

Patterns and People

By: Col Robert W. Strunk, AUS (in 1992)

With additional notes on the History of our Chapter

By: LtCol Robert C. Bienvenue, USAF (in 2006)

The history of the Western New York Chapter of The Retired Officers Association (TROA), *now known as the **Military Officers Association of WNY***, does not conveniently fall into a military style, series of battles and campaign; nor does it fit periodic business style summarization of profit and losses. Instead, overtime – perhaps as to be expected – activities of the WNY Chapter have reflected an interplay between objectives and personalities in adaptation to on-going situations.

In 1972, reacting to requests from TROA national headquarters, plus personal contacts and guidelines provided via the New York Council of Chapters, a few altruistic cooperative individuals agreed to help organize and initiate WNY Chapter activities. Operating from a post office box address, with the help of family members and at personal expense, their efforts resulted in an organizational meeting September 20, 1972. At this meeting the first chapter by-laws were accepted and a slate of officers – individuals who had agreed to serve on a temporary basis – was approved. In October 1972, representatives of the WNY Chapter attended meetings with the NY Council of Chapters in Albany, where the chapter charter (from national headquarters) was received. J. R. “Jack” Roberts, COL, USAR-Ret, representing the WNY Chapter was elected vice – chairman of the Council of Chapters.

More local meetings occurred: flurries of enthusiastic activities and membership in the WNY Chapter grew. Arrangements were made for a beautiful calligraphic listing of charter members (now totaling 138). Sister Mary Martinelle of the Villa Maria organization performed this service. *The original Charter, the List of Charter members, and the new Charter issued in 2003 when we changed our name to MOA of WNY are all in the chapter archives which we occasionally display at special ceremonies*

Featured as the “most important first social meeting of this organization”, a dinner dance was held February 2, 1973, at the Brookfield Country Club. The Honorable Jack F. Kemp, Congressman, 39th NY District, was guest speaker complimenting the organization for its aims and efforts; he presented a flag that had flown over our national capitol to the Chapter.

Subsequent WNY Chapter activities reflected use of a variety of facilities; Naval Reserve Center, VFW and American Legion halls, Connecticut Street Armory, public restaurants and rooms of hotels/motels/banks et al. Committee meetings and those of the Board of Directors often were conducted within private homes of members. A pattern of events/meetings took form that included:

- Installation of Officers

- Personal Affairs/Benefits Briefings
- Support of the Annual NY Council of Chapters Convention
- Support of Armed Forces Week (especially luncheons and the military ball at the Connecticut Street Armory)
- A Summer Social/Picnic
- Social meetings featuring guest speakers
- Election of Officers and Directors
- Holiday Party

From time to time special recognition of Chapter members took place. As a noteworthy example, in 1975 CPT Henry Wilkinson, USA and CDR Arthur Harder, USN were designated “Directors Emeritus” and their positions were to continue throughout their association with the WNY Chapter. Later similar designations were noted for Maj Alice Burlin, USAF and LCDR Gene Zak, USN. *And in 2005, the Board of Directors appointed COL Dick Peters, USA as “Director Emeritus” for his longstanding service to the chapter as Secretary, Newsletter Editor and Membership Chairman.*

Too, it would be well to note that in addition to WNY Chapter member Roberts serving with the NY Council of Chapters, members Harder, Zak, and LtCol Charles Smith, USAF also have served. *In 2001, after serving four years as Council First Vice president, COL Pat Cunningham, USA was elected President and carried with him LtCol Bob Bienvenue, USAF as Secretary and COL Peters as Treasurer – all whom served for the next four years.*

During the period of October 10-12, 1975, the WNY Chapter served as host for the annual NY Council of Chapters Convention. The program was conducted at the Niagara Hilton and featured as principal speaker LtGen Ira C. Eaker, USAF-Ret who spoke on “The dangers in US disarmament.” Additionally, during the period of August 28-31 of 1981 and 1987, the WNY Chapter again served as host for the annual NY Council Convention. These programs were centered at the Buffalo Waterfront Hilton, with social get-togethers on the Miss Buffalo and USS Little Rock at the Naval and Servicemen’s Park.

In 1998, once again the Chapter hosted the State Convention in Niagara Falls. Highlight of the event that year was our formal dinner at the former Officers Club Building at Fort Niagara State Park. And just this past year, in September 2005, the chapter hosted the best attended convention in over 12 years, with headquarters at the Niagara Inn at the NF Air Reserve Station. Activities included tours to historical sites, an Erie Canal “cruise” and a formal dinner in the exhibit space of the Niagara Aerospace Museum.

