

**EIGHTY YEARS
OF
ANNAPOLIS, BRANCH 24
Fleet Reserve Association (FRA)**

A HISTORY

The history of Branch 24, Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) is a long and storied one, spanning eighty years. Over this time many Shipmates and their ladies have come and gone, and with each of them a little history has been made and lost. It is very difficult to separate the entities that make up the Branch 24 family; Branch, Unit and Club, as they were always one big happy family, striving for the good of the whole family. Consequently, this story will spill over into unit and club as it progresses. For that, I apologize ahead of time.

The Beginning, 1920-1927.

The history of FRA Annapolis Branch 24 began in 1927 when then newly elected Fleet Reserve Association National Executive Secretary, Charlie Lofgren came to town. The Fleet Reserve Association was brand new back then, trying to establish itself as a spokesman for the active duty

sailor. Consequently, a little FRA history is in order here.

In the early 1920s, after GMC Carl McDonald and YNC Robert White successfully testified before a congressional committee regarding military pay issues, YNC George Carlin, who was stationed in Philadelphia at the time, had a vision. Create a permanent enlisted organization to represent the enlisted viewpoint to members of congress with regard to legislation affecting their well being. This was unheard of in those days. Most Naval Officers instinctively viewed such an organization as a threat to Navy good order and discipline. Some civilian leaders feared that such an organization would lead to unionization in the military. “Oh horrors”!

This was not to happen. Chief Carlin stated that this would be a group of mature, dedicated, responsible career Navy personnel who were devoting their lives to the protection and preservation of the United States. They truly believed and supported the perpetuation of our representative form of government. They were not trying to change that government, but to merely have their views, regarding their military careers, considered by the members of congress responsible for making the laws governing military personnel well being. Chief Carlin

advocated that this could best be served by an “enlisted professional society” if you will, not a military union. This enlisted association would, like other established professional groups of the time, enhance a Navy enlisted career thereby benefiting the U.S. Navy and the nation.

Organizational meetings were held in Philadelphia in 1922 and in October of that year Chief Carlin and his associates outlined the basic principals of this proposed association.

First and foremost, the primary goal of the organization would be collective representation on military personnel legislation and issues before the U. S. Congress. They unanimously agreed that the new organization would not deal in military policy or weapons matters. To do so would dilute their energies in personnel matters. This basic plank in the new organization’s platform would prove to be a wise decision as it told the Navy Department that the new organization was not being formed to question command.

The second principal agreed on was that the organization would be a Navy careerist’s organization. To assure this, the group established strict membership eligibility rules limiting

membership to enlisted personnel; E-5 or above, with eight (8) or more years on active duty, serving on the Navy retired list or in the Fleet Naval Reserve. Over the years these requirements have been modified to be more in tune with the ongoing organizational climate, allowing a wider base of candidates to recruit from.

The third and final principal was that there would be no rank or rate differences in this new organization. We would “hang our pay grades on the door” and all be called “Shipmate”. The name of this new organization would be The Fleet Reserve Association. Worthy of note, this name has been the topic of debate over the years as it sounds like an organization of reservists. Those who know the organization call us the FRA.

Over the years these three principals have continued to be the guiding ideals of the FRA.

In 1922 a Board of Trustees was elected and YNC Bob White was hired to represent the FRA as a paid lobbyist. During this time an important issue came up concerning a U.S. Comptroller General decision to not allow commissioned officer time to count toward retirement for enlisted personnel commissioned in time of war. The new FRA put together a bill,

presented it to congress, debated it and in early 1923 won passage of the bill to stop this unfair decision. This was our first victory and career enlisted men flocked to this new organization in the Philadelphia area.

Because of this notable victory, career enlisted personnel nationwide became curious about this new organization. On 14 September, 1924, Brooklyn (2), Boston (3), Washington DC (4), Norfolk (5) and Baltimore (6) were chartered with Philadelphia being recognized as the lead or headquarters Branch, (1). The National FRA Organization was chartered on 11 November, 1924. Over the years numerous Navy towns were recognized with branches, bringing us to the 1927 visit by FRA, National Executive Secretary, Charlie Lofgren to Annapolis.

Annapolis Branch 24 FRA takes shape.

