

# ***Warrant Officer Associations – A Recent History***

*by the late CW4 (Ret) George C. Gratchen, USA*

Many attempts were made in the past to form U.S. Army Warrant Officer Associations. Until now, all failed. I am sure those who worked so hard had good intentions, just as is the case today. The purpose of this article is to educate today's membership and nonmembers as to the trials and tribulations experienced in forming the U.S. Army Warrant Officers Association (USAWOA) as we know it today.

Upon completion of my tour in Vietnam in 1969, I was reassigned to Mannheim, Germany (per my request). On my way home to my quarters, I decided to stop at the Benjamin Franklin Village Officer's Club for Happy Hour. Many of the people attending Happy Hour were known to me as they were there when I departed for Vietnam. Old home-coming. While enjoying my usual mix drink, I was informed of a meeting taking place in an adjoining room. It was a meeting of the Rhein/Neckar Warrant Officer's Association. It did not take me long to be convinced to join. Maynard (Larry) Welch was president, Wild Bill McDade the vice president, Bill Crane, secretary and Rodney Guepet, treasurer.

Within a few weeks several of the officials received reassignment orders and I was selected to serve as VP and then president. It didn't take long to get baptized; and it didn't take long to learn how much I did not know about administering an organization. Initially, the Warrant Officer Associations in Europe were formed for camaraderie, betterment of living conditions in the military community and to assist their fellow warrants in mission accomplishment as needed. As time went on, the leadership of the various associations and their membership decided they wanted a European Warrant Officer's Association (EWOA) which would be more effective in obtaining help to solve the many inequities discovered in the Warrant Officer Corps. A few chapters met in Mannheim at the Benjamin Franklin Village Officers Club to begin the EWOA formation. I was selected as the chairman for the group and commenced working very long hours, traveling throughout Europe to form new chapters. The Mannheim Military Community Commander was considerate enough to let me use an old dilapidated building at the rear of Taylor Barracks which we were grateful to have. The office consisted of an electrical cord with a 75 watt bulb for lighting. Heating was provided by an old kerosene heater. A field desk and an IBM Selectric typewriter were hand-receipted from a unit supply. No, I did not have a computer. A telephone was installed a little later. We purchased our office supplies from the German markets. Funds to operate were out of my pocket and donations from many dedicated warrants from associations throughout Europe. These were the only funds available until we established a dues structure. When performing my military duties, I would receive calls from warrants throughout Europe asking me to come to their locations and help them set up a chapter. At the close of military duty, I cranked up the old Mercedes and was on my way. CWO Charlie (Lindy) Linderman volunteered to ride with me as my navigator. Lindy always got us to where we were supposed to be. I must not forget the kindness of the many warrant officer ladies who would invite us to their homes and serve us with meals fit for royalty. Their efforts helped to save many dollars/D-Marks on tour visits to their areas. Many of our warrants were also generous by taking us to the military gas stations and using their gasoline stamps to help with travel costs. Also, I must mention those families who provided us with overnight sleeping facilities on those trips which required overnight stays. These actions were in contrast to those warrants that were always skeptical and mistrustful of what we were attempting to accomplish. I can clearly remember their question, "What can your association do for me?" Or they would comment as to the amount of the dues structure. They were filled with negativity. Needless to say, our humble beginnings were a definite strain on personal finances and in some instances on family relations. However, our endeavors were not in vain. Out of all the difficult times we encountered, a fine organization was born. I hope the warrant officer of today is grateful for the efforts of the pioneers who worked so long and hard to make their lives and careers better than their predecessors. I must finally remind all of you that those of us who gave our utmost to building this association did not expect nor receive any personal or military benefits from our efforts. The benefits you all enjoy today far exceed the paltry dues you are asked to pay.

I humbly request my longtime friend, Don Hess, to make up a list of the accomplishments for which the USAWOA is responsible. I have now been associated with warrant activities for 41 years. Any and all efforts in which I have involved were toward the betterment of the U.S. Army Warrant Officer Corps. Our Army needs the support of all of its warrant officers to ensure that technical advances of the future are being maintained. Is it asking too much to ask fellow warrants to join an association which has done so much toward bettering their careers? I don't think so. If you are not a member, join now and sign up other warrants who are not members. Thank you all for listening. Now, get out there and shake the bushes I am disgruntled when I read that our membership rolls are not what they could be.

#### **Ordnance Hall of Fame Citation**

CW4 George C. Gratchen was born in Joffre, PA in 1929 and entered the Army in 1950, appointed as a warrant officer in June 1961, and completed seventeen years in a variety of Ordnance assignments in Europe, the U.S., the Pacific Area, and Vietnam. One of his major accomplishments was the development and implementation of the maintenance system used with organized equipment utilized for removal of all depot stocks from France to Germany during operation FRELOC. While Commander of the Equipment Support Center in Mannheim, Germany during the years 1972 to 1974 CW4 Gratchen was responsible for the management of five U.S. Army personnel and 250 German nationals. His unit provided maintenance and materiel support to Headquarters U.S. Army Europe, Seventh Army, and all installations east of the Rhine River. CW4 Gratchen became increasingly concerned with the status of the U.S. Army Warrant Officer Corps while serving in Europe in the mid 1970s. He felt that the schooling, career patterns, standards for technical competence and other requirements for a modern Warrant Officer Corps were lacking. He therefore, helped form the European Warrant Officers Association. This merger took place about 15 years ago and has resulted in substantial improvements in the Army Warrant Officer program. CW4 Gratchen retired in 1978 after 28 years' service.

#### **A personal postscript by CW4 (Ret) Don Hess, first USAWOA President Emeritus:**

George was affectionately known as the Father of the EWOA. His vision for the Corps included an examination of all areas of professional development from accessions, education, promotion, assignment, compensation and retirement. With the assistance of key warrant officers he identified potential chapter areas within Europe and George traveled over 20,000 miles to organize these chapters. Recognizing that the EWOA could address issues in Europe but did not have representation in the U.S., George contacted the newly formed USAWOA in Washington, DC with the purpose of merging the EWOA with the USAWOA. After personal contact with George, I visited Germany for 30 days in the early 1970s and witnessed firsthand his passion and energy as the leader of the EWOA. His efforts resulted in over 1600 members of the EWOA becoming the European Region of the USAWOA and the largest Region within the Association. George was a friend for 40 years and was awarded USAWOA Life Member Number 2 by the USAWOA Board of Directors.