



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

## From the Bridge...

Dear USNPAA Members:

I'm delighted that we have been able to put *Sightings* 'back on the street.' It's been far too long since our last issue, and I want to thank Joe Quimby and Tim Beecher for stepping up and volunteering to bring it back. When I assumed the presidency of the Association, one of the most frequently asked question was: "When are we going to see *Sightings* again?"

The **MOST** frequently asked question, though, was about a reunion. The last one was held five years ago in the Washington, DC area. I'm pleased to tell you that we are looking at holding one in the fall of 2019. As you all know, we issued a survey specifically asking about members' desires. The primary questions are: What is the likelihood of your attending a reunion? What is your preference of when, and, what is your preferred location?



RDML Tom Jurkowski, USN Ret.

The results we received clearly indicate a preference for the Washington area. That's not a surprise since so many members live in the Maryland/Virginia/DC area.

With that in mind, Sheila Graham, Chuck Connor and I have conducted some initial site visits for accommodations and a dinner venue. Pricing, of course, is the key driver—but we also need to ensure the facilities we choose are going to provide us appropriate customer service and 'perks.' Although nothing has been finalized, we are coming close to a decision.

For your planning purposes, we are looking at the weekend of **20-22 September 2019**. As soon as we have venues finalized, we will be sending out the initial Save the Date with details.

Kudos are very much in order to Dick Thompson who has worked tirelessly to get out our initial messages, including the reunion survey. He diligently works to maintain our database, so if you have updates to your contact info please send them to Dick at [usnpaa@gmail.com](mailto:usnpaa@gmail.com).



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We are also very pleased with our being able to support CHINFO with its mentoring program. As I've communicated previously, I think mentoring is one of the backbones of our community, and I think we have an opportunity to help some of the young public affairs officers grow and develop professionally. If you have not signed up for the program, I would encourage you to consider doing so. Again, mentorship has proven to be a critical part of our professional development.

To bring that point home, Mike Sherman shares his thoughts about mentoring and the impact it has had on him—both during his time as a PAO and then in the private sector—in this issue. I think you will enjoy what he shares.

When Mike shared his thoughts with me, he brought up a very interesting idea. For a mentoring program to increase its effectiveness, it would be very useful if there were a collection of various situations that members could document and make available as a ready reference to both mentors and mentees to use as learning tools. I think this is a great idea. I would welcome any member who would like to lead such an effort.

Tim Beecher also does a great job of documenting his experiences during the evacuation of Saigon in 1975. He cites the many lessons he learned from one of his mentors, Erv Sharp. Tim's piece captures not only some of the historic implications of this evolution—Operation Frequent Wind—but the emotional impact it had on countless South Vietnamese and American people.

Tim's piece is a perfect example of the type of documents that Mike says should be collected as ready reference tool for both mentors and mentees. It's a great learning tool.

Thanks to Mike and Tim for their efforts in sharing their thoughts. Both items are meaningful reads.

As we move forward, my primary goal as president of the Association is to continue to maintain the bonds, both professional and personal, that we have established over our careers. We are a very special community of professionals—a unique group. It's important for us to not only maintain those relationships but to demonstrate to current practitioners just how special the Navy public affairs community is. We cannot lose the pride we have had in making so many meaningful contributions to our Navy.

My number one goal as president is to help sustain that pride in being a Navy communicator, whether we be officer or enlisted, reservist or civilian.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Sightings*.

Sincerely,  
Tom

PS: I think the below commentary by General Walter Boomer, USMC Ret. is as relevant today as when published two decades ago. "Reprinted from *Proceedings* with permission; Copyright © (1997) U.S. Naval Institute / [www.usni.org](http://www.usni.org)"

## 'Stop whining'

**Author:** Boomer, Walter

**Publication:** United States Naval Institute. Proceedings; Annapolis Vol. 123, Iss. 7, (Jul 1997): 2.



GEN Walter E. Boomer, USMC Ret.

When I was asked to appear on this panel, I asked myself: Why are we doing this again? How many panels have we had on the military and the media? I bring a little different view to this whole subject, and that is, if we haven't figured this out yet on the military side and on the media side, we're not half as smart as I think we are.

From the military perspective, there is something we need to understand. This is a democracy, and a free press is the fundamental underpinning of everything that we stand for, fight for, and believe in. Now, it doesn't make any difference then whether you like the media or you don't like the media—they're here to stay.

