."

The Museum of Public Relations

Three CHINFOs representing over 50 years of Navy public affairs experience gathered virtually October 26 to discuss Navy public affairs communication strategy, tactics, and effectiveness since the Vietnam era. [Military Public Affairs, Past & Present: The U.S. Navy](#) was presented by the Museum of Public Relations in collaboration with San Diego State University (SDSU) School of Journalism and Media Studies, the U.S. Navy, and the Defense Information School (DINFOS). The event featured Navy Chiefs of

Information from different decades who discussed successes and challenges during their careers: Current CHINFO, RDML Charlie Brown, APR+M, and former CHINFO's, RADM Kendell Pease (1992-98) and RDML Frank Thorp IV (2007-2009). Retired Marine Corps PAO Carl Redding, APR+M served as moderator. With over 350 originally registered participants, the event remains available for viewing through the museum website and uTube.



A first of its kind, this webinar was one element of a communication campaign created by an SDSU Summer 2020 Cohort team comprised of two Navy and two Marine Corps public affairs officers: Navy Lieutenants Devin Arneson and Josey Lynne Lenny, and Marine Captains Dave Morris and Gabriel Adibe.

San Diego State's rigorous 10-month master's degree program *designed specifically for military PAOs* launched in 2005. Since then, mid-career PAOs have taken advantage of this opportunity to hone their craft. During the summer, students are required to complete a 4-week public relations "bootcamp" in preparation for fall semester.

"We use the summer session to transition these mid-career PAOs from their fleet public affairs experiences into a more well-rounded, civilian view of the practice," said the SDSU cohort coordinator Dr. Kaye Sweetser, APR+M. "From the day that the students come aboard campus, they are pushing forward at a breakneck pace in applying what they are learning during the classes to their team projects." The cohort is divided into teams, each assigned a real-world client, to prepare a public affairs campaign based on the organization's objectives. Summer 2020 introduced Arneson, Lenny, Morris and Adibe to The Museum of Public Relations in New York City (www.prmuseum.org).

During their initial research, the officers found that the museum appeals to public relations professionals of all types around the world. However, surveys also revealed that military public affairs professionals who did *not* have prior knowledge of the museum are extremely interested in what it has to offer. To reach this untapped audience, the resulting campaign included a military public affairs themed social media plan along with a webinar that became the *museum's first program about the armed services*.

"The museum is incredibly lucky to have had such a dedicated team of brilliant PAOs who helped bring this event to life, from conception to implementation. The team created very impressive strategies and tactics that helped make the program a real success—the first such event in the PR industry," said Shelley Spector, founder of the Museum of Public Relations. "Now, students and young professionals have a better idea of what it's like to become a PAO. In fact, we wouldn't be surprised at all if PR students around the country are now considering the military as a career, thanks to this very intriguing presentation."



The museum's success was demonstrated by the study and webinar, but the true winners are the Navy and Marine Corps public affairs practitioners who brought it to fruition. "I didn't know what to expect from the graduate program other than it would be challenging and offer many opportunities to grow professionally," said Marine Corps Capt. Gabriel Adibe. "I've been fortunate to work with Navy and Marine Corps officers in this program and it is exciting to see how our training and experiences converge."

The Cohort Team-SDSU military PAO grad students (clockwise from top left): Navy LT Devin Arneson, Marine Capt. Dave Morris, Marine Capt. Gabriel Adibe and Navy LT Josie Lynne Lenny.

Another perspective came from LT Josie Lynne Lenny. "It was an honor to work with the Museum of Public Relations as a part of my grad school program. My team and I were not only able to help the museum reach a new audience, but on a personal level, I learned so much about the history of PR within the military services," said Lenny. "I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to work with the museum and look forward to seeing the amazing things that they'll do in the future."

Looking ahead, "The Museum of Public Relations is very eager to host future webinars with a focus on public affairs within the U.S. Armed Forces," shared Spector. "The role of public affairs officers (PAO) across these branches, past and present, is absolutely vital for growing PAOs and inquisitive PR students alike."

To view the webinar's playback: [Military Public Affairs, Past & Present: The U.S. Navy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0G55O26ZG8k&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=JMSFrontDeskJournalismMediaStudies)

or

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0G55O26ZG8k&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=JMSFrontDeskJournalismMediaStudies

Blundering at the Highest Levels

by Brian Cullin CAPT, USN, Ret.

By seeking and blundering we learn. — Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



WAKE ISLAND, OCTOBER 13, 2000: US Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig talks with his office in the Pentagon from a phone booth on Wake Island in the South Pacific regarding the Oct. 12 bombing of the guided missile destroyer USS Cole in the port city of Aden, Yemen. (Photo by Dolores L. Parlato/AFP via Getty Images)

It's a stormy afternoon outside my home in the Pacific Northwest. Lights are flickering and a fire is lit. Perfect atmospheric for this short tale of professional failure. Writing a piece about mentoring seems an anathema to our community - where so much of our skill set resides in gray areas - and so much of what we learn is on the job. So, I thought I would begin with one of the poorest executions of judgement I demonstrated in my career. After all, what's more alluring than hearing the mistakes made by others - especially old, veteran PAOs!

There I was in 2000, waking up in a Shanghai hotel. I was on a historic trip with Secretary of the Navy, Richard Danzig, as a member of his executive staff - his PAO. I felt I had paid my dues to get to this coveted billet. I had served as Assistant White House Press Secretary for foreign affairs under Bill Clinton and more recently as the Sixth Fleet PAO during some major contingencies. The other members of the front office team were no slackers. They included Jim Stavridis who would eventually put on four stars

and command NATO; and Bob Work who would rise to Deputy Secretary of Defense. We were a close team who loved serving our principal - an extraordinary human being and leader - who was very hard to keep up with. The Secretary was in Shanghai to meet with Chinese naval commanders as well as opinion leaders in the city. The Chinese navy had begun to stir things up in the South China Sea and this was in part an act of detente in an attempt to steer things back to levels of normalcy. Danzig was to also address the Chinese naval cadets at their academy in Beijing - a historic first. In characteristic out-of-the-box thinking, the Secretary had brought with us the Tofflers - Alvin and "Heidi" - authors of *Future Shock* and world-renowned futurists. This was not to be a typical national security mission.



CAPT Brian Cullin briefing SECNAV Richard Danzig.

