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# SIGHTINGS

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## Board selects San Diego As next reunion location

San Diego was selected as the site of the 2010 Reunion at the March 31 meeting of the USNPAAA board. The on-site location and other details are still to be determined. Moving ahead on meeting planning the board established an Events Committee to coordinate events such as Washington area luncheons. Mary Hansen will chair the committee. Its first event was a D. C. area luncheon on April 23. RADM Thorp was the featured speaker. A summary is on page 7.

A sign of more interaction with our active duty comrades was announced by President Noone when he said that Association members were invited to attend a CHINFO Symposium reception

on June 10 at the Landsdowne National Conference Center. It was also reported that the Association has been asked to put together a panel for a roundtable discussion at the Symposium.

It was noted that both the Norma Connelly and Thompson-Ravitz awards will be presented at the reception. On a related note, the board approved annual funding of the Connolly award. And, the board approved the production of an information sheet on USNPAAA membership for distribution at the Symposium.

Jack Garrow reported on the Finance and Audit Committee's review of Association finances. In summarizing the

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### San Diego and USS Midway



# View from the Bridge

Dear Association Members, families and friends. Three significant and positive developments have occurred since the January issue of Sightings.

First, your Board of Directors has decided to hold Reunion XIII in San Diego, during the first quarter of 2010. With the last three reunions on the East Coast, the Board felt it was time to return to the Navy's West Coast home. The Association's last San Diego reunion – a big success -- was in January 2004.



San Diego is a wonderful place any time of the year. But for those of us living in colder climes, the San Diego weather should be a particular treat that time of the year. Stand by for further word!

Second, on April 23 USNPAAA Historian and immediate past president Brent Baker and yours truly turned over what we're calling the Navy Public Affairs Archive to the Navy History and Heritage Command (NHHC) at the Washington Navy Yard.

The Archive consists of documents and materials collected over the years by former Board member Ed Castillo and Brent himself. Not only does it capture the history of the Navy public affairs program, but it also documents the recollections and views of flag officers and other PAOs regarding the issues of their times. It is an important contribution to Navy history, and was gratefully accepted by NHHC's leadership and archivists. Hats off to Brent for his meticulous organizing and indexing of the collection.

Third, we formed a Finance and Audit Committee of the Board of Directors, under the leadership of past president Jack Garrow. Other committee members are Jim Finkelstein and Mike Doubleday. The purpose is to advise the Board and President on the stewardship of Association assets and to assist our treasurer with investments and budgeting.

The committee took a thorough look at our finances, and on March 30 made a number of recommendations that will help put us on sound financial footing. Those recommendations were unanimously approved by the Board on April 29. The key provisions are that we fence off the Endowment Fund (cur-

rently about \$87,500), with the interest used for operating expenses. Remaining assets – about \$13,000 – would be split into an operating account and ready reserve account.

Like most individual savings, our assets took a hit last year due mainly to the dismal condition of the financial markets. However, we've started to see a turnaround. Moreover, the investment structure we've adopted should serve us well in the years ahead, in good financial times and bad.

Finally, the Association's sincere condolences go to the family of Board member Pete Litrenta, who passed away recently in San Diego. He was a friend and shipmate to many of us, and a consummate public affairs professional.

*-Jim Noone*

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report, Garrow pointed out that they analyzed data for the past five years and the last three reunions.

He said that as planned, the estimated five percent return on the endowment essentially funded the regular annual expenses of the Association with some one-time exceptions.

Garrow noted that it was anticipated at the beginning that the reunions would be self-funding, and they have not been. He said that the past two reunions resulted in a deficit of well over \$13,000.

Essentially, the main recommendation of the study is that the Association budget to spend only the annual projected interest earned, and that the principal of the endowment not be spent. The Committee recommended that the reunions be planned in order to be self-funded.

President Noone called for a special Board meeting to be held to focus on finances and the study's recommendation. He reports on that April 29 meeting, the Endowment Fund and other Association assets in this issue's *View from the Bridge*.

