



Hosting Visiting Vessels A Guide for International Councils

The hosting of visiting US and allied vessels is an important activity for Navy League Councils outside of the continental United States. The following is intended to share the experiences of several of our Councils.

Preparation – Port Call Notification

Increasing operational requirements and security concerns have resulted in shorter notice periods of port calls for our usual sources and for the ships themselves. An overview of major unit activities globally is available every two weeks or so on the US Naval Institute web site, www.news.usni.org under the heading CNA Fleet and Marine Tracker. More specific ship information is available through Fleet web sites, e.g. www.c6f.navy.mil for the Sixth Fleet.

While these sources can give an indication as to vessels operating in Council areas (an example being public notice that a vessel has entered the Black Sea) we still rely on the usual suspects for advance notice of port calls. These normally are:

[1] US DAO or Naval Attaché, [2] nearest US Consul, [3] Sixth (or other) Fleet HQ or liaison with host country navy [4] host country naval sources, [5] local port authority and/or husbanding organizations, and [6], occasionally, a NATO Command or the ship itself following previous port calls.

Area or Council Presidents generally take responsibility for relationships with these sources. In any case, experience shows that having a named Council officer with responsibility for port call notification helps continuity, as DAOs, etc. are frequently replaced. This individual can also make DAO/Fleet sources aware of local events which would provide an opportunity for a port call, e.g. the event in Villefranche commemorating the Sixth Fleet Headquarters there and the USS Springfield reunion.

Preparation – Activities for Hosted Vessels

The Coast Guard motto, *Semper Paratus*, is applicable here. An inventory of prepared activities saves last minute scrambling, and also provides an opportunity for Council leadership to provide development activities for Council members.

There are several parameters to be considered. Port calls tend to be much shorter than in previous years, making scheduling important. COs and other officers may have political requirements (meet with local or regional officials; host country military) that will normally be managed by the DAO and/or Embassy/Consulate. Security concerns will affect access to and from the ship. And, the combination of professional, volunteer crews and short port calls may mean that sailors and marines are less interested in organized activity and more in just getting off the ship.

A lunch or dinner for officers and selected enlisted can take place at a restaurant or other venue, preferably with a private room or area, or catered at a Council member's home. This offers a planning opportunity and is best held early on in the port call, and needs to be coordinated with the timing/participation of official visits.

Public Information in English on local activities and tourist options should be provided to the ship's MWR officer (through the XO?) prior to the ship's arrival, together with any suggested Council-organized activity (e.g. Romania Council organized a beach clean-up followed by a barbecue.) Other activities which have been organized by Councils have included:

- Tours guided by local Council members
- Picnics and beach parties
- Athletic events – 10K runs ending at a McDonalds; football (soccer) or basketball games with local groups
- Work parties (e.g. paint a school) followed by a reception/socializing with local partners

It is a great help to the ship's officers if a description of these activities is available prior to arrival, including location and transport, possible number of participants, and responsible Council member with contact details.

This information and a budget are also important in recruiting sponsors from the local community.

Publicizing Navy League port call-related activities through local media and the ship's PAO (for Fleet and home port media); the Navy League Council in the vessel's home port; and headquarters communications such as *Anchors Up* all provide additional visibility for the Council.

Follow-up

Councils often meet with the ship's officers prior to the vessel's departure and present a certificate or other Navy League memento commemorating the visit.

The host Council should maintain a data base of contact information for each ship. Council presidents generally send follow-up "thank you" letters to the CO and other key contacts, often staying in touch with these individuals during their deployments and beyond.

If a vessel has repeat deployments into an area, the local Council may also consider adopting it, with appropriate ceremony.