It's the same situation that I face now as the leader of a public company. I may or may not like the Wall Street analysts who cover our company, and I may or may not like the view that they take, which is sometimes short-term versus long-term, but, too bad. I can't change that. I have to deal with analysts because they are there and it's my responsibility to figure out how to deal with them.

It's the military's responsibility to figure out how to deal with the media, and the Admiral [Rear Admiral Brent Baker, USN, ret.] just suggested some ways. I think it is a healthy thing for the American military to be exposed through the media to the public. After all, they pay our salaries. Now, there are legitimate securities issues, but they're another question, and we all understand it.

So, to the military I would say: Look, figure out a way to deal with this problem. Stop talking about it, stop whining about it, just get down to work. I tell my people now that talk is cheap, plans are cheap. If it doesn't translate into work, I don't want to hear about it.

Let's stop talking about this issue and solve it. It's not that big a deal. From the media side, you are, you always will be a pain in the neck. It has been that way and it is going to be that way in the future. You are a burden when you come out to call on us. That doesn't mean that we should exclude you, but you are a burden. You take up time in a person's very, very busy day.

If I know that I'm a burden, I try to act a little bit differently and appreciate the fact that I am a burden. But in wartime, you should be able to cover the war. The American people need to know what's happening and what's going on. In this information age, they need to see and to understand, as horrible as it might be, what is happening on the battlefield. Perhaps, if more people understood the horror, we would be less inclined to go to war.

There are issues that the media doesn't want to deal with, and my message to the media is the same as it is to the military: Stop whining about it. We can't take all of the media at the same time. The thousands that might descend upon the battlefield can't be dealt with. So let's figure out a way to deal with what we can deal with and then let's have the courage to talk about the security issue. There are some things that cannot be broadcast, should not be broadcast, because there are legitimate security reasons for not doing so. We just need to figure out what they are—and they're not very hard.

On the military side, however, don't use security as a copout. There are relatively few things that the press cannot be told, relatively few things.

Now, that's how I feel about it. And because I felt that way about it that is why we operated the way we did during Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The First Marine Expeditionary Force was open to the media. We had layed out some rules -- I didn't like them all -- but they caused us to be able to deal with fewer rather than more media. But those [reporters] that got out, we welcomed them. They could go anywhere, do anything, talk to anybody, from private to general, no restraints, no restrictions.

Now, there's a caveat here, if you're going to do that, you better have faith in your troops. If you don't trust them, if you don't have faith in them, you can't turn the media loose. But I would submit that if you don't have faith and don't trust them, you're not a very good leader and you shouldn't be there either. You've got to be able to deal with the one percent that is going to say what you don't want them to say. There's going to be one Marine, one Sailor who is going to embarrass you, but only one. Ride that storm out; don't shut it down because of the one percent.

There's been a lot of discussion of Molly Moore's [Washington Post reporter] coverage of the war. In fact, I noticed the picture of Molly Moore and me in front of my tent when we came back from the attack in Kuwait [in the May 1997 Proceedings.]

You should know that I extended that invitation to five reporters. Molly was the only one who showed up. This wasn't the fault of the other people; it was rather late in the campaign planning when I decided to do this, and then there were some who thought, 'Boomer's going to be 50 miles behind the lines and there ain't going to be any story there.' Well, they didn't know me very well, but that's how Molly happened to get the scoop.

Both sides need to stop talking about this thing, sit down, and get to work, figure out the few tough issues that we need to work on and let's learn to live together. Neither of us is going to go away.

#### Author Affiliation

Retired General Boomer commanded I Marine Expeditionary Force during Operation Desert Shield-Desert Storm and later served as the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps.

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Happy Navy  
Birthday#243  
October 13, 2018



Taken from a NAVADMIN 173/18 of 20 July 2018 from the CNO... On 13 October 2018, the Navy will celebrate its 243rd birthday. The central theme of this year's 243rd BDAY and heritage week will be **"Forged by the Sea."** The announcement of this theme now allows planners at all echelons to focus on talking points, guest speaker and solicitations for this year's commemorations. On 9 October 2018, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) will mark the commencement of a week-long Navy Heritage Celebration in Washington, DC culminating with a commemoration at the National Capital Region (NCR) Navy Birthday Ball on 13 October 2018.



... The intent is to maximize public awareness by conducting local events in areas with a Navy presence. On a broader scale, we will use the 243rd BDAY to tell our Navy's story, strengthen our Navy's connection to the American public, and improve the American public's appreciation for our Navy's role in our nation's history and culture.