While in Shanghai, terrorists attacked the USS Cole (DDG-67) on Oct. 12 in Port Aden, Yemen. Al-Qaeda would claim responsibility for the attack that killed 17 and wounded 37. Informed shortly after the explosion happened, Secretary Danzig reached out to Stavridis and Work who recommended that he return home without delay given the severity and significance of the attack. Despite the fact that Chief of Naval Operations Vern Clark was overseeing the handling of the attack in its immediate aftermath, *there was a shared belief held by the Secretary's close advisors that it was imperative for practical and perceptual reasons that Danzig return to carry out his senior civilian responsibilities.* This belief was shared by all but me. With great confidence in my geopolitical perspective, I offered that he should consider shortening his visit but not abandon his remarks to the Chinese naval academy. After all, it was historic and had the potential to strengthen ties, etc. Thank God the Secretary did not heed my counsel!

In short order we all boarded an emergency aircraft at Shanghai to return the Secretary to Washington, DC. We had to leave in such haste that the procured aircraft did not carry a communications suite. Danzig had to use a public pay phone at our refueling stop on Wake Island to check in. The photo of that phone call circulated widely and carried with it a strong message that the Secretary had dropped everything to return to his duties and support his Sailors and Marines.



CAPT Brian Cullin underway with SECNAV Danzig.

There was a "bigger picture" here that had initially been lost on me. Yes, there was a historic geopolitical significance to the Secretary's visit to China. Yes, the CNO could handle both the administrative and operational aspects of the attack's aftermath - certainly in the short run. But these facts paled in significance with what was really vital. *There was nothing more important than to communicate to those who had been attacked that the Secretary had their complete attention and that he would travel across the world to pursue those who had put them in harm's way.*

We talk about perception and reality. In this case - both merged.

Five Questions for Rod Hill



Q1 – How did you happen to become a 1650?

I was doing well as a successful, department-head-screened SWO junior officer when I was asked to work for the late VADM Tom Weschler on the USS NORMANDY (CG-60) Commissioning Committee supporting public affairs. It was my first exposure to public affairs; not only was Admiral Weschler an incredible boss, but the job was a total blast. It was during this assignment that I learned the Navy had 200 full-time PAO's. While I was on track for department head school, the more I learned about the PAO community the more I realized it was the right fit for me. I spent the next year learning as much as I could about the community and the team and then transferred to SWOS Division Officer School as an instructor. My coworker, Deb Carson was also trying to become a PAO. We never imagined that we would both get selected in 1990, but we did!

Q2 – What would you say was your most formative assignment?

Without a doubt, my first assignment: carrier PAO aboard USS Ranger (CV-61). Not only did I learn from great PAO's like Tom Jurkowsky, Sheila Graham and Bruce Cole, but my skipper on the Ranger, VADM Dennis McGinn, was the best boss I have ever had, hands down. He taught me how to be a successful leader, lessons that guide me to this day. I had dozens of "firsts" along with many experiences from that tour that I will never forget.

Q3 – Who were your mentors and what did you learn from them?

Tom Jurkowsky was my first PAO mentor. He taught me the importance of demonstrating integrity in all that we do, and to always take the time to pass the lessons you've learned to those who follow in your footsteps. Craig Quigley taught me you can work hard in the most difficult challenges and still have fun and celebrate life in the process. Steve Pietropali taught me how to be a media officer and how to

leverage the authority of my boss's office to get things done. And, I got yelled at a lot by Kendall Pease. I'm grateful for all of them.

Q4 – What was your toughest challenge as a PAO? Your most satisfying assignment or project?

Working the News Desk in the aftermath of the suicide of Admiral Boorda. It was incredibly difficult taking so many phone calls from grieving Sailors; the statements over and over to queries from all over the world; and managing my own personal grief and loss. I will never forget that week.

My most satisfying assignment was officer in charge of the Navy DINFOS Detachment at Fort Meade. I believe the work I did there had more impact on Sailors lives than any other assignment I've had.

Q5 – Where are you today and what's next?

I live and work in DC as the Director of Training for Communication and Professional Skills at Graduate School USA, the nation's largest trainer of federal workers. I have a team of 45 instructors and 68 courses in communication, leadership and management. As a hobby I'm a semi-pro portrait and landscape photographer. I plan to open a studio when I retire from full-time work.



Favorite Navy Assignment: DINFOS OIC in action (l to r): CDR Hill flag presentation and public affairs exercise role playing with student.

U.S. Navy Public Affairs Association

The U.S. Navy Public Affairs Association was established in 1994 with the following purpose and objectives:

1. 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.
2. To support and promote the professional growth, education, and development of individuals engaged in all aspect of U.S. Navy public affairs.
3. To 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.

Mountain Climbing for Dummies

(Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society and Navy PAOs)

By Chris Dour, CDR, USN (Ret)

Editor's note: In September 2019 USNPAA presented CDR John Alexander, USN, Ret. with the CAPT Thomas Coldwell Award for Significant Achievement, recognizing his years of dedication to the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS). After retiring from active duty in 1992, CDR Alexander played key roles on the executive team of the Society for over 20 years, serving first as Vice President of Communications, then as Chief of Development. Former CHINFO, RDML Dawn Cutler was hired by the Society as Chief Development and Communications Officer in November 2019 and shortly fleeted up to Chief Operating Officer, a role in which she currently serves. When retired CDR Chris Dour joined the Society as Chief Administrative Officer in early 2020, he became part of a special legacy shared among former Navy PAOs. Here is Chris's personal reflection about this calling.

I don't read many books these days. Those who know me best know I'd prefer to be playing softball, or down at the Archives looking for old documents (although Ancestry.com just makes it too easy these days). And if I'm not doing one of those, you can likely find me serving food or bartending at my local Knights of Columbus. It's not like I don't pick up any reading material; I do read a number of business and travel magazines.

So, when a consultant friend recommended one of David Brooks' recent books, *The Second Mountain, The Quest for a Moral Life*, I gave it a look. The timing was last September around the time we gathered at ANCC for the USNPAA reunion. I hadn't been planning a career move at the time but felt it was time to start considering my twilight tour. And since Maureen and I are empty nesters, I figured I had a few hours a week to flip through what I considered a self-help book.

