

# *Looking Back*

*By CW5 (Ret) Ray Bell, USAWOA Executive Director*

***"Warrant officer friends told me that I'd do this.  
I said I wouldn't --- I am."***

**As I prepare to leave** my USAWOA desk, I cannot help but think back on the many times I've talked with others about being a warrant officer. What it is, what it means, what it could be, what it should be.

**This began long ago** at Fort Jackson when (as I was to learn shortly) an armament-type warrant officer skillfully worked on the breechblock of a 106mm Recoilless Rifle, jammed on the firing range by PFC Bell. He fixed it, said: "Don't do that again, son." and departed with his little tool box in his personal jeep.

**I asked the range NCOs:** "Who the heck was that?" They said "That's Mr. Fox .. don't do anything to your gun to p\*\*s him off." Well, from my perspective, these NCO weren't impressed by much .. but it was clear they were impressed by Mr. Fox.

**I recall years later,** in Bamberg Germany, SSG Bell being guided in the fine art of property book management by CW2 Ken Griggs. Or, when CW4 Ira Kirkland told SSG (P) Bell to "move your b\*\*t" "and submit an application packet for warrant.

**More recently,** I clearly recall when CW3 Jerry Hanley advised CW4 Bell (as a 1X pass-over for CW5) how to write the president of the next promotion board. (Yes, mentoring is a two-way street.)

**Later as a CW5** and wearing my black windbreaker while riding the Washington DC subway, I explained to a group of touring WW II vets that: "No, I'm not a really old lieutenant."

**After retirement from active duty,** I was pleased to see promotion lists that contained names of warrant officers being advanced to senior grades – and remembering the letters I wrote for some them as they applied for warrant. And most recently, working diligently to fit the large shoes left under the USAWOA desk, speaking often and long with CW4 Don Hess. Pleasant reflections ... great times.

**The preceding paragraphs** have nothing to do with the title of this article ... however, I'm doing the writing so you must wait.

**Many times in my career,** I heard various "*secrets, keys, truisms, rules*" (or whatever) for career success. However, I discovered lasting value in only three of them – and, in no particular priority order, I want to share them with you.

**First:** "*Don't tell your commander what can't be done; rather, tell how it can be done.*" Relayed to me by a vastly combat-experienced Infantry major, my boss when I made WO1. What he explained is that anyone can easily quote chapter and paragraph that says "no" to something. However, my more-difficult responsibility as a warrant officer and technical expert was to not only advise the commander of the "no;" but also offer one or more acceptable options to accomplish the desired plan.

**Generally, I followed his advice.** There were a couple of times it was difficult — cases of a real hardheaded commander or a ludicrous plan. However, in these situations, behind closed doors one-on-one, I was able to explain what was flat wrong – and able to present something “close” by which the commander could achieve a comparable result.

**Second: “*Don’t hang your boss out in the wind.*”** A year or so into my warrant career, a CW4 took me aside and apologized to me, for the junior officers he had humiliated in front of others, early in his career. He realized I would wind up working for some of those same officers, now of senior grade. What he had done long ago was likely to have given those officers a dislike (or distrust, you pick the words) of warrant officers in general.

**What he recommended** was the old leadership adage: “*Praise in public, criticize in private.*” We often think this applies only downward; to our troops. What he suggested was that this rule equally applies upward — uniquely so for warrant officers because we so often work with (train) junior officers.

**I also tried** to live out this guidance. Every now and then it was not easy. (Again, a hardheaded (or, frankly, a not very bright) young officer; a ridiculous plan; or a disaster leaving me to police up the battlefield. However, they moved on and I soon saw that the “system took care” of these officers (to the street).

**I really learned** what this CW4 was talking about when, as a junior CW2, I worked for a certain battalion executive officer. I’d been in the unit for a while when he arrived and had a decent reputation for success in my area, and worked hard to make the organization a success. With him, however, it seemed that nothing I did was quite right, quite enough, or quite “trusted.” He did nothing overt, but I sure felt it. Finally, at the right time with just he and I in the back of a five-ton expando van during a major FTX ... I asked him: “why?” After some (worrisome to me) silence .. he apologized.

**He related** that as a captain and a motor officer, he had been ridiculed and humiliated in a battalion command and staff meeting by the maintenance tech. He’d never really gotten over it – until our talk. That clearing of the air reversed the relationship between us for the rest of our time in that unit. I saw him years later in the Pentagon cafeteria. He recognized and remembered me and thanked me for that REFORGER night long ago.

**Third: “*It’s what you do as a CW2 and early CW3 that will make (or not make) you a CW4.*”** That was long ago. Now I must add: “*..and what’s done as a senior CW3 and junior CW4 will make you a CW5.*”

**Your career manager and proponent** Chief Warrant Officer of the Branch will tell you: “*there is no better career path to success than to seek the difficult jobs and do well.*” I believe that’s true. In my career, I never had a TRADOC job. (However, a couple of times I tried. Should I thank my career managers?) I mixed divisional and non-divisional jobs, bringing the experience and best of both to each other. Later, as a senior CW3, I was assigned to a TDA position in a large, complex, cross-discipline Pentagon support organization. I relied a lot on truism one and did OK.

**After the Pentagon assignment,** it was back to a corps-level, tactical signal brigade. Once again, truism one and two paid off. Three years later and ready to come out of Europe .. it seemed the only place they wanted to put me was *back in the Pentagon.*

**Not my favorite choice!** I was angling for a job at Campbell and a nice weekend (future retirement) place in the Land Between the Lakes. This Pentagon job led me to CW5, a tour as USAWOA president, and ultimately to this great job I'm preparing to depart.

**I've talked to many others about the Army warrant officer.** But, perhaps, in no numbers equal to the 5000 + readership of our NEWSLINER. I'm always grateful for the opportunity.

**Serving warrant officers, please think** about what I write — what I found to be a truism for me, may also be so for you.

**Best wishes for all success.**

**RAY**

[Webmaster's Note: CW5 (Ret) Ray Bell was the USAWOA Executive Director, *NEWSLINER* Editor, Legislative Liaison, and USAWOA Representative to The Military Coalition from July 1997 to April 2004. During his tenure he was also the President of The Military Coalition from November 2002 to November 2003. CW5 Bell is also a Past National President of USAWOA (1994-1997). Ray has been a member of USAWOA since December 1974 and served in a number of capacities and offices at the Chapter and Regional level prior to assuming the office of USAWOA National President in October 1994.]

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