...With a desired End State of the following:

- (a) Enhanced naval heritage and traditions.
- (b) Maximized opportunities for participation in Navy commemoration events.
- (c) Increased awareness of, and support for, the Navy by key audiences.
- (d) Improved Navy-wide processes and coordination for Navy birthday commemorations.

### **Messages/Talking Points**

**The sea is the greatest force on earth, and it has the power to transform Sailors, enabling them to go beyond what they thought possible.**

- Your Sailors have been forged by the sea since 1775 when the Continental Congress determined a navy was needed to protect America and our international interests.
- From our original six frigates to the fighting force today comprised of a ready and resilient submarine, aviation and surface forces your Navy continues to forge new boundaries, forge new alliances and forge new strengths. We are Forged by the Sea.

**The U.S Navy is the esteemed force that pushes the boundaries of what is possible. It is prestigious, strategic, innovative, nurturing, progressive, and strong.**

- Since its earliest days, the U.S. Navy has deployed forward to deter our adversaries and fight and win if deterrence fails, in order to safeguard our interests and preserve our way of life.
- In today's increasingly complex global security environment, the U.S Navy continues to provide constant forward-presence in areas where our interests are being challenged.
- The world today and our global security is complex. Your Navy Sailors provide constant forward-presence.
- State and non-state adversaries strive to match and outpace the capabilities of our fleet, it is imperative that we continue to grow, develop and innovate to maintain maritime superiority.

**The strength of the U.S Navy emanates from the toughness, initiative, integrity, and accountability of its Sailors.**

- For 243 years, your U.S Navy has celebrated the seekers of knowledge and adventure. Our Sailors are the difference and this birthday we celebrate the security they provide for all Americans.
- U.S. Navy Sailors – past and present – represent exceptional talent and have achieved success in service, industry, business and government.
- The U.S. Navy attracts seekers of knowledge and adventure, who are intelligent, adaptable, resourceful, ambitious, courageous, hardworking, and strong-willed.

Courtesy Naval History and Heritage Command

<https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/browse-by-topic/commemorations-toolkits/navy-birthday/commemoration-resources-birthday.html>

# Birthday Message to the Fleet from SECNAV

R 271654Z SEP 18  
FM SECNAV WASHINGTON DC  
TO ALNAV

RMKS/1. To our Sailors, civilians, families and friends, for 243 years the Navy has been a global force, forged from the sea, united in a common purpose, ready to fight, respond, and defend wherever there is need.

2. Because of your hard work and dedication, the foundation for restoring readiness and increasing lethality has been set. But as we enter our 244th year of service, we must now build on that foundation. I need you to continually think of how to improve the delivery of the Navy the Nation needs with a committed sense of urgency.

3. We are accountable for how and where we invest our time and our resources, and we must understand the readiness and lethality we gain from those investments. To that end, we must be disciplined in our focus on our people, capabilities, and processes.

4. We have developed plans informed by the National Defense Strategy, which recognizes that our primary role is warfighting. Now each of us must align our efforts in order to accomplish these plans. Ask yourselves and each other, how can we accomplish our mission better, faster, and cheaper.

5. With your help, I have no doubt we will leverage every resource, leading practice, and efficiency we can find with the professionalism, integrity and accountability the American people expect.

6. My wife Polly and I are forever grateful for all that you, your families, and your loved ones do for our Nation. Happy Birthday Shipmates, God bless you and God bless the United States Navy.

7. Released by the Honorable Richard V. Spencer, Secretary of the Navy.

Richard V. Spencer of Wyoming was sworn in as the 76th secretary of the Navy Aug. 3, 2017.

A Connecticut native, Spencer graduated from Rollins College in 1976 with a Bachelor of Arts in Economics. Upon graduation he joined the United States Marine Corps and proudly served as an H-46 pilot until 1981 before departing active duty to enter the private finance sector.



## Sightings in August 2018 at the USN Public Affairs Conference where USNPAA sponsored a reception

Photos by Toby Marquez



Jim Noone and RDML Stephen Pietropaoli



Steve Clawson, Agnes Tauyan, Sheila Graham and John Dewey





Paul Hanley and John Dewey



Alan Goldstein, Jim Noone, Dick Thompson and RDML Vick Beck among others listen to RDML Jurkowsky's remarks during the USNPAA sponsored reception.

