Political Turmoil in Ukraine Brings Out the Flags

By Byron DeLear

As is the custom in times of political turmoil and conflict, people are swept into defining roles; and either willingly or not, groups and forces coalesce around identifying symbols and markers to show who’s on one side or another. Flags used in this context become calls-to-action, nationalistic, patriotic; they are rallying points and sources of pride. In public demonstrations and protests, flags can symbolize a particular cultural narrative, political affiliation, or worldview; but when used on a barricade on the frontlines, they literally delineate lines of battle. The recent unrest in Ukraine is primarily composed of two opposing political movements—pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian—each with their own distinct set of flags and symbols.

Conventional Russian and Ukrainian national flags have been used frequently in the crisis and most succinctly depict either side’s message. Ukrainian forces have also been seen using a Ukrainian naval ensign which features a white field with a blue cross throughout with the standard Ukrainian blue-and-yellow bicolor arrangement in the flag’s canton (the upper hoist corner). Also seen in various forms, has been the bronze or gold Ukrainian trident symbol, both on the national bicolor or on a blue-fielded flag (the Ukrainian Naval Jack, 1992). Dating from last winter’s Euromaidan (literally, “Eurosquare”) protests in Ukraine, the repeated use of a red-and-black bicolor has been observed. This red-and-black Ukraine, continued on page 3
President’s Message

Friends,

As you know, the time I have left in this office is short.

In supporting the term-limits amendment last Fall along with the other members of the Executive Board, I supported imposing those limits on myself. Because I will have served six years as your president when we convene NAVA 48 in New Orleans, I will be retiring from office then.

It’s been a wonderful opportunity to serve the Association and help prepare it for the challenges of the 21st century. As recounted in these pages, we have