

CCCA 50th Anniversary Post Op

The 50th Anniversary celebration of Combatant Craft Crewmen was a tremendous success. Frankly, I do not think it will be equaled, much less surpassed at the 60th or 75th Anniversaries, because we had so many original brothers attending. I know we were a bit frustrated and saddened that so many San Diego/Southern California area brothers and dear friends did not attend, but man, what a great time! We certainly learned many lessons which we should be able to pass on to future generations, but we really have to look to the future and **fully** utilize the diverse experiences and talents of our brotherhood.

The 50th Anniversary was just like a wedding were some things really worked in our favor and others did not measure up; however, for the attendees it was almost all wonderful and seamless. The major areas of note were:

1. A few folks, primary local brothers in Southern California did all the work. Other brothers need to step up. This was a particularly trying time as we were working really hard to establish the association and get tax exempt status as well as coordinate the 50th Anniversary.
2. The Navy has been constrained by lawyers and overly conservative legal opinion vice common sense. It was these detached legal entities who significantly hampered active duty participation and lessened the impact of all the events. This was despite aggressive support from the Admiral and Commands.

Now that we have the blessing of “legal precedent,” we need to move forward and go broader and deeper.

Planning/Execution Lessons

Mary Buonaguidi from Conference Direct was an incalculable asset throughout and worth every penny. What differentiated Mary from other “event planners” were her military connections and experience with military organizations such as the UDT/SEAL and F-8 Crusader associations. She understood our military culture and objectives and knew a number of players in Naval Special Warfare, including Admiral Losey which greased the skids for many aspects of the 50th. Additionally, she was able to reassure us that we were spending our treasure correctly, and would have many last minute and late sign ups, which we did. The Marriott was far and away the best location in Coronado, we had plenty of space, amenities and good prices. I don’t think we could have done what we did at the Hotel Del Coronado for four or five times what we paid, and Lowes’ is too far removed from town, how many folks just walked up the street to get a bite to eat or a coffee or see the PCF? The bungalow as an office/ships store and quarterdeck was genius. We had plenty of space (indoors and outdoors) good facilities and were near rooms, ballroom and pool and boat dock for the reception. We easily could have done the receptions for the 50th Ceremony on Thursday or the Friday night events at the bungalow, had our primary plans fallen through, which was a strong possibility due to legal. She

also set up transportation which was critical and her experience with other similar events made the difference for us.

Chuck Chaldekis and Pat Battels really went way, way out on a limb for us with commands as well as helped us understand changing Navy attitudes and positions. They were able to connect with us as boat guys as well as navigate very treacherous waters, walking a tight rope between their civilian jobs with NSW and our association. In addition to these senior civilians and Boat Team/Unit veterans, we really need to have a couple of senior actives on the board. A Warrant and/or Master Chief would give us an even better connection to the active duty components and be able to voice concerns of the active community as well as educate the younger fellows. The person who stood out in my mind was Warrant Gary Luna from the school house, he has got the respect, and casual “can do attitude” (he is one cool cat) and the school house is a real hub of experience and potential membership, rather than relying on one Team or another. I think the actives would be able to help us with electronic media as well, from video and memorial to social networks (see below).

Joe Zemlin did a magnificent job standing up the ship’s store, shaking down and out products and streamlining sales. His artwork was excellent and we are not sitting around with boxes of white elephants, which will never leave even if we tried to give them away. The individual and custom operations were brilliant ideas well executed as well as the basically just in time orders for shirts. There was enough for you take something home as well as things to buy and look forward to. He also spent a lot of his own time getting this going as well as running it throughout (We all spent a lot of time and energy standing this association up.) I think we could do more to get the active units to cross pollinate what is working, colors, designs and merchandise wise and bring it to a larger market. How many old SBU/SBT 12 guys can get their hands on SBT-12 merchandise? and there is some great work at 20 and 22, which we can all wear, “That’s my brother’s unit!” Joe was also true brother getting a shipmate out of jail and legal matters squared away in the background of everything else. Things like this are going to happen it is about character and the moral compass.

Tom Folkesson had to ride herd on a bunch of wildcats and could easily have spent our revenues ten times over, thanks for financial restraint and responsibility. Tom also got the credit cards going, which was a huge boost for the CCCA. He was also working hard to get the non-profit status, all while working a full time job with family commitments to boot. Finally, he stepped up while Jim was taking care of his family at critical times for them and for CCCA running meetings and getting things done. Bravo Zulu Tom!!!

Dave Wylie and Art Camacho got a lot done behind the scenes while dealing with business and family commitments from sponsors to golf tournaments. Additionally, we owe a great debt to Dave’s wife and the other boat gals for the decorations and amenities which all of our wives really appreciated. They do get us and can certainly relate to having husbands who would like to shoot guns on fast boats, drink beer and get in the way-back machine, may be not quite in that order.