I was sitting at a table in the back of the ANCC ballroom reflecting on one of the passages in the book I had read just hours earlier. I think I was still on page two in the Introduction section:

With that, John Alexander was called to the front to be recognized for his years of service with the Navy Marine Corps Relief Society. John started at the Society in 1992 following his retirement. John was hired by then-Society President, Vice Admiral Jimmy Pappas. Huh, NMCRS, I thought now that place seems to line up pretty nicely with my own interests.



7th Fleet Flagship— Service has always come naturally. Here I am serving the crew, circa 1997.

"Everybody says you should serve a cause larger than yourself, but nobody tells you how."

But it was three months later before I started getting serious. I had taken the entrepreneurial route and helped grow a small defense company after my retirement in 2007. I opted to do something completely different from the 1650 world. Not that I didn't enjoy it. It was just the opposite. I was convinced that all the skills we pick up along the way in the PAO community prepare us to take on just about any other job.

We are well suited to take a broader approach to the business sector, I thought, and so did John. John had only planned to remain at the Society for a year or so while he looked around for other opportunities but ended up remaining there for more than two decades. "I cannot think of a more rewarding or impactful career than providing vital financial assistance to active duty and retired Sailors and Marines," John told me recently.

More often than not, timing is everything and it was providential when on January 15 this year, the Chief Administrative Officer position at NMCRS was posted on Indeed. The job description read eerily similar to my resume. I had been keeping an eye on the administrative functions at my last company, spending much of the 12 years building a team of first round of draft picks. We weren't always able to compete with the large defense firms, but we gave each of the new employees their own space and allowed creativity to flourish. Hiring new employees became as second nature as cranking out press releases. So, I quickly reached out to John to pick his brain.

Paraphrasing John's comments, he said: When Admiral Pappas arrived at the helm of the Society, he looked around and asked the other officers, "Where's my PAO?" He got a blank stare and a reply like, "We don't have one, never had one, and why would we need one? Jimmy Pappas replied, "I have been the base commander in Norfolk and San Diego. I don't do anything without my PAO!"

My next email and phone call were to Dawn Cutler. I knew she had just started at NMCRS. (Dawn relieved me at the Joint Staff in 2004 so we knew each well over the years and I respected



RADM Bill Thompson and RDML Dawn Cutler at 2016 Lone Sailor Awards, U.S. Navy Memorial.

her opinion on whether the Society might be a good fit for my skill set.)

Dawn joined the Society in November 2019 after John had re-joined the Society in midsummer 2019 to help identify and recruit a new Chief Development and Communications Officer. Dawn was a natural choice to take on the CDCO role and after a very short stint in this capacity, Dawn was hand-picked to take over as the Chief Operating Officer, the number two position behind retired Marine Corps LtGen Jack Klimp, the CEO.

"I was thrilled to become the COO at NMCRS. Much of what I do is similar to the community management roles as CHINFO. We have 40 employees at headquarters and over 120 employees scattered around the globe at the various Navy and Marine Corps bases. Coupled with over 4,000 volunteers, we have a vast employment network to support our Sailors and Marines. It's an honor to continue to serve the Naval Service."

I reported in late February 2020, the same week John was wrapping up his recent recall assignment. It was also three weeks before COVID started shutting everything down. As the CAO, office management, human resources, the 401k, and the pension, as well as corporate secretarial duties all fall under my purview. Dawn and I work hand-in-hand on the day-to-day operations of the

Society ensuring we meet mission...ensuring the team has what they need to serve our clients if and when they need support.



My last day at C7F in July 1998. Greg Smith was bidding us farewell before we left for the airport. My oldest son James is in front of me and Greg is holding my middle son John.

So, what is it that attracted three USNPAA lifetime members to join the same organization? Sure, the benefits are fairly good. The salary is competitive. The employees are exceptionally dedicated to a worthy mission. And getting back to supporting the waterfront has been very refreshing to me personally, as my daughter will be commissioning in May 2022.

But what is unique about NMCRS and the journey that Dawn and I have recently begun? I think it might be that the history of NMCRS reads like a mirror image of the U. S. Navy. Since our founding in 1904, NMCRS has been there for just about every event, providing vital support to those Sailors and Marines in need. We received our first donation of \$9,000 from the proceeds of the 1903 Army-Navy game and in January 1904, the Navy Relief Society was authorized by President Theodore Roosevelt and the Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable William H. Moody.

Admiral George Dewey led the Society until his death in 1917. The Society needed to increase its presence during World War I to support the military buildup. During the Great Depression, Navy Relief funds were used to help shore up

family budgets. Admiral Stark was the President at the beginning of World War II and immediately sent funds to Hawaii to assist with the relocation and evacuation efforts from Pearl Harbor.

NMCRS has just been *an exceptionally well-run organization for a very long time*, providing assistance for everything from the unexpected car repair, to a hurricane to emergency travel, or to a recent COVID childcare issue. Dawn and I just happen to be a couple of the current watchstanders helping the Society navigate through the next chapter. (I hope and pray that we go out of business one day, but our original charter registered the Society as a non-profit to last 1,000 years and in case we're needed.)

As Dawn mentioned during the USNPAA Virtual Happy Hour back in July, she knew little about NMCRS when she started. She recalled participating in the Active Duty Fund Drive as many of us have done. But now, after a year on the job says, "I can't think of a more worthy cause to continue my service and apply the skills I learned as a career 1650."

I wasn't quite sure what I was going to find when the Society appeared as a mountain in front of me. So far, I've been pleasantly surprised and took one of the quotes from David Brooks' *Second Mountain* very literally:

"The best advice I've heard for people in search of a vocation is to say yes to everything. Say yes to every opportunity that comes along, because you never know what will lead to what. Have bias toward action. Think of yourself as a fish that is hoping to get caught. Go out there among the fishhooks."

All three of us feel honored and privileged to be a part of the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society's long and storied history. Dawn and I both hope we have as long of a career as John did and can only hope that there are 1650s waiting in the wings to turnover with us when we move on.



Pandemic Fires and Hurricanes Strained NMCRS Resources This Year

By Gillian M. Gonzalez, CFRE
Vice President, Chief Development and Communications Officer
Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society

2020 has been a challenging year for those served by Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society: a pandemic, horrendous fires both wild and onboard USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD-6), a multitude of Gulf Coast hurricanes, and extended deployments with family separations unprecedented in peacetime. (For just Bonhomme Richard alone, NMCRS provided \$202,000 in grants to 339 sailors.)