Finally, a discussion was held on the corporate status of the Association. It was noted that at present the Association is a 501c6 organization, which gives it tax-free status, but does not give tax-free status to donations. The Board will check on the possibility of achieving a 501c19 tax classification, which provides tax-free status for both.

# Pete Litrenta leaves a legacy in San Diego and in the Navy

We were saddened to learn that after a long illness our friend and colleague **CAPT Peter Litrenta**, USN, passed away in his sleep early Wednesday morning, April 22, at his home in Coronado, CA. We are keeping Linda and all of his family in our thoughts and prayers.

A 25-year career naval officer, Pete served tours as the Navy's senior public affairs officer in the Mediterranean and the Pacific Ocean, and coordinated community relations for the Navy in San Diego.

When he retired from the Navy in 1989, Pete became totally involved in community activities in San Diego. He became Vice President for Communications and Military Affairs at the Greater San Diego Chamber of Commerce. He joined the America's Cup Committee in charge of media and community relations.

As past president of the San Diego Fleet Week Foundation, he was inducted into the 2002 Fleet Week Hall of Fame by the Mayor of San Diego. He was also a past President of the Coronado Schools Foundation, and a board member of the San Diego Taxpayers Association.

He helped spearhead efforts to bring USS Midway to San Diego. He served on the Mayor's BRAC Task Force and as a board member of the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce where he was Chairman of the Chamber's Military Affairs Council. He also was a board member of the San Diego Convention and Visitors' Bureau, the USS Midway Museum, and was a Director Emeritus of the Port Tenants Association.

In January 2004, he received the USNPAAA "Significant Achievement Award" for distinguished service to the public affairs community and to the City and County of San Diego.

Pete earned a Bachelor degree in Communications from the University of Notre Dame and a Master's degree in Public Relations from Boston University.

## A message from RADM Thorp

A consummate gentleman and patriot, Pete was one of the original members of our modern professional PAO community who paved the way for public affairs to be such an integral part of Navy operations today. Whether in his capacity as detailer or in PA assignments that included SURFPAC, PACFLT, THIRD FLEET and the San Diego Naval

Base. Pete understood the value of good public affairs and how we as a professional community support our Navy and our nation.

Transitioning from the active duty force to an equally active role in the alumni ranks in January 1989, Pete remained a stalwart in San Diego for Navy issues as they related to both the local community and to the nation. Serving as a "big brother" to many young PAOs still learning their trade, Pete offered timely advice and mentoring on operational and administrative issues alike and always had an encouraging word.

His love for the Navy and his country were steadfast and true. Understanding the growing need to educate the public about the Navy, he was one of the early and enthusiastic supporters of the MIDWAY aircraft carrier museum in San Diego, and his commitment to the project was instrumental in convincing senior Navy leaders of the viability of the project. He found a similar calling in helping to educate the civilian community about encroachment issues and the criticality for the Navy to be able to train and operate in a realistic manner.

Throughout his life, his devotion to family, community, Navy and nation served as an inspiration to countless uniformed and civilian personnel. He lived his life by the simple principle of doing the right thing. He exemplified everything good about our Team and he will be missed.



*A memorial service for Peter will be held at 11 a.m. on 18 May on board USS MIDWAY in San Diego. **Smooth Sailing- Peter!***





## Recent Sightings

### Vercessi's *King of the Hill*

You want to read a novel about a power grab among organized crime families along the lines of *The Godfather*? The plot is based in New York and Washington, D.C., between the late-1950s and mid-1970s. It traces the rise of a Neapolitan chieftain, and his goal to put his own man in the White House.

In **CAPT George Vercessi's** fourth novel, *King of the Hill*, you'll find out that when organized crime bosses want something they usually get it. And, when they set their sights on the White House it can be downright costly, not only for the American taxpayer, but for many of them as well.

The story revolves around the law-abiding son of New York don Anthony Vittorio, who is pulled into the organization against his wishes and sent to Washington, where he befriends a skilled government technocrat. Together, they contrive to skim hundreds of millions of dollars from the treasury.