CAPT Gregory L. Hicks, USN has been the Acting Chief of Information since August 5, 2017 to present and the host of the 2018 Navy Public Affairs Executive Seminar. Hicks became a public affairs officer in 1996 and has served in a variety of shore and sea billets. Before reporting as the acting Chief of Navy information, Hicks served as the special assistant for public affairs to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for both the 18th and 19th chairmans.







Panel discussion with Captain Hicks, Acting CHINFO, Lolita Baldor (AP), Hope Seck (Military.com), Bob Burns (AP) and Phil Stewart (Reuters)



Bob Burns (AP) and Phil Stewart (Reuters)



RDMLs Durand, Jurkowsky and Pietropaoli

# Mentoring – Thoughts From an experienced professional PAO by Mike Sherman

While looking over this program, some things came to mind that would have helped me in so many situations. I think we were fortunate to have experienced (truly battle-tested) bosses who were really our mentors whether we called them that or not – Bill Graves, Bill Stierman, Dale Patterson, and Jack Garrow were mine. They provided us with experienced counsel and leadership that we could see, touch and feel. The mentor program certainly is one way to accomplish this today.

For example, coming into a staff where the previous PAO was considered a golden boy is unnerving and difficult. How does one get up to speed? I know that as the first SWO who walked into AIRPAC to “handle” the most senior Naval Aviator, it required an immediate learning curve. Where to go to get information, credibility, and respect?

How to handle the sudden invasion of media to Saudi Arabia with our crew of 17? Fortunately, I was able to reach back into my past as a LT in Guam where we worked to create a JIB to handle Operation New Life and the media that followed. I also was fortunate to have some basic understanding of the Saudis as a result of my background there as well.

One of the things that I tried to impress on the young men and women at the JIB in Dhahran...watch and learn from this. I still get feedback from those “kids” that they valued that advice.

So, with all those reminiscences from an old mind, I thought it was important to go a little deeper as to what mentorship can provide. How are we viewed when we first walk into the room/ship/station to become part of a team of experts, be they SWOs, aviators, doctors, lawyers, etc.? I believe that the most important asset we have in those times is the reputation that being a PAO brings with you.

But how does a young PAO acquire a body of knowledge to better serve him/her? The Mentor program is one answer, but both mentor and PAO need background and reference material. Here are some thoughts from “one who has been there.”

**Credibility** – One of the major/essential standards that all PAOs have to be held to is one of credibility in the eyes of their superiors – who usually are at the level of CDR – ADM. When you walk into “that room,” you have to be viewed as credible and knowledgeable. That requires an awareness of similar problems, and how they might have been handled/solved or even mishandled. While a new/young PAO might not have all that, the reputation of the entire PAO community itself should provide comfort to the staff and leadership.

**Historical References** – Somewhere, sometime, someplace, the PAO community has handled every possible permutation of emergency – from our emergence as recognized communications experts during the Vietnam era to present day arbiters of instantaneous communications. We’ve handled ship collisions, rapes, beatings, the new embedded media concept, POWs, etc. Has all/any of this ever been documented and stored for reference and review? Are case studies available? I’m not aware that it has been. So, I would suggest that an online source be available for research and reference for both mentor and youngster.

**Reference Library** – For the development of a credible and knowledgeable PAO, I would recommend that there be a complete online library of cases from which both PAO and mentor can



draw. This can be in the form of personal experiences, formal email/messages, photo/motion picture, media coverage (print and electronic), etc.

Those are my thoughts on the whole program. Probably not the most coherent or helpful, but experience is so valuable. In my civilian position I ended up being the go-to guy to set up 400+ member meetings of Visa staff and bankers, as well as handling all marketing PR aspects of eight Olympic Games. Where was that expertise? The fallback was always my role as a PAO.

*Captain Sherman served in a variety of key positions during his career to include ...during Desert Shield/Storm and the Director of the Navy's Hollywood office/NAVINFO LA*