Adapting to the new normal, this year NMCRS launched a Rapid Response Loan to cover COVID-19-related expenses. The new loan streamlines the application process to provide up to \$1,500 and even covers approved homeschooling costs. Traditional financial assistance, Quick Assist Loans and other programs are also available to active duty and retired Sailors, Marines and their families.

Gratefully, in addition to challenges, 2020 also brought *the largest single donation in the Society's 116-year history: \$4.5 million provided in August by financial services company USAA*. This "incredibly generous donation" has had a profound impact on the assistance and programs NMCRS provides Sea Service families facing hardships related to COVID-19, according to Society President and CEO, Lt. General Jack Klimp, USMC, Ret.



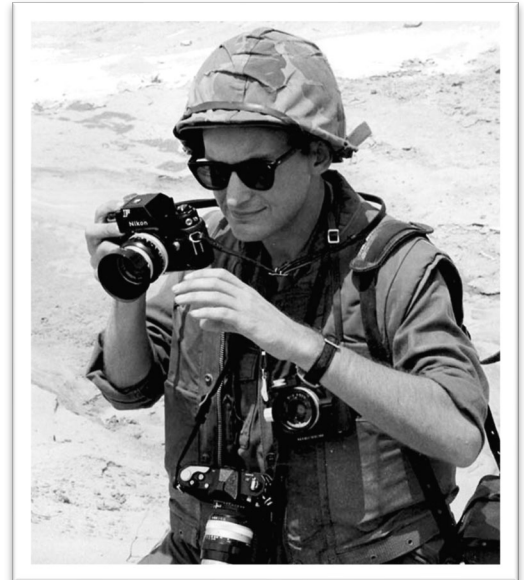
On December 1, *Giving Tuesday*, we teed up #BattleforBraggingRights and challenged donors to choose the Navy or the Marine Corps when they sent their money. NMCRS raised more than \$100,000, winning bragging rights for the Navy. (We're already planning for 2021 and expect some strong competition from the Corps!)

Also embracing Giving Tuesday was defense company Leonardo DRS, Inc. Their donation of \$25,000 targeted our general relief fund to support Sailors, Marines and families with a range of economic needs from natural disasters and economic uncertainty to educational support and more. Leonardo DRS Chief Executive Officer Bill Lynn emphasized, "... it is an important mission for us to look for innovative ways to support active duty and retired families where they need it the most - at home."

The vast majority of active duty donations are under \$100 and come from monthly allotments deducted from service member paychecks. Yet, these Sailors and Marines continue to take care of their own: *The Active Duty Fund Drive remains the Society's biggest revenue stream*.

Make a difference. Donate. <https://support.nmcrs.org/a/homepage>.

A Navy Journalist in Vietnam



By David H. Lyman, former JO3, USNR

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Two explosions invade my dreams. By the time, the third “UHMP” hits, I realize I’m not dreaming—this is real. It’s another VC rocket attack on the Marine runway, just over the berm. I kick off the sheet, swinging my legs off the cot, fumble around in the pitch-black night to find my boots, sirens wail, followed by: “Now hear this, now hear this. In-coming! In-coming! All personnel to take cover.” More thuds. By now, I’m fully awake.

I slam on my helmet, slip my flak jacket over my left shoulder, throw my ammo belt with its .45 pistol, holster and extra ammo clips over my right shoulder and grab my rifle. I stumble outside the hooch, down the three steps to the sand wearing nothing but my skivvies. It’s 3 a.m. on a hot night in Vietnam.

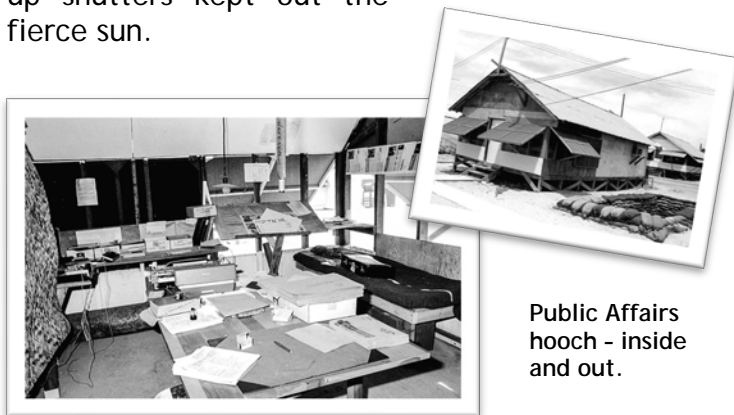
Four strides and I’m at the mortar pit beside my office hut. I slide down the sloped bank of sandbags, into the soft sand at the bottom. I lay my rifle aside, strap the ammo belt and holster around my waist, slip my right arm into the flak jacket and close it. I adjust my helmet and fasten the chin strap while sitting on my heels, my butt against one of the sandbags at the bottom of the pit. Two of the HMs (Hospital Corpsmen) on all-night sick bay duty, slide in beside me. No one appears concerned we are all sitting there in our underwear...

Photos above (l to r): Fishing Nets and JO3 Lyman decked out with new Nikon camera gear he bought in Japan.

A Public Affairs Office in Vietnam

Dropping out of college after studying journalism, I avoided the draft by enlisting in the Naval Reserves. By the time I was called to active duty, I was 26, an E-4, Journalist Third Class (JO3). That got me assigned as the PR guy with a Seabee battalion, eight-hundred hard working, and harder drinking, construction workers. By the spring of 1967, we found ourselves on the beach in Chu Lai in Vietnam, there to build roads, bridges, barracks, runways, helipads, anything the Marines, the Army, or the Airmen needed. Seabee 71 had crews scattered all over the Chu Lai compound and out in the boondocks. Our mission: building stuff and fixing things the VC had blown up.

Seabee 71's PA office shared a hooch with an air-conditioned photographer's darkroom. A sea breeze blew through the screened walls; propped up shutters kept out the fierce sun.



Public Affairs hooch - inside and out.

JO-strikers, wrote and mailed out releases to hometown newspapers, and produced a weekly news bulletin. My job was to photograph, write, edit and layout the monthly tabloid, *The Transit*.

Needing privacy to write, I built a cot in the office and took up residency. Evenings, after chow, dressed in civvies, I'd spend a few hours sharing beers in the beach-side EM Club. When I'd feel a story approaching, I'd head over to my office, climb the steps, open the door, turn on the bare bulb over my typewriter and begin to type. It didn't matter what I wrote, so long as I was writing. Stories of the days' experiences, projects I had photographed, or rambling about

life in Vietnam flowed out on the cheap yellow newsprint. Occasionally I'd write something I liked.