From an administrative standpoint the WNY Chapter activities generally have flowed smoothly. In the late 1970’s a revision of the by-laws was deemed necessary to bring Chapter activity patterns and by-law guidelines into agreement. This was accomplished. The status of the chapter as a non-profit organization (exempt from income and sales tax) was addressed. In the early 1980’s and finally after another minor

modification of the by-laws required by New York State – this also was established under date of March 12, 1982.

*At the Annual Meeting and Holiday Party in 2002, a resolution was adopted to change the chapter name to reflect the change in the national organization's name to the **Military Officers Association of America**. Over the course of the ensuing year, the chapter changed its name officially with the NYS Secretary of State and at the 2003 Annual Meeting adopted revised by-laws to reflect these changes.*

Another first occurred in 1982, for it was in October of that year that the WNY Chapter presented its first “Distinguished Military Freshman Award” to an Army ROTC student at Canisius College in Buffalo. *Subsequently, awards have been presented each year at ceremonies for Niagara and St Bonaventure Universities and at Canisius.*

In 1982, the WNY Chapter also found a “home” with Troop I American Legion Post 665 in Buffalo. This use of a semi-permanent address for a base of operations, files, storage, etc. was intended to reduce needs for chapter officers to provide administrative and committee meeting space at their residences. This arrangement continued into the later 1980's but proved to be somewhat unsatisfactory due to mail control deficiencies and lack of parking space near Troop I. *Today, with the widespread use of personal computers by the officers of the chapter, and email for communication, most chapter records and reports are now in electronic form and the need for centralized storage is unnecessary.*

Noteworthy also is the fact that the WNY Chapter was nationally recognized and received an “**Outstanding Chapter Award**” for 1988. This resulted from continual growth in membership, publication of an excellent newsletter, and sunshine committee support of fellow members in need. *National Recognition was also received in our 25th and 30th anniversary years, and in 2004, we received an “**Excellence in Communications Award**” for our Chapter Newsletter based on the previous year.*

In 2000, our chapter started a new tradition that now is in its 7th year by inviting the Royal Niagara Military Institute to a “Garden Party” on the terrace of the former Officers Club at Fort Niagara. This event has rotated from the American to Canadian sides of the Niagara River with each organization hosting the event in alternating years.

The traditions of the Formal Officer Mess Nights were revived in 2002 with a Dining-In in Robinson Hall at the Connecticut Street Armory including military bugle calls, toasting and other formalities appropriate to the occasion. The next year it was held in the General Brock Room at the Masten Street Armory with more of the same. The following two years the event was conducted as a Dining-Out, including civilian guests. All of these versions of the formal officer's dinner were exquisitely conducted with the traditional protocols from the many dinners attended by our members when serving with their military units during active duty.

Our chapter's commitment to fulfilling its mission to our members is best illustrated through the support it has provided to the very successful and well attended Retiree Activities Days in 2003 & 2005. Although these events are a collaboration of several military service organizations under the auspices of the Fort Drum Retiree-Sub Council of WNY, the mailing, volunteers and programs have all been strongly supported by members of our chapter. The bi-annual event has grown to be acknowledged as the largest such activity conducted off-site from a military post.

We have seen increases in the last several years in attendance at several of our events, in particular the Annual Meeting and Holiday Party. This has paralleled the growth in our membership from the original 138 charter members (6 of whom are still on our rolls) to today's count of almost 300 officer members and just over 100 auxiliary members.

For the past thirty-four years, the WNY Chapter has met the challenges of ever changing situations, adapted administratively and organizationally as necessary, and – by all indications is a strong and viable organization building on its successes from the past to carry on its mission well into the future.

Roll Call of Presidents

CPT Henry E. Wilkinson, USA	1972 – 73
LCDR Gene A. Zak, USN	1974
MAJ Leonard R. Dixon, USA	1975
BGen Henry F. Newcomer, USAF	1976
LtCol Charles E. Smith, USAF	1977
Capt Thomas F. Hart, USAF	1978
LTC Theodore D. Franzek, USA	1979
COL Robert W. Strunk, USA	1980
1LT James S. Pietraszck, USA	1981
CDR Thomas E. Blaine, USN	1982
LtCol Richard J. Smigielski, USAF	1983
MAJ Robert F. Baker, USA	1984
LtCol Harry E. Kellar, USAF	1985 – 86
CW4 William C. Dolce, USA	1987 – 88
MAJ Cecil A. McTaggart, USA	1989 – 92

COL Patrick J. Cunningham, USA 1993 – 96
LtCol David Doyle, USAF 1997
COL Patrick J. Cunningham, USA 1997 – 98*
CDR Stanley J. Lichwala, USN 1999 – 2001
LtCol Robert C. Bienvenue, USAF 2002 – 05
BGEN Anthony F. Caruana, USA 2006

* Served the unfinished term of LtCol Doyle