Jim Larcome significantly expanded our membership. He stood up and made it happen. He also pitched in wherever needed. Jim started months out getting memberships under control relieving an overburdened Tom F. Jim is also getting in and pitching and actively getting recruiting going with the SWCC graduates and active duty. You don't have to be the president or an officer to have a major impact.

Mike Sigsworth is what all members should aspire to; he got in there and turned to where ever needed. He designed and made flyers, went on supply runs helped Joe Z with the ship's store, set up and take down at all events. You don't have to be the president or an officer to have a major impact (get involved!).

Phil Powell did a lot of behind the scenes and stuck his neck way out. I think only Pat, Chuck and Mary will be able to comment on what he really did for us.

Casey Dillo is what we are looking for in the CCCA, an active with a sense of history as well as a great grasp of the latest technology. The videos at the ball were outstanding (everyone wants copies) and the oral histories were genius (sadly I think we will lose many more great brothers before their stories are told). [There were many significant stories which were shared on the q-deck that need to get out to and through CCCA. He also pitched in getting tours going and things set up along with Sean, young brothers making it happen.

Jim Gray. We could not have done it without his vision, dedication and organization. His personal connections with many generations of boat guys from Vietnam to the present day, got people to help out. We should all be doing this. And like a true hero he did this on his own time with family crises burning brightly. This is the ideal we should aspire to; a Boat Guy's Boat Guy and has an ongoing vision for the CCCA.

It is clear we need to have chapters which support the Association. There is no way we could have an Anniversary in Stennis or Little Creek, which was arranged by our current group primarily based in Southern California. It is going to be the local chapter who sets up the next Anniversary/Reunion with support of the board. It will be their job to secure space for a reception and picnic as well as a venue for golf. And for the picnic to be a success, the active duty brothers must be involved, if held on base or off. As an example, when SBT-12 had folks at the gate checking in members, all went well for the 50th Anniversary Ceremony at CISIM field. When we dropped off a list at the gate on Saturday and electronically Sunday for the picnic without actives on station, many members were waiting and things took much longer to get set up; though our young brothers from the School house and SBT 12 turned to and fired up the grills.

Along these lines, we have to have participatory active duty members in all of the principal bases: Coronado, Stennis and Little Creek. We need to get "a buy in," from the active duty members who are going to benefit us at the various locations and service wide. They are our future and are going to differentiate us from many veterans' associations whose memberships are sadly dying off.

For now, our focus has got to be gaining the 501 status (tax exempt status). This will be most helpful in fundraising and going beyond a local brewery for a keg or a bakery for a cake. This will help us educate and provide more significant assistance to brothers and their families. **Building a better circle of service.**

Media bringing it to the next levels. Casey Dillo was terrific. We need to canvas for a more materials, talent both in front of the screen and production. CCCA has a lot of history to promulgate, brothers send in your pictures and stories. We should be able to do even more sophisticated pieces as well as something targeted for a local event, for example: The Gulf Coast Chapter raising money for a brother's sick child or an ill older brother. We would be able to provide relevant and accurate material for back ground to local news organizations. If Bob was in a PBR then show it. If Jose was a SWCC with a RIB show it, but tie it into the brotherhood. You can see the lead in: "In Bob's day they were called the River Rats fighting in the shallow waters of Vietnam, today they are Special Warfare Combat Crewman. Local Gulf Coast CCCA veterans young and old are seeking charitable contributions for an American hero, Bob..."

Ships Store We need to promote and expand our products, but also be an outlet for the FRG/MWR of the active units. An old 12 guy in Washington DC might really want a cool SBT 12 shirt but not know it is available much less how to get it, or as above 20 or 22 might have a fantastic design, "That's my brother's unit!" Variety and cross polenization of ideas and experience equals more exposure for them and us. There is no reason for active duty brothers picking something which looks good but we have learned years ago does not sell or them not telling us about the latest trend, wrist bands or iphone covers that older brothers might not be aware of?

If Ronnie the River Rat is not already licensed or trademarked, we need to get a hold of this image. If it is licensed, we need to get licensed to use it along with our devices, historical and contemporary. Can you imagine our Gulf Coast chapter doing a fund raiser especially for a special project like a child's illness, say a fish fry with custom shirts, then Navy legal filing an injunction days before saying you can't use Ronnie? There is no way we can ensure a member doesn't do something stupid with an image or run away with some of the treasury, but I trust the brothers more than I trust disassociated legal types.

The bottom line is we have to tap into our brother's diverse experiences and expertise.
Very Respectfully

Phil G. Garn