Off to Stars and Stripes

Every month, I'd fly up to Japan to put *The Transit* together at the *Stars and Stripes* facility in Tokyo. These were then mailed to the men's families, other Seabee units, sent up the chain of command, all to show what Seventy-One had been doing.

With my attaché case full of stories approved by the XO, a stack of 8x10 prints, my orders and traveling cash, I was off: out of the heat, the dust, the noise of war, back to a civilized country. A "slick" flew me from Chu Lai to an air base outside Danang where I hitched a ride into the city and MACV- HQ.



Seabees at work.

There I stood before a Marine colonel - a military censor-while he read my prose and inspected my photos to ensure I was putting the military in a good light and not printing anything that might aid the enemy.

Next stop, the airport to see if I could catch a ride to Japan. It would be the next day before I

arrived in Japan, where a train took me into Tokyo itself. By the time I reached the transit barracks adjacent to the S&S facility I'd been on the move for 36 hours.

The Transit, a letter press tabloid, was set in lead type, the way all newspapers, books, magazines had been printed for 350 years. Japanese type setters working on Linotype machines rendered my words into slugs of lead. I moved these blocks of lead around forming columns, fit in the headlines and captions. It is here, on the make-up table, the "look" of the publications came together. It was the page layout, proofing, corrections and tweaking that took me two or three days. But I had a hard deadline to meet. S&S made-up and printed dozens of unit tabloids like mine.

My time in Tokyo was not all work. I had time for a shopping trip to the PX in Yokohama to buy cameras, radios, watches, and tape recorders for the men back in Chu Lai. I also outfitted myself with new Nikon cameras, lenses, and equipment. I met the Japanese. They all wanted to talk with American GIs. They introduced me to their culture, their shrines, parks, and their food.

The trip back to my base in Chu Lai meant catching a C-130 full of that day's *Stars and Stripes*. The flight stopped at every island base along the way dropping off S&S, arriving at Tan Son Nhut Airbase, outside Saigon that next day. If I didn't get a flight north that same day, I slept

in the terminal or bunked in with one of the airmen who ran the freight service. These nights in Saigon allowed me to see and experience what was once called the "Paris of the Orient." The Saigon of '67 was slightly war torn, militarized, with refugees camped on the streets and sandbagged bunkers protecting hotel entrances. But the food -- I still remember the food.

Getting back to base, I now had just three weeks to come to with another raft of stories and photos for the next issue and do it all over again.



Six issues of *The Transit* were published during our seven months in-country. Out of 500 Navy unit publications, CHINFO, the Navy's Chief of Information named *The Transit* "the Best Letterpress Overseas." We shared the recognition with the JACKSTAFF, a newspaper from the Naval Support Activity in Saigon with a team of half a dozen JOs.

Upon arrival at my first duty station, a PO1 division chief had once told me: "You've got two years active duty in this man's Navy, kid. Make the most of it!"

I did. Those 14 months with the Seabees telling their story kick started my career as a newspaper and magazine photojournalist. I learned how to put things together to tell a story, lay out a page, and create photographs that shared what words could not. My hitch as a Seabee JO landed me a PR job at a Vermont ski resort when I got back to the States. This led to a career writing, photographing, and designing newspapers and magazines.

In 1973, six years after leaving Vietnam, I started a summer school in Maine for photographers. During the 34 years I was the school's President,

Rolling through a rural village our Seabee convoys on its way to Quang Nagi (right & below).



The Maine Photographic Workshops became an international conservatory for the worlds' storytellers, photographers, journalists, filmmakers, cinematographers and writers. It continues today as MaineMedia.edu. My memoir of the 14 months I spent with NMCB-71 was published last fall by McFarland Publishing. The book, *Seabee 71 in Chu Lai*, is available on the website www.seabee71.com. See *April Sightings* for CDR Joe Navratil's review of *Chu Lai* at:

https://www.usnpaa.org/uploads/6/8/0/3/6803713/updated_final_april_2020_sightings_14_april_2020.pdf.

David Lyman lives in Camden, Maine and is at work on a series of memoirs.

Mentoring

Remembering PAO Service Opportunities

Part 3 - Flag Service at the Pentagon

By LCDR David K. Sturges, USNR (Ret) (Life Member)

This is the third in a series of articles by Dave Sturges on mentoring and the people who helped shape him and his Navy career.

Background: Within a year USNPAA lost two of its founding and most accomplished members: CAPT John Cameron MacKercher and CAPT James Patrick Mathews. For Navy Public Affairs, they leave basic and timeless standards molded by meeting a combined 65 years of challenges to the Navy of their times and mine. For me, they both were reporting seniors, mentors, and close shipmates from active duty days and long into retirement. Bonded by designator and joint heritage, I am now the survivor of this trio. Our story continues here.

Flag Service in the Pentagon

With me newly aboard the CNO Personal Staff as Flag Journalist, Jack MacKercher and Jim Mathews acted swiftly to build the office into a team. "Everyone," in Jim's words, "knew firsthand how ADM Moorer valued leadership integrity." He had a quiet way of exacting the best and we strove to give him that best during the late sixties and early seventies, when divided public opinion about the Vietnam War vented onto the military.

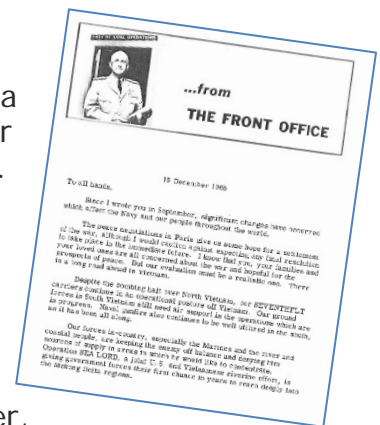
The Pentagon press corps reflected the anti-war climate. Most veteran correspondents could be trusted. Some others, younger, had open minds to be brought along by the facts. Still others were less objective and filed personal commentary with their copy no matter how well they had been accommodated. All of them sought time with the CNO.

We were the gatekeepers who managed the Admiral's public briefings and interviews, weeding out those that might waste his time with interviews of more pontification than inquiry. Jack set the policy early on. "In this work, be alert if they approach you. Never accept favors for access, exclusives, or scoops. You don't play into outside hands!"