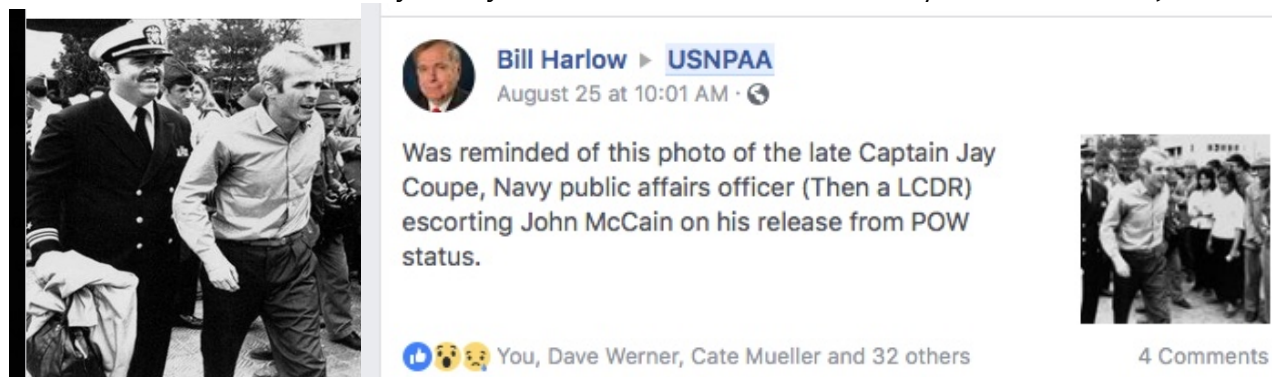
## Note:

If you desire to serve as a mentor, kindly send the following personal information to CAPT Thurraya S. Kent, Deputy Chief of Information, [Thurraya.kent@navy.mil](mailto:Thurraya.kent@navy.mil) and Jill Votaw of the USNPAA at [jvotaw@san.rr.com](mailto:jvotaw@san.rr.com)

Please be assured that this information will be placed on a password protected website dedicated to the mentoring program.

- Name, phone number and email address
- Current position/job
- Location
- Area of expertise (e.g., photography, writing, environmental public affairs, etc.)
- Biography that captures previous duty stations and any examples of special events, crises, etc. that you may have been involved. If retired, that should be noted.
- Photograph (if available)

From USNPAA on Facebook – Remembering a great PAO at the passing of American Hero, Senator, Captain and POW in Vietnam, John McCain in August. – **Editor's note:** I worked for CAPT Jay Coupe in 1977-1978 at the "Old Brooklyn Navy Yard" when he was a PAO LCDR/CDR and I was a JO2.

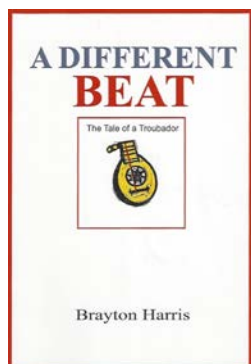


**Editor's Note:** In upcoming editions we will be in a better position to provide information about members in the spotlight features, the advancements and updates of members, list new members and unfortunately, any deaths. Tim Beecher, Toby Marquez, Mike Sherman, Brayton Harris, Dick Thompson, Bill Harlow, and Tom Jurkowsky were instrumental in our ability to publish this edition of Sightings in addition to previous editor, Cate Mueller and the Naval History and Heritage Command. Special acknowledgement goes out to the United States Naval Institute.



# USNPAA founding member writes another book

Brayton Harris' Latest Literary Endeavor: *A Different Beat: The Tale of a Troubador*



Brayton Harris has done it again—his 16<sup>th</sup> book (five of which, by the way, were ghost written). His latest, *A Different Beat*, documents what Brayton refers to as his “world voyage” between 1956 and 1962.

The book begins with Brayton’s discussing the friendship that developed between him and a young ensign while both were aboard USS Oriskany as crypto security officers. After they left the Navy, they decided to start a greeting card company—although neither had experience with greeting cards. But as Brayton says, “So what?” They knew how to draw and were soon in the printing business. However, they had no experience as printers. But again, “So what?”

What developed from their first printing press was a book and before you know it, they had three printing presses and contracts. Soon their obscure little venture—Troubador Press—became the leading publisher in the world of what was then known as Beat poetry. (Beat poets have been referred to as being ‘pre-hippies.’)

After his release from active duty, Brayton tells us about how he was invited to return to active duty because of “manpower gaps.” This led to his being assigned to the fleet oiler USS Taluga where his PAO career really began. He started a ship’s newspaper/family-gram and a “how to guide” to underway replenishment. He obviously impressed his leadership.

He soon had orders to the Pentagon as the Head, Editorial Services Branch. It was there that Brayton started what was then known as *Direction*, a magazine designed to provide communications assistance and guidance to commanding officers. He also led a program called “Operation Upgrade” that was begun to improve the quality and readership interest in ship and shore newspapers. Brayton and his team actually read the papers and provided comments.

