



Southeastern Region Annual Report 2016

By CW5 (Ret) James Rathburn

Southeastern Region Director

On 18 October 2016 I was honored to join National President CW4 (Ret) Greg Gouty, fellow members of the national board of directors (BOD), and USAWOA members attending the 44th Annual Meeting of the Members (AMM). It was held in the great state of Texas, where patriotism is still alive and strong, like our association and its Members. Before I go into my annual report I would like to commend Mid-Southern Region Director CW3 (Ret) Mike Long, and all who diligently worked to ensure we had a spectacular, professional week.

I have been honored to serve as the Southeast Regional Director since January of this year, when I was selected by the Region's Chapter Presidents to fill out the balance of the current term upon vacancy in the office. Their confidence in me is humbling, and I continue to be grateful for their support.

As I shared with you in the Counsel of Presidents Report in the June Newsliner, three Southeastern Region Chapters deactivated during the last two years. The Swamp Fox Chapter (Fort Gordon, GA), Forever Forward Chapter (Fort Benning, GA) and Greater Atlanta Chapter (Atlanta, GA) all closed due to residual effects of BRAC. I also shared with you that by using the regional membership list provided by our national office, we were able to find members of our cohort willing to step up and reenergize the Warrant Officers in those local areas.

We are making great progress with this strategy, so I would like to take this opportunity to update the association and publicly thank CW5 David Betancourt and CW4 (Ret) James Fiedler, both from Fort Jackson, SC, who are actively working to resurrect the Swamp Fox Chapter. I also want to thank CW3 William Goebel, who is working to resurrect the Greater Atlanta Chapter. I am hopeful that in the wake of our exceptional AMM we will see requests for activation of Chap-

ters, waiting for the BOD to approve them, very shortly.

Though the June Newsliner shocked many, all is not bleak in the Southeast Region. We also have two large Chapters that have received national recognition for the exceptional work they do for both the association and their respective communities. The Above the Best Silver Chapter earned recognition by winning the 2015 Outstanding Chapter of the Year. Similarly in 2015, the Redstone Arsenal Chapter (RSA) was honored when CW4 (Ret) Johnie Keeter became the first recipient of the Secretary of the Year award.

If you are wondering what it takes to be Secretary of the Year, and why RSA has garnered the Outstanding Chapter of the Year award *six times*, email me. I will send you a sample of the RSA Secretary's reports sent to national headquarters every month. Be ready to be wowed!

Why share, you might ask? It is because just as we need to focus on recruiting and retaining our Members, we also must share best practices of our respective Chapters, and work together to make them all as strong as possible. With unity of purpose, we can grow our association. I challenge all Members to join me in a fight to increase our membership to more than 8,000 before the 45th AMM, and then to top 10,000 by our cohort's 100th birthday in 2018!

The examples I presented are a testament of just two of the many exceptional Chapters within our region. Even our smaller Chapters are continuing to stay strong, through constant recruiting. Often limited in this effort by not being situated near a local installation, they persevere nonetheless.

For example, the Florida Sunshine Chapter stays strong through vigilant recruitment of retirees, together with the support of loyal Guard and Reserve members. They were commended for conducting a very successful 43rd AMM, with their limited number of dedicated Members – a

testament to such dedication and the inherent strength it generates.

The Volunteer Chapter is another great example of a small Chapter having a major impact for the good of the association and the cohort as a whole. I was honored to attend the Tennessee Warrant Officer Memorial dedication on 9 July 2016, at the War Memorial Plaza in Nashville, TN. There I witnessed the professionalism of that Chapter and its Members, led by Chapter President CW4 Robert Nicholson. They all represented the association with distinction, by their professionalism and representation of us all.

The Volunteer Chapter also took a very active part in helping Mrs. Susan Taiji when her husband, CW4 (Ret) Bruce Taiji, passed away on 20 June 2016. Bruce was a longtime, thoroughly dedicated Member of our association, and loyally attended every AMM in recent memory. May our association brother rest in peace, knowing that his wife was taken care of by the USAWOA brothers and sisters he knew and loved. We will forever remember him fondly.

Witnessing the association lending a helping hand and sympathetic counsel during a devastating period in our family, we are reminded why we belong to the USAWOA. Our cohort is small, and we need to belong to an association that takes care of their own – the Warrant Officer family as a whole.

In concert with this emphasis on banding together to help one another, we are also on a campaign of sharing knowledge and experiences within our cohort team, leveraging the knowledge and experiences of our retirees as we transition into garrison and training Army, so we do not repeat mistakes of the past.

A focused recruiting strategy – bringing together Warrant Officers from all points along the experiential continuum – will increase the value of membership in our association. Together, we are all stronger. The collective knowledge of our association

Members is incredible. The perspectives of our retirees (who previously faced similar challenges) can offer the necessary mentorship/coaching to move forward – history does not have to repeat itself, as the Army force structure contracts.

Many in our active force are leaving our formations to serve proudly in the Guard and Reserve. Together, they too are a critical part of the network of knowledge. We must continue to be vigilant in our efforts to revitalize and grow all Chapters, and take care of our young company-grade Warrant Officers, as the Army continues to streamline its forces. The stakes are high – their failure could cause our cohort to stop being relevant.

With this new focus the Southeastern Region – together with the entire association – will be even greater, with a solid representation from all Warrant Officers, whether currently serving or retired, from all three components of the total Army. Together we must work together to keep our cohort and our association relevant to the future force structure. Through growth, we have strength in

numbers and knowledge base sharing (networking), so I repeat my challenge – 8,000 Members before the 45th AMM, and 10,000 by our cohort's 100th birthday! I ask you, *if not now, when? And if not you, who? Let us grow our association, and ensure continued relevancy of our cohort!*

I look forward to the upcoming year, working with my Chapters, the BOD, and other national leaders, in being an association that serves its Members and our Army.

Thank you and God bless our military and our country.

For the COHORT! 🇺🇸

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