ADM Moorer had a genuine touch for internal relations. To fleet Sailors, the presence of the CNO can seem quite formidable. He got around that with a

personal newsletter, *From the Front Office*, which we put together with a wide and regular circulation. Through it, readers got to know "Admiral Tom." It had a masthead photo of him with a warm smile, hard at work with papers in hand. Copy conveyed his care and concern for Sailors' needs and related in plain terms the challenges before the Navy around the world and what was expected of all.

In his speeches, we helped ADM Moorer hone his points and themes. He had us keep a file of them as his "quotable quotes." For those in uniform, it was the basics of leadership: taking responsibility and being accountable, no matter what the consequences. For academics, politicians, and diplomats, he reminded them to place hard military assessments beside expedient government "policy" in determining the nation's true interests.



"Never judge your adversaries by their intentions, but, rather, by what they are capable of doing." he would say repeatedly. In an era of aerospace fascination and the country's forgetfulness about sea power and open shipping lanes, he was fond of chiding Americans in his Alabama drawl that *"Seventy percent of the Earth's surface is still ocean"* and *"It was still the rusty old tub that was bringing the Volkswagens to Baltimore."*

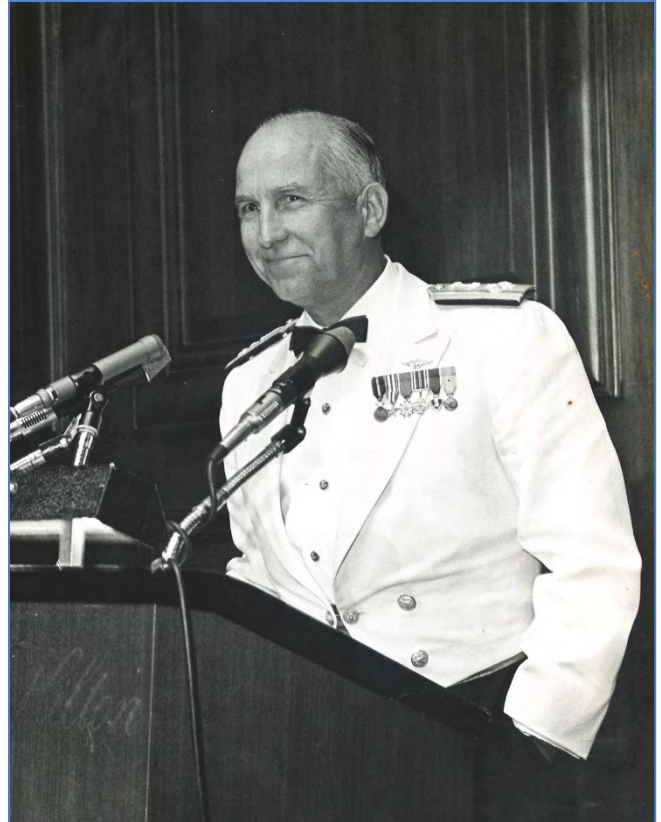
In days of typewriter, cold comp publishing and visual proofreading, well before computer, internet and casual spell-check, the PA workload was daunting.

Jack reminded me and all staff personnel that you had to hold to higher conduct. "You stand for the dignity of Naval service!" He put another expectation before all who served him and, as well, before all he served. He had no toleration for corner-cutting, immoral conduct or ego-serving. You had to possess a dogged willingness to get at assignments promptly, creatively, successfully and under your own horsepower.

Jim had a subtle but succinct way too. His genial nature helped you belay fear of failure. He'd sit you down, explain what was wanted and why. He had a knack then and throughout his career for convincing people of any rank of what was the right thing to do. Before you were dispatched, he'd make phone calls to contacts throughout OPNAV who would know what you had to obtain for the Front Office.

The rule from both Jack and Jim was plain. You do not yield to administrative convenience or "nonsense" as Jack called it. Jim's undisguisedly blunt, "You don't take no for an answer if it should be yes to the mission and, equally, to the orders of the senior flag staff."

Somehow, I found it easy to get creative dealing with civil service voices on the phone. There was a need to edit the Admiral's speech drafts, appointment briefs and issues research on public background information and current events linkage he needed as he traveled to fleet units around the world. That became my main oar to pull for the team, drawing on my prior experience I had as an archivist and graduate student in military and diplomatic history at Ohio State. "You're right about this, and I'd better tell him," Jack began saying. And from



ADM Thomas H. Moorer, 7th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Jim, "Dave, I guess we can call ya the *figure-it-out-and-get-it-done* guy."

When you gained Jack's confidence, he'd open up his rich sense of humor. He'd pull your leg relentlessly with his jokes and his descriptions of the cantankerous, weird and demanding people he had to cope with. Jim would respond with his "laugh and scratch time," imparting his fleet service on the destroyer, USS Vandivier (DER-540), and I would with mine on the "Big E." Since he also had prior enlisted service, we would often lapse into banter between "tin can" and "bird farm" Sailors.

Our team saw the Navy through as the war dragged on, stretched our forces and negotiations and POW release stalled. Washington seemed full of peace and "anti-everything" demonstrations, consuming

public opinion. They often reached the steps of the Pentagon, insulting everyone in uniform and pouring animal blood out of buckets as a symbol of our "war mongering." No matter how thoroughly we scoped out an opportunity, hostility finally crept into the Admiral's speaking engagements.

The "Boss" had his own way of neutralizing it. Before an audience at Princeton University, he was booed; people stood with their backs to him. Noting a person hold up a sign with his name on it, he calmly said, "You certainly don't and won't get anywhere making idle gestures and noise!" With that, the room went politely quiet and he resumed his remarks.

Forever etched in my memory is that day in 1970 when he took the call from President Nixon informing him that he had been appointed Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the first time a naval officer had become senior military leader since ADM Arthur W. Radford 15 years before. It was one of those moments of well-deserved delight and we had staff grins on our faces to match ADM Moorer's.

Soon, my active duty time was up. At age 29 I faced the decision of how best to give back to the Navy for all the opportunities it had given me. Jack, Jim, and the Front Office had an answer for me in keeping with their way of drawing out energy from individuals they thought could do more. The Reserve's 1655 direct commission program was new then and needed people. I was further encouraged by later RADM William Thompson, first 1650 CHINFO. After a few weeks of vetting paperwork and further mentoring, my own moment came when ADM Moorer signed my Ensign's commission.