But most significantly, Brayton led efforts to create what is now known as the CHINFO Merit Awards that recognized the best of the ship and shore-based papers. His work was recognized with a PRSA “Silver Anvil” award in 1965.

He also relates how a New York publisher was looking for someone to author a book about the Navy’s history between 1890-1922. Brayton raised his hand and what resulted was *The Age of the Battleship: 1890-1922*.

He soon had orders as the executive officer of a destroyer when he received a phone call from the CHINFO detailer. There was a restricted line transfer board the next morning, and Brayton was asked if he could consider becoming a “full-time PAO.” He didn’t blink about saying “aye aye,” and the rest is history.

*A Different Beat* is a quick and humorous read. It’s available from Amazon.



Brayton Harris is a retired navy captain, and the author of numerous books, including *Blue & Gray in Black & White: Newspapers in the Civil War* and *The Navy Times Book of Submarines: A Political, Social, and Military History*. He has been a guest on the *Today* show. His articles have appeared in the *Saturday Review*, *Civil War*, and *Proceedings* of the U.S. Naval Institute, among others. He lives in Mission Hills, Kansas.

## *Lessons Learned*

### Recollections of Operation Frequent Wind:

### The Evacuation of Saigon, April 1975 by Tim Beecher, Deputy Editor

I occasionally pick up an apple and it makes me remember a day more than 40 years ago when I saw -- for the first and only time -- Graham Martin, the last U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam. It was 1975, and the scene was a one of the few open and unoccupied spaces on the USS Blue Ridge, the command ship for Operation Frequent Wind. That was the operational name for the evacuation of U.S. citizens and our friends from the soon-to-be surrendered capital of a soon-to-be former sovereign nation. We had sailed from Subic Bay in the Philippines a few weeks before with a media pool that included [Kevin Delany](#) of ABC News, Arnie Zeitlin from the Associated Press, and a few others.

It was one of many surreal scenes as the Blue Ridge steamed in a racetrack pattern along with more than 40 Navy ships from the Pacific Fleet in the South China Sea. Vung Tau, a peninsula on Viet Nam's east coast, was the reference point for the largest armada since Normandy. And it was well-guarded task force -- two of the five carriers, the Enterprise and the Constellation -- were on "strip alert" with their F-14 Tomcats and F-4 Phantoms.

Launching the evacuation force became very problematic in the waning days of April. The White House and the Pentagon wanted to execute a carefully drawn up plan. A similar one had worked well in a smaller scale, just weeks before when the Navy rescued Americans from Phnom Penh, Cambodia when it fell to the Khmer Rouge. Ambassador Martin had the authority to give such an order in Vietnam, but delayed, some claimed he stalled, for several days. The situation became rather critical, and I was at one point asked if I'd volunteer to join a small group that would helicopter to the embassy and persuade the ambassador to get things moving.

Ultimately, as so often happens with the best laid plans, a complete surprise forced the evacuation to start.

On the evening of April 28, about 2200 a lone RVN Army Chinook helicopter suddenly appeared, and hovered off the Blue Ridge's stern. The ship immediately went to General Quarters -- all hands manned their battle stations. A detachment of Marines in full combat gear lined the passageway that ran through to the aft part of the ship to get a great view of the proceedings. The Chinook's crew had a loud hailer -- an over-sized bullhorn -- that could be heard over the racket from the chopper's twin rotors. Problem number one was they were speaking Vietnamese. So, the ship's 1-M-C (PA system) soon blared, "Anyone who speaks Vietnamese to the flight deck *On The Double*." It was a couple of minutes before a sailor scurried out to help. By this time, Blue Ridge's executive officer had a loud hailer of his own and turned it over to the sailor, who had learned passable Vietnamese from his wife.

The helo pilot announced to a gathering crowd that as many as 100 South Vietnamese officers had taken their families to Tan San Nhut Air Base near Saigon and were preparing to commandeer Vietnamese military (and U.S.-made) helicopters on the flight line. They were planning to fly east the next morning in hopes of finding the U.S. fleet. They had heard rumors the Seventh Fleet was poised to rescue the few thousand Americans remaining in Saigon. Their information was solid -- the U.S. Navy

indeed had a large and special task force assembled for the evacuation – five aircraft and two helicopter carriers plus amphibious ships, cruisers and destroyers.