As National Executive Secretary of the FRA in 1927, Shipmate Charlie saw no reason why the career active duty and retired personnel in the Annapolis area shouldn't band together and form their own branch in the FRA and talked our founding fathers

right into it. Shorty Metzger and Irving Page became the driving force behind establishment of Annapolis, Branch 24, FRA.

On 03 February 1928 Branch 24, Fleet Reserve Association was issued a charter with 44 charter members. Our first Branch President was P.J. Dunleavy. In the beginning, the branch met in various places around town. The community center on Compromise Street, the committee room at the old Bladen St. Armory and the Automotive Service Building at the foot of Main Street were just a few. Interesting note; Annapolis Mayor W.E. Quenstedt (1925-1929) was a charter member of Branch 24. Two other Annapolis Mayors; A.G. Ellington and R.G. Rowe were also Branch 24 members during the early years.

After WWII, it became obvious that holding meetings in the Automotive Building and “Game Night” at the armory was a logistic nightmare. A piece of property on Compromise Street in Annapolis became available (an old oyster house as I understand). In 1947, the branch took a \$40,000.00 and a \$45,000.00 loan to buy the present property (2 parcels) with several Past Presidents putting up personal homes as collateral. The Fleet Reserve Club Incorporated was formed and a Board of Governors

(BOG) was selected from the branch to operate it as the new branch home. Past Branch President, C.E. Maloney, the first Chairman, was elected from the BOG. The Branch 24 Home was commissioned on 09 July 1949 with all the pomp and circumstance of the commissioning of a battleship, including speeches by Mayor Rowe and Rear Admiral Holloway, Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy.

Over the years, Branch 24, along with its club, grew into a smooth operating organization involved in community affairs as well as supporting the local Navy community.

On 08 July, 1963, Unit 24, Ladies Auxiliary, Fleet Reserve Association (LAFRA) was chartered with 177 members. Mary Yanovitch was elected as first Unit 24 President.

Over the following several years, affairs in the Branch, Unit and Club kept to an even keel. We held Game Nights, Bingos (who could forget Bill Yanovitch calling bingo), offered sandwiches and hamburgers for sale from the little galley behind the bar and kept the place shipshape, all with volunteer help. We also had slot machines to help defray expenses.

In the late 1960s, A couple of Navy divers who were also Branch 24 members made a dive under the building and discovered that the ground under the water side of the club was eroding away due to a broken storm drain on Newman Street. If something was not done soon, we could fall into Ego Alley. A building committee was formed, plans were drawn, permits obtained and in 1970 the club was renovated. We added a stand alone galley and second floor office and banquet room, all housed in the new front building extension IAW Historical Annapolis rules. In addition the building underpinnings were stabilized to stop the erosion and the void was filled. The outcome was a fine looking building. Worthy of note; there is an unopened time capsule in the front right corner of the building from that period.

Over the next several years the branch, unit and club continued to grow. It became evident that volunteer help was not going to pay the bills and professionals were hired to run the club.

During the late 1970s, early 1980s, Branch 24, Unit 24 and the club were all going in different directions. Membership was suffering and it looked like we were going to have to sell the property. Some of the old timers will remember the Phillips Crab House offer flap. Fortunately cool heads prevailed and with the

help of all hands we ducked this bullet. Also about this time, Branch 24 was the recipient of one of the hardest chargers in the FRA in the form of one PRPEC, Robert Bacharach. Bob came over from Branch 67 and was immediately elected Branch Secretary. Working with several Branch Presidents, National Headquarters and the members of the branch, Bob turned the membership drain around, winning several branch membership trophies and making Branch 24 the largest branch in the FRA, a spot we continue to occupy today.