Jack added his humorous touch on an 11 x 14-inch framed proclamation admitting me to his *"Most Distinguished, Illustrious and Exclusive Order of the Wolf and the Sled...for having completed two years of distinguished services as a producer of sentences that march, paragraphs that prance and phrases*

that sparkle, and as an outstanding marksman dispatching numerous ravening wolves approaching the CNO Head Shed Sled." He accompanied this with his *Mark IV Ensign's Public Affairs Officer Survival Kit*. Among its "vital" contents was a tiny book of matches: "non-explosive type for lighting your senior's cigars."



Light moment for OOD office, Jack MacKercher receives birthday bottle of Geritol at 40. From left, YNC Jim Reep, Secretary, Penny Scheiner, then CDR Jack, then LCDR Jim Mathews and then JO2 Dave Sturges.

Jack's generous teaching carried onward. He, Jim, and I continued our careers spanning an ever-changing Navy. Jack became ADM Moorer's Military Assistant at CJCS. Jim went on to serve ADM Zumwalt, followed by PA staff assignments with Sixth Fleet and European commands. I went home to Connecticut and affiliated with the Reserve in New Haven as Station PAO. I married and took a job with Pratt & Whitney as a military engine manual writer.

As a new officer, I was fortunate to be asked back to Washington for active duty training periods with the Chairman's Staff. Jack put me to work briefing with full responsibility. As a green Ensign, I froze and was tongue-tied one day at morning line-up. Jack said to me,



Jack and me (above) after ADM Moorer commissions me Ensign in June 1970 (below right).

"You! are going to get right back out there again and keep doing it!" When I did, the Chairman was wearing his avuncular smile and Jack and then-Chief of Staff, CAPT Harry Train, were dismissing my lingering apprehension.

CJCS was an even more intense environment than CNO. The Admiral, now a key member of the National Security Council, worked with Defense, White House, and State Department to answer and manage U.S. commitments worldwide. Simultaneously, strategy and tactics had to be devised to get the North Vietnamese to the conference table and the U.S. out of Vietnam; handle emerging relations with China; cope with the Cold War and Soviet moves and with the Mideast conflict between Egypt and Israel. Few were aware that behind the scenes ADM Moorer was an architect of synchronized military application backing up the diplomatic moves which led to eventual success for the United States and our allies.

On January 27, 1973, the Paris Peace Accords ended hostilities in Vietnam. ADM Moorer was interviewed live on national television by a young John Cochran, NBC's respected Washington correspondent. For his demonstrated honesty, John was personally selected for this plum opportunity by Jack, then Chairman's PAO.

ADM Moorer reflected on the sacrifices of so many American soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines despite brutal criticism from many at home. He lauded our great American men and women, individuals of every race and religion, who performed as all Americans had before them. "When the nation believes our world is under siege, we protect our nation with all our strength," he emphasized.

These words had a great effect on young Jay MacKercher, then in high school. Jay, Jack's eldest son, attended this interview and later told me how the event had a marked impact on him, stating how impressed he was with the Admiral's presence and wisdom. (Jay subsequently attended the Naval Academy, served for 29 years and commanded two warships before retiring as a Captain.)



ADM Moorer had a persuasive stamp on many of us, and it's a story, I hope, will be fully told someday.

U.S. NAVY WARSHIPS VISIT LENINGRAD

By CAPT Gene Wentz, USN, Ret.

In 1975, then-Commanders Gene Wentz and George Kolbenschlag became the first of very few U.S. Navy Public Affairs Officers to set foot in the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Recently, Captain Wentz shared fond memories of his Leningrad port visit with Sightings.

The USSR and USA decided to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the end of WWII by exchanging warship port visits to Boston and Leningrad (which reclaimed its original name of St. Petersburg after the fall of the Soviet Union). As Naval Forces PAO in London, I established a Command Information Bureau that was assigned to the task group commander, RADM Jim Langille (COMCRUDESGRU 12), flagship USS Leahy (CG-16) and USS Tattnell (DDG-19). CDR George Kolbenschlag, from U.S. European Command headquarters near Stuttgart, West Germany, was my assistant PAO.

The task group got underway from the British naval base at Portsmouth on May 6, 1975 and drew attention from East German and Polish warships as we moved across the Baltic Sea. Once tied up in Leningrad, on May 12 the ships were open for public visiting. Soviet media reps, along with the international press corps from Moscow, descended on the flotilla.

Admiral Langille had been briefed in Washington on political sensitivities. To prepare the admiral for provocative media queries George and I arranged "dirty question" drills in which we played the parts of skeptical, cynical, and irreverent reporters. The preparation paid off. There were no embarrassments during the visit and the task group left Soviet waters having contributed to American public diplomacy.

One of the most moving occasions during the visit was when Langille, with Kolbenschlag and I serving in the honor guard, laid a wreath at [Piskaryovskoye](#) Memorial Cemetery, site of mass graves containing nearly 420,000 civilians and 50,000 soldiers, victims of WWII's siege of Leningrad. Other events, less emotional, were a tour of the Hermitage museum and a Kirov ballet company performance at the Mariinsky theater.

Homeward bound, the task group requested to make a goodwill port visit to Gdansk, Poland, en route back to England, but was denied entry. Instead, we stopped in Helsinki, Finland, for a four-day visit. Mission accomplished; I wrote a public affairs after-action report that described the steps taken to make the deployment successful. Nearly 50 years later, my Leningrad port visit remains an unforgettable experience I continue to treasure.



Commanders Gene Wentz (left) and George Kolbenschlag at the memorial in the [Piskaryovskoye](#) Cemetery in Leningrad during the first port visit by an American warship to the Soviet Union since 1945. The cemetery contains mass graves with the remains of nearly 500,000 people

Letter to the Editor

In the fall issue of Sightings, Tom Bullock wrote an excellent review of Tom Jurkowski's book, "The Secret Sauce for Organizational Success - Communications and Leadership on the Same Page." When I got Tom's book, published by Air University Press, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, I could not put it down. I spent the day reading it and saying "Spot on" after each chapter.



Tom's book is an important one packed with practical cases and insight. It is the perfect book for both seasoned PR/PA professional and folks beginning their careers.