And as advertised, when dawn broke 12 hours later on April 29, the thin black line of helicopters started arriving. Problem: there were no plans, and very little room, for these helicopters and their passengers – pilots with their wives and children, grandparents, aunts and uncles. That is because the decks were already full of Navy, Marine Corps and borrowed Air Force helicopters about to fly to Saigon and return with their own loads of evacuees.

So, after hastily making a plan for our newly arriving guests and once the passengers were safely aboard a ship, some of the helicopters were shoved overboard. For others, the pilots were persuaded to ditch their helicopters in the sea, to be retrieved by utility boats standing by.

Planning for the Public Affairs team, led by then-LCDR Erv Sharp, looked at resources, mainly because there was little advance notice for him and his team.

As the head of the PA Detachment in Subic Bay, Erv was deployed to the Blue Ridge when we sailed. There was an expectation that the Blue Ridge would be well-suited to host a media pool and the Saigon press corps: it was built for communications. So, when we heard that a small team of Marines would be dedicated to teletypes (yes, this is post- Stone Age and pre-Internet), the thought was that we could offer uncommonly good service to reporters who wanted to file copy. Great plan until we discovered that military teletype operators typically send terse messages full of acronyms. To our great horror, the embarked reporters would – each – typically generate 500 words every 30 minutes. Times 90 reporters, and within an hour the decks around and then the passageways leading to our communications shack were stacked, not littered, with copy waiting to be sent. There was no way six young Marines, as capable as they were, could keep up with the onslaught. And that meant frustrated and ultimately very unhappy reporters.

One thing we could do was offer ship-to-shore radio calls so they could call in their stories. There was only one circuit to Clark Air Base, and the USAF staff there only worked days and between golf outings, so there was limited success in relieving the pressure. Radio-telephone was popular with international radio correspondents who filed their stories and averted foreign language issues with the teletype operators. All media swore an oath that that would make no attempts to divulge the ship's location.



U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam Graham Martin speaks to the press aboard the USS Blue Ridge after being evacuated from the U.S. Embassy in Saigon on April 30, 1975. (AP)

*– Just over Amb. Graham's right shoulder is LTJG Tim Beecher*



Ambassador Martin was compelled to address the pool and the freshly arrived Saigon press corps – all 90 or so hard-bitten journalists from countries representing more than a dozen languages. From the United States, several of them had trekked across eastern Asia from the time Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai Shek first fought as warlords: Keyes Beech from the *Chicago Daily News*, George MacArthur from the *Los Angeles Times*, *TIME* magazine's Roy Rowan – to name a few. All were crowded around Martin and fired off question after question. The ambassador obviously had not had much sleep and was functioning on the last adrenaline he could muster. And he was focused on an apple that seemed to be a workable prop in the face of the withering questions. He answered in the voice of a career foreign service officer and diplomat who had suffered the pain of striking the colors and withdrawing the United States from one of the most contentious wars in our history. He was a man burdened with a deep sense of loss.

The late Ed Bradley was there for CBS. Ed would be the reporter chosen by his peers to carry the first of the pool footage – 16mm Kodak film reels -- to Hong Kong in the back seat of an F-4 Phantom II flown from the *USS Enterprise*.

It would take a few days before Americans back home would see on their nightly television news the images of dozens of Hueys, Chinooks, etc. disappearing into the some of the deepest water in the Pacific. In the coming weeks, I would be the "lucky" Navy Public Affairs officer who would spend several weeks answering the angry letters from U.S. taxpayers, who were furious that after years of suffering a very unpopular war, that we appeared to be throwing perfectly good aircraft into the Pacific deep.

The Blue Ridge, because it served as both a communications platform and troop carrier, played host to many of these RVN pilots, and several were generals or admirals. After gathering them into a group on the Blue Ridge's fantail, the 50 or so officers were led up a main passageway to the anchor-and-windlass room in the bow. The room would not offer accommodations to which they were accustomed. As the first in the line started to see that their new, if temporary quarters, there was a complaint passed from one to the other down the line. One general officer poked a Marine Corps Captain in the chest and said, "We are general and flag officers. You cannot treat us this way." To which the Marine answered without hesitation, "And of what country is that, sir?" The fire went out in the general's eyes. Another humbling moment in an operation that produced many.