During the late 90s and early 2000s it was found that again the club was falling into the creek and needed severe renovation to keep it from doing so. In 2003 the club was closed and the building was totally redone, resulting in the finest FRA home in the organization. Also about this time the FRA passed a change to their Constitution and Bylaws to allow any one who had ever been in the Navy, Marines or Coast Guard into the FRA as members in good standing. This didn't sit too well with our BOG who now had a \$2 mil + mortgage to pay for the new building and a club membership made up of many former FRC dues paying Sea Service Vets who, under the new rules, were eligible for membership in Branch 24 at a far less monetary outlay. To stem this hemorrhage, they modified their bylaws to keep these Sea Service Vets

dues paying club members as opposed to free Branch 24 members. This didn't sit too well with a few new branch members and they filed a Mandamus law suit against the branch, the club and several branch members. This suit went on for 2 years and was recently settled in favor of the club. However, during all this litigation, lawyers were hired and nothing was done for two years without checking with a lawyer, essentially allowing the lawyers to run our business, not to mention, draining our collective bank accounts. Fortunately for us, all that is past and we can get on with our daily business and hopefully in the near future, get back to one big family again without lawyers looking over our shoulders and in our wallets. We continue to grow in spite of a continuous decline in the FRA membership base. In the early 90s the FRA had 170,000 members, now it's down around 80,000 members. Why? The older members are passing on and the younger generation is less inclined to join things.

There are two pieces of naval history here at Branch 24;

The first is a Captain's chair recovered from the Captain's Quarters of the U.S.S. Maine, sunk in Havana Cuba, harbor, 15 February, 1898. The chair

was given to Branch 24 by Branch 6 in Baltimore as they had no secure storage for it.

The second is the ships bell, used in the branch two bell ceremony, from the U.S.S. Squalus SS-197. She was sunk 23 May, 1939 off Portsmouth, NH with the loss of 23 men. The bell was presented to Branch 24 by Branch 24 Shipmate, Bill Badders, a Navy Master Diver and Medal of Honor recipient, involved in the rescue and salvage of Squalus. The bell initially was presented to Badders by a grateful Squalus crew. One caveat requested by Shipmate Bill, on presentation of the bell, was that Branch 24 conduct a memorial ceremony every May for those lost Squalus shipmates. This is done religiously and all are invited to witness it.

HISTORICAL BR. 24 NAMES.

Branch and Unit 24, FRA has several home grown members who have gone on to higher office in their respective organizations;

PNP, FRA, Bob Means

PRVPEC, FRA, Bob Sturgil (Note; this was before Regional President was created)

PRPEC, FRA, Paul Dix

PRPEC, FRA, Claire Purdy

PRPEC, LAFRA, Mary “The Road Runner” Prophet
PRPEC, LAFRA, Joyce Cooper
PRPEC & NT, LAFRA, Dianne Hoover

There are numerous Branch 24 Shipmates who will long live in the memories of those of us, who have been around Branch 24 for a while. A few are listed below,

Irving Page; John “Shorty” Metzger, PP; Jimmy Hill; Roscoe Rowe, Annapolis Mayor; Bill Quenstedt, Annapolis Mayor; Al Ellington, Annapolis Mayor; Slip Lawless (the old poop deck bar area was named after him); Ralph Marcoot, Bill Bailey, PP; Stew Baltimore, PP, PCBOG; Bob Bacharach, PRPEC, Branch Sec; Eldo Busch; Ken Carter, PP, CBOG; Benny Crossno, PP, History; Bob Cooper, PP; Dom DeLucia, PRP; Paul Dix, PP, PRP, PCOB, FRC Mgr, History; Gus Franz, Branch Sec; Ace Klimes, FRC Mgr; Ed Kline, PP, PCBOG, FRC Mgr; Charlie LaRoque, PP; Stew Lindley, PP, History; Chuck McIntyre, PNP, Branch Sec; Benny Noyce, PP; Thom Prophet; Joe Walsh, Branch Sec; Thom Williams, PP, FRC Mgr; Zelma Woods, Branch Sec, Bill Yanovitch and the list goes on. These folks gave their all for the benefit of the Branch and the club and we salute them.

80 years is a long time and we have just touched the tip of what's happened around here during that period. We've hosted National, Regional and Regional Mid-year conventions over the years, all well executed and enjoyed by all attending.

As the Branch 24 Historian, I've had the honor of being a member here since 1966 and the double honor of knowing many of the founding fathers and mothers personally. Should anyone have anything squirreled away of Branch historical significance, please get it to me so that I can update this epistle for the next birthday celebration.

P.G. Dix, PRPEC, Br. 24, FRA