From there, the plot moves in a series of twists and turns that'll take you to the very pinnacle of the U.S. criminal empire, and leave you wondering who actually controls our federal government.

This book and the other three from Vercessi's pen are available through AuthorHouse.com and other retail outlets.

## In memory of Stan Sirmans

His wife Royanne informed us that the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund in Memory* program honored **CAPT Stan Sirmans**. Every year there is a ceremony to pay tribute to those whose deaths do not fit the DOD criteria for inclusion in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

This year, the ceremony was held on April 20. During the ceremony names of all honorees were read aloud, and at the end of the ceremony certificates bearing the honoree's names were placed at the memorial. They were then stored in a permanent archive. In addition, the honorees are included in an *In Memory Honor Roll Book* to serve as a lasting reminder of their service and sacrifices.

Sirmans was commissioned in 1961. In 1968, he reported to the Naval Advisory Group in Vietnam as an advisor to a Vietnamese Riverboat Command in the Mekong Delta. While in Vietnam he was awarded the Bronze Star with "V", the Navy Commendation Medal with "V", two Purple Hearts and numerous Vietnamese awards.

In 1972, he changed his specialty to Public Affairs. Over the remainder of his 31-year career, he was assigned to a number of Navy staffs including Bupers, Chinfo, Legislative Affairs, Cinclant, and the Navy Recruiting Command. Sirmans retired in 1992, and passed away in June, 2006.

For more information about the ceremony, contact the Memorial Fund at (202) 393-0090 or visit their website at [www.vvmf.org](http://www.vvmf.org).

### What's going on with *Sightings*? The scoop in some detail below

Your *yes* responses to the Association's OP-OUT email message totaled 45 out of 500 members. That's a savings of about \$48 dollars an issue. Or, if there were 4 issues, that would be about \$192 per year. (With the May rise in postage that could push \$200.)

Considering this and other reasons, the Board voted on April 29 to cut the number of issues a year from four (4) to three (3). They are looking into some sort of online-only pub for one issue. Or maybe if the Association funds stay over \$100,000 again, a 4th print issue might be reinstated. **Keep sending stuff!**

### Thompson-Ravitz Award article correction for Jan 2009 issue

The last issue contained info from a Chinfo news release concerning the Thompson-Ravitz Public Affairs Award. The article stated that RADM Robert Ravitz was the first director of the Naval Reserve Public Affairs program. A subsequent correction names RADM Bob Garrick as the first director, RADM Joe Callo as the second and then RADM Ravitz. First, second, third – they were all great leaders of a great program.

Sorry admirals - tough proof-reading mistake for CAPT Gengler, NAVRES PAO in the Callo era.

## LCDR Moore recalls the 1960's

Historian Brent Baker reports that, one of the most important parts of the history archive is the personal “first-hand” stories from people like you. One of the latest is from **LCDR Sid Moore**. His naval service began in 1942. After the war he went home, but was recalled during the Korean War, and was on active duty until 1970.

**Sid was PIO and a witness to three significant events in naval history.** They were the loss of USS THRESHER in 1963, the first Vietnam landing of combat Marines in 1965, and he was the first PIO sent TAD by himself to Saigon in 1965.

On April 9, 1963, Sid was PIO at Deputy COMSUBLANT in New London, when the USS THRESHER (SSN-593) was lost at sea. He recalled: We used to take news people and others out regularly for a cruise on our diesel submarines, and I was on such a cruise that very day.

After his submarine docked, he was told that the submarine was missing. He went into COMSUBLANT headquarters and all of the officers there were quite concerned. **They didn't want him to talk to the media at that particular time.**

The Canadian Navy was asked to help in the search and a Canadian radio station broadcast that an American nuclear boat was missing in the Atlantic. This concerned the submariners because there were several nuclear ships at sea at that time, and they didn't want families to be unduly concerned. He went ahead and announced that it was the THRESHER.

**Later that evening, the executive officer of the base, approached Moore and told him that there were about 40 newsmen at the gate.** He said, “just say the word, and I'll turn them away.” Moore responded, please don't do that, I'll go out and let them in and I'll talk with them. He explained to them, that a search was underway for the THRESHER. That was on the hectic initial day.