With 45 years of experience in this challenging profession, I know the key ingredients in Tom's "Secret Sauce" are the real case studies showing what happened and what was done right and wrong.

Also, the need for a trusting relationship between the boss, PA staff, and the media is a constant, never changing role which Tom makes crystal clear. I only wish that Rear Admiral Jim Finkelstein, former CHINFO and I had such a PA & Leadership handbook, when we initiated the

CHINFO media training program in 1987. Thank you, shipmate Tom, for a book we should all read and pass on to both our bosses and PA shipmates.

*Brent Baker, Rear Adm. USN (Ret)
Dean Emeritus, College of Communication,
Boston University*



RDML Brent Baker and CAPT Bob Prucha in CHINFO offices just off the E-ring, 1990.

- Active duty and retired military personnel can obtain a **FREE** copy by contacting the Air University Press (AUP) at: AirUniversityPress@au.af.edu
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- Available on Kindle and in paperback from Amazon.
- See www.tomjurkowski.net for more *Secret Sauce*.

Book Review

Indianapolis: The True Story

By Alice Prucha, CAPT, USNR (Ret) and Bob Prucha, CAPT, USN (Ret)

Several books have been written about the sinking of the *USS Indianapolis* (CA-35), so why write another? Journalist and Navy veteran Lynn Vincent and historian Sara Vladic collaborated on this new book in order to tell the whole story, now that declassified documents are available. Other books, especially ones written by survivors, are informative but Vincent and Vladic fill in holes left by those books. The authors have done a masterful job researching, interviewing, and telling the story not only about the ship, her crew, and her captain, but also the Japanese participants.

The full title tells it all: *Indianapolis: The True Story of the Worst Sea Disaster in U.S. Naval History and the Fifty-Year Fight to Exonerate an Innocent Man*. Christened in 1932, *USS Indianapolis* was a Portland-class heavy cruiser used by President Roosevelt as his ship of state. Later, it served as ADM Raymond Spruance's Fifth Fleet flag ship for the war in the Pacific.

The ship had been attacked by a Japanese kamikaze and repaired at Mare Island, CA. That put her in the right place at the right time to load the components of the atomic bomb that would be used at Hiroshima. In late July 1945 the Indy, commanded by CAPT Charles B. McVay III, delivered the critical elements of "Little Boy" to Tinian Island, north of Guam. Days later, during an otherwise peaceful midwatch, a Japanese submarine fired two torpedoes into the Indy. Three hundred men died and nearly 900 went into the sea. Only 316 survived the hunger, thirst, injuries, drowning, and shark attacks.

Immediately following rescue of the survivors, the investigation began. CAPT McVay was soon court-martialed without evidence of misconduct on his part, despite the findings of incompetence by others - some very senior in the Pacific Theater. Though he received a guilty verdict, he was also promoted to rear admiral and received a Bronze Star for courage in the kamikaze attack three months prior to the sinking. However, McVay's career was forever tainted.

Over many years his surviving crew, growing smaller every year, attempted to exonerate his reputation.

The second half of the book is the story of the trial, efforts, personalities involved, and the final verdict in 1999. But it was not until 2005 that official annotation of his exoneration made its way into McVay's military record. It came too late for McVay. He killed himself on November 6, 1968, still grieving for the sailors he couldn't save. Only one of his sons and a few of the survivors were alive to celebrate his vindication. Interestingly, the final exoneration came because of an eleven-year old boy named Hunter Scott (a future Naval Aviator) who did a school project on the incident. That started a years' long effort to clear McVay's name. He testified before a Senate Committee chaired by Sen. John Warner of Virginia (a former Navy Secretary). Fifty years after the sinking of the *USS Indianapolis*, her skipper was fully cleared.

What can PAOs learn from this riveting account? Quite a bit:

- Captain McVay was interviewed by media his first day in the hospital with no public affairs assistance. No one helped him screen reporters or end the session when he tired.
- The Navy delayed reporting the sinking to the media until VJ Day so the story would be ignored in the euphoria. The authors write, "Navy sabotaged the efforts of correspondents to get complete detailed stories into their own newspapers..."
- CAPT McVay's Bronze Star for valor at Okinawa during a kamikaze attack, awarded three months after the loss of the ship and very shortly after the court

martial, was kept quiet. Sharing this at the time would have done much to repair his reputation.

- In 1999, PAOs were included in the preparations to vindicate CAPT McVay before a Congressional hearing. It was *public affairs* job to anticipate backlash and either head it off or be prepared to manage it.
- The Navy needed to be willing to admit mistakes. Public affairs professionals are now trained to get the information out even when it is unfavorable.

We highly recommend *Indianapolis*. It is not for the faint of heart as many scenes are graphic, depicting injuries, fear, and shark attacks. We often had to take breaks in order to settle nerves before continuing. After the account of the

rescues, anger sets in as McVay is vilified by the Navy and we see firsthand how fallible the leadership was and how multiple mistakes were made.

Vincent and Vladic capture the spirit of life on a Navy combatant, and the fear of being stranded in the ocean for days in life rafts or clinging to anything that floated. Interviews with the survivors include very personal stories, some of which are unflattering to themselves as well as shipmates. Navy and Congressional leadership aren't spared criticism, either. The authors enumerate many mistakes, incompetence and coverups that began in 1945 and continued through 1999. With the exception of McVay, this book is a primer in how NOT to lead. Most importantly, it is a book of courage, sacrifice, and humility.

USNPAA members Bob and Alice Prucha are happily retired in Tampa, Fla. Bob served on active duty for 26 years. He became a designated PAO after six years as a surface warfare officer. Memorable duty stations included OASD/PA (where he and Alice met), CHINFO(OI-5), and USCENTCOM (both on active duty and as a civilian deputy). He is a model ship builder and grandfather of 4.



Mogadishu 1992: CAPT Bob Prucha with then-LCDR Lydia Robertson.

Alice was on active duty for eight years, then transferred to the Navy Reserve in 1988 to stay home with a baby and remain involved in the Navy. Memorable assignments included OASD/PA on both active and reserve duty with various NAVINFO units, ultimately commanding the CHINFO unit, 206. Recalled to active duty after 9/11, using experience with many PA reservists to place volunteers in commands needing PA support. She is now active in church activities and the grandchildren.



LCDR Alice Prucha on Reserve duty in 1992.



Sightings

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

Send your stories and photos to *Sightings* c/o:

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