Finally, there was a time when it became clear to me that our leaders who were running this operation also were struggling with the weight of the history they were making. It was a small thing, really. When a journalist suggested we include photos and biographies of the admirals and the general in the media kits for reporters, word came back that they would pass on the opportunity. Motives were unconfirmed, but my guess is that this was not an occasion for any sense of celebration. And, the glum looks on the faces of senior officers standing in the Blue Ridge's command center said it all: after 25 or 30 years of dedicated service to the people of the United States, after sending letters of condolence to the wives and families of hundreds close friends, officers, sailors and Marines, after several tours to defend this nation and its people, after tours at the Pentagon where they were spit on or had blood thrown at them, now at this, the twilight of their careers, they were in charge of closing a chapter in our nation's history that is arguably one of our nation's most humbling.

When the correspondent for *Newsweek* magazine asked RADM Donald Whitmire, commander of the amphibious task force and in charge of the evacuation, what he thought of the operation and its role in history, the answer was simply, "I think it's time we all go home and drink a cold Budweiser."

Once we had embarked all the people and aircraft we could hold, the ships in the task force turned east and sailed either for Subic Bay in the Philippines or Agana in Guam. So, with that, more than 40 years and nearly 60,000 American lives sacrificed, the war came to a close.

Despite the circumstances, the opportunity to witness the largest and most successful helicopter evacuation in history has forged strong memories. Rear Adm. Whitmire, Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Richard Carey, and my boss, Vice Adm. George Steele, Commander of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, faced constantly changing conditions and circumstances. Remarkably, they were able to rescue thousands from Saigon without a single casualty.

It was a memorable and honorable experience to work with Erv Sharp on this. All of you who know Erv will remember him as a consummate professional and very cool under pressure. Then-CDR Tom Coldwell held down the fort back on the *USS Oklahoma City* as the PAO for COMSEVENTHFLT. Then -- LCDR Tony DeMarco was deployed from the PA Det. in Subic Bay to the *USS Coral Sea*. His first call for help regarded a problem with a “working girl” from Saigon who had found her way onto a helo and thence to the carrier, apparently short of money. Then-LT Bill Harlow handled the chaos aboard *USS Midway* during the evacuation (and we are nudging him to scribe his memoirs of the experience). Then-JO1 Dan Guzman was a key team member, having crossed-decked from 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet staff on the *Oklahoma City* to the *Blue Ridge* via an H-2 *Sea Sprite*, as I had.

#### Lessons learned:

- More planning en route to the station off of Vung Tau would have helped. While Erv Sharp has excellent instincts and we responded well “on our feet,” an hour a day with RADM Whitmire and Gen. Carey that incorporated PA thinking with operations and other disciplines would have been very useful. Unfortunately, VADM Steele was not high on communications (a former submariner, he pledged well to the Silent Service in all regards) so I don’t recall seeing our efforts as a priority.
- Resources to file reporters’ copy were planned but not tested. As with all plans, “Trust but Verify.” Today, this will be a digital solution, as will managing imagery that needs to leave the ship. Protocols and expectations need to be set well ahead of the need.
- I think Erv needed and deserved more PA resources. It is very difficult to plan such things, but not impossible. Once the order to sail from Japan was sent to COMSEVENTHFLT, it would have been possible to pre-position some PAOs in Subic Bay or Hong Kong. Worst case, they could be flown to a carrier via COD and cross-decked to the *Blue Ridge*. I was incredibly inexperienced and it was three of us trying to deal with a mob. A mob of reporters, by the way, that told me that this wasn’t their first evacuation via our U.S. Navy. Operation Eagle Pull had rescued several news pros from Phnom Penh in Cambodia just weeks before and also had been rescued a number of other times in circumstances just like this one.

Tim Beecher left the Navy in 1979 and has enjoyed a successful career in public relations with McDonnell Douglas and Fleishman Hillard. He currently is a Senior Partner with Fleishman Hillard and lives in the St. Louis area.



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

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.

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

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.

When it was first created, the title was the U.S. Navy Public Affairs Alumni Association and for two decades the primary focus was to honor and celebrate this rich heritage and to keep alive the friendships we have made during an important part of our lives.

The organization changed its name in 2013 to the U.S. Navy Public Affairs Association to bring back the focus of all three areas of the purpose and objectives as well as to signal the inclusiveness with all aspects of Navy public affairs: active, reserve, retired, civilian, officer and enlisted.

More information is available at [www.usnpaa.org](http://www.usnpaa.org) or on [Facebook](#)

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# Sightings

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If you have any *Sightings* (photos) of members and or yourself involved in something of note please send your stories and photos to editor Joe Quimby via email at [cvn70pao@gmail.com](mailto:cvn70pao@gmail.com)

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# Sightings



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