

## NATIONAL OFFICERS



**NATIONAL PRESIDENT**  
CAPT G. Mark Hardy III, USN  
E-mail: g.mark.hardy@usnr.org

**NATIONAL EXECUTIVE VP**  
CAPT Lance R. Mauro, SC, USN  
E-mail: lance.mauro@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-SURFACE RESERVE PROGRAMS**  
CAPT Lawrence E. Weill, USN  
E-mail: larry.weill@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-AIR RESERVE PROGRAMS**  
CAPT John F. Farr, USN (Ret)  
E-mail: john.farr@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-BUDGET & FINANCE**  
CAPT Douglas H. McDonald, SC, USNR (Ret)  
E-mail: doug.mcdonald@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-LEGISLATION & EDUCATION**  
CAPT Paul A. Denham, USN  
E-mail: paul.denham@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-MEMBERSHIP**  
CAPT James J. Parker, USN  
E-mail: jj.parker@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-MEMBER SERVICES**  
CDR Kevin C. Hayes, USN  
E-mail: kevin.hayes@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**  
CAPT William A. Emslie, USNR (Ret)  
E-mail: bill.emslie@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-ACTIVE DUTY PROGRAMS**  
CDR Aaron G. Bresnahan, USN  
E-mail: aaron.bresnahan@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-ENLISTED PROGRAMS**  
YNCS Ralph H. Hensley, USN  
E-mail: ralph.hensley@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-LEGAL AFFAIRS**  
LCDR Marc J. Soss, SC, USN  
E-mail: marc.soss@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-HEALTH PROGRAMS**  
CDR Marian Cioe, NC, USN  
E-mail: marian.cioe@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-RETIRED PERSONNEL**  
LCDR David M. Bradley, USNR (Ret)  
E-mail: david.bradley@usnr.org

**NATIONAL VP-JUNIOR OFFICERS**  
LCDR Steven L. Rogers, USN  
E-mail: steven.rogers@usnr.org

**NATIONAL TREASURER**  
DKCM Charles E. Bradley, USN (Ret)  
E-mail: charles.bradley@usnr.org

**NATIONAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER**  
LCDR Joyce Zongrone, USN  
E-mail: joyce.zongrone@usnr.org

**NATIONAL CHAPLAIN**  
LT Matthew C. Fuhrman, CHC, USN  
E-mail: matthew.fuhrman@usnr.org

**NATIONAL HISTORIAN**  
CAPT David L. Woods, USNR (Ret)  
E-mail: david.woods@usnr.org

**NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIAN**  
CDR Leo Hill, USNR (Ret)  
E-mail: leo.hill@usnr.org

## President's Message

### Last Call to Colors

Last month, I handed over my eighth and presumably final command to my relief in a time-honored change-of-command ceremony. What struck me most wasn't the ritual, the dress uniforms, or the reading of speeches, but something much more simple and profound — the Call to Colors.

The first time I stood at the head of my unit as a new commanding officer was more than 16 years ago. As the National Anthem played from a tired tape recorder, I held a steady salute on behalf of all of my Sailors standing behind me in ranks. That simple gesture, rendering honors to our flag, standing at attention, marked for me the passage of time. Every month brought me closer to what would eventually come to pass — my last Call to Colors.

On Veteran's Day, Admiral Coane and I, on behalf of the Association, attended the wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. We were one of dozens of military and veteran service organizations present. As I scanned the audience, I saw veterans from every conflict from World War II to the present, including one survivor of Pearl Harbor. For many of his shipmates, their last Call to Colors was over 67 years ago.

Over the holidays, I had the privilege to meet with life member CAPT Robin Oxenford, USNR (Retired). He and his wife Alice were perfect hosts, and he reminded me of the importance our Navy service has for each of our lives. Robin missed the World War II draft by a single day, but began a 34-year Navy career when his "number came up" at the start of the Korean conflict. He told me of a single command tour he held that stretched 16 years — each year, he received special permission to continue. Hard to imagine today in a world of hypercompetitive APPLY Boards with 6%-10% command opportunity.

While passing through Dallas-Fort Worth airport, I spoke with LTC Jim "Maggie" Megellas, the most decorated officer of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. He was signing copies of his book, *All the Way to Berlin*. Since my father is a second-generation paratrooper, I had to buy one for him. I cherished the moment — I was talking to living history — Maggie is 91.

We have only a finite time to participate in uniform to serve this great nation of ours. The blessings of liberty, which sadly for many Americans are regarded as an entitlement, are earned by the blood and the toil of those who serve and have served in the Armed Forces. Less than eight percent of Americans alive today are veterans. Our active forces are less than eight percent of that number. You, dear reader, are a member of a very special brotherhood or sisterhood — the men and women who have chosen to serve our fellow Americans by wearing the cloth of our nation.

As we embark on a new year, the two hundred thirty-third of the independence of the United States of America, let us remember our fellow citizen-Sailors who have gone before us, and especially those who are no longer with us. Spend some time with a World War II veteran while you still can. Strive to honor his/her contributions by a rededication to the service of our nation, so that when our last Call to Colors comes at the sound of a bugle, our legacy will be one of unquestioned loyalty to our highest ideals. Happy New Year!

G. Mark Hardy  
National President

**Editor's Note:** To learn more about your Association President, see <http://www.navy-reserve.org/president.pdf>.

## PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENTS

**IMMEDIATE PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENT**  
CAPT Walter K. Steiner, USN (Ret)

**PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENTS**  
CDR Joseph Quaglino, Jr, USN (Ret)  
CAPT John E. Lindell, USN (Ret)  
RADM Stephen S. Israel, USNR (Ret)

CAPT Arthur C. Monson, USNR (Ret)  
RADM James J. Carey, USNR (Ret)  
CAPT Robert L. Bell, JAGC, USNR (Ret)  
CAPT J. Robert Lunney, JAGC, USNR (Ret)  
RADM Lester R. Smith, USNR (Ret)

CAPT Kenneth J. Welch, USNR (Ret)  
CAPT Pat R. Lucci, USNR (Ret)  
CAPT Curtin R. Coleman II, USNR (Ret)  
CAPT Fred D. Carl, USNR (Ret)  
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