On March 7, 1965, Sid was PIO for the SEVENTH Fleet Amphibious Group when the first combat ground forces landed at Da Nang, South Vietnam.

He recalls that the media were on the beach, and that the **South Vietnamese had flower girls on the beach.** As the Marines disembarked from their landing craft the girls put flower lei's around their necks.

One of the newsmen made a beeline for the first Marine who landed. He said, ‘Say, how do you feel about being in Vietnam now that you've arrived in force? The Marine said, “Well, sir all I can tell you is that I was just glad to get off that God damn ship.’ **Sid's hope of getting joint Navy-Marine Corps recognition was blown out of the water right there.**

Moore was in Saigon, in 1995, as the first PIO (1655) assigned to the air strike Operation Rolling Thunder. He took top-secret bomb damage assessment (BDA) messages and used them for news releases for MACV. He remembers the pilots of four propeller driven Skyraiders who were attacked by enemy MIG-17s, but managed to down one MIG with 20mm gunfire. They were flown to Saigon for a successful event at the Five O'Clock Follies.

When asked if he learned anything from these events. **He said that he was very impressed with the professionalism of the people with whom he associated in the Navy.** He added that the THRESHER prepared him for contingencies that came about that looked real bad, but he knew that things would work out alright. Lcdr Moore summarized his experiences, saying that, “You just have to rely on the high degree of professionalism of the Naval people who are involved when things do go bad.”

## Nemeth's Cognitive Systems

Life member, **CAPT Chris Nemeth** has accepted a position with the Klein Associates Division of Applied Research Associates. He is a Principal Scientist and Group Leader for Cognitive Systems Engineering, and will be based in the Chicago area.

Klein Associates is engaged in areas of research including applied cognition, decision support, information and intelligence, modeling and simulation, and training. The division consists of 40 professionals and staff who are based in Dayton, OH. The parent company Applied Research Associates is an engineering firm, based in Albuquerque.

Nemeth joins Klein Associates after earning his PhD in human factors/ergonomics, and engaging in seven years of research centered at the Department of Anesthesia and Critical Care at the University of Chicago.

## PA Archives are now history



*President Jim Noone (on right) and Historian Brent Baker turn over the USNPAAA "PA Archive" files to Navy archivist Barbara Posner on April 23 at the Naval History & Heritage Command in D.C. This initial PA archive consists of "The Ed Castillo Collection" of 24 cases of historical material covering a vast area from the civil war era to the 1990s, and the "Brent Baker Collection" of 12 cases of historical material covering his tenure as CHINFO.*

## Chemung on the Rocks

Retired **Senior Chief Journalist Bill Russell**, served with RADM Thompson at First Fleet in 1957. Chief Russell reports that one of Bill's "big ideas" was to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the around-the-world cruise of the Great White Fleet by having a "Fleet Review" in San Francisco Bay.

Aboard the First Fleet flagship were civic officials, news media, and various admirals, including Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz. Thompson and Russell were escorting the press.

As fate had it, as the ships arrived in single line formation, the oiler USS CHEMUNG ran aground near Alcatraz and could be seen from the flagship.

This could have been a PR disaster, but Admiral Nimitz calmly explained to the news media, that when the Great White Fleet deployed in 1907, he could not go because he had just grounded his submarine. Everybody laughed!

Luck was with the fleet, a few hours later the oiler was re-floated from a mud bank without having any

injuries or major damage. The grounding became a media footnote buried in the newspapers.

Chief Russell said he wanted to honor his PAO shipmate, and contributed \$500 to the USNPAAA Endowment Fund in honor of the Thompsons.

Unable to come to the Reunion, Russell then passed this message to Bill and Dorothy: "Remember our days at First Fleet together and at the 1957 Fleet Visit to San Francisco, where our favorite drink was **CHEMUNG on-the-rocks.**"

It turns out that CAPT Jerry Pape was one of the officers on the CHEMUNG's bridge when the oiler went aground. But, at least, he wasn't the pilot or Captain at that time!

## 1975 Port Visit to Leningrad



*Commanders Gene Wentz (left) and George Kolbenshlag at the memorial in the Piskariovskoye Cemetery in Leningrad during the first port visit of an American warship to the Soviet Union since 1945. In the cemetery are the remains of nearly 500,000 people who died during a German siege of the city in WWII.*



# RADM Thorp addresses Chinfo's past, present and future

## He also announces retirement plans, and that Chinfo is 68

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**RADM Frank Thorp**, addressed a USNPAAA luncheon in D. C. on April 23. **He said that he and Rear Adm. Greg Smith would both be retiring this summer.**

The admiral said that after two years as CHINFO he realizes that he walks on the path set for the current generation by previous PAO communities. He added, **“It is clear to me from the recent piracy incident to other events that what we have today in Navy public affairs – we are the best – did not happen overnight. So I thank all of you.”**

Thorp cited the piracy case as making a lot of money for the PA community. “The Navy ended up with 11-minutes of NBC News and on the day Captain Phillips was rescued, **he labeled NBC, the Navy Broadcasting Company.**”

He touched on two recently signed documents that have an impact on Public Affairs. “The first, **‘The Navy Vision for Public Affairs’ was signed by CNO** and it has been used for leverage with Navy leadership. It’s not the 1650 vision, but the Navy vision for public affairs. He cited CAPT (Ret) Bruce Cole as the force behind the documents.

It was followed up by a strategic plan on how to implement the Navy Vision document. He said, Chinfo was on an aggressive outreach path, also recognizing visual information as a core competency. **The LDO photo community has been merged with the 1650 community.** It was 210 PAO billets plus 46 photo billets or 256 billets.

He said that the other area the Strategic Plan recognizes is **“Strategic Communication.”** It was addressed with a strategy called ‘communication integration.’ He said that when he became CHINFO he looked at all the things CHINFO did and the one thing that was missing was, ‘Who is the guy who backs up the CHINFO and makes sure the information crosses throughout the organization?’ There was nobody who did that or it was the front office – the deputy or the CHINFO. **The Assistant CHINFO for Communication Integration now runs this office.** They look at strategic or longer-term items. They are not putting together tactical plans.

“Thorp said that *Rhumb Lines* really got energized

when the CNO said while he liked ‘Rhumb Lines,’ he didn’t understand what Navy public affairs was really doing in it. Thorp showed it to him. Because of the information in it, he wanted it briefed at the CNO Morning Meeting. Thorp gives a 15 – 20 minute briefing and goes through the next four months of what’s going on in the Navy. CNO then gives his opinion on what the priorities should be.

**“The news desk is still the news desk,”** according to the admiral. We are diving into the new social-new media thing. He said he has been challenged by the leadership to create a new section on social and news media. We are not going to do that! I do not want an old media shop and a new media shop, I want a single integrated media shop. **The admiral said that Chinfo is diving into how to do FaceBook and Twitter** from an official Navy viewpoint and that you will see some “new stuff” rolled out in June.

**The OI-8 office, headed by retired CAPT Bruce Cole is the largest part of CHINFO.** When the Navy Media Center became the Defense Media Center, a lot of the shipboard visual information was transferred to OI-8. It’s already bearing fruit, You know about the grad school program, we now have a department head training program for PAOs at San Diego State University. The old PACENs are now Navy Public Affairs Support Elements (NPASE) to align with the joint and operational world. They are now discussing moving combat camera to NPASE.

**He said outreach is biggest change in the last couple of years** This year we will have ‘Navy Week’ in 21 cities. He wants more flag officers to speak to groups other than just the Navy League. He referred to a variety of other programs that could involve interaction with the civilian community. On the people side, **Thorp mentioned new civilian senior Navy PA positions coming up .** They include a GS-15 to handle Community Relations in Chinfo and a GS-15 as Deputy Director at NAVCO in Millington.

*In a separate message, Adm Thorp noted that May 1, marked the 68th anniversary of the Office of Information. Congrats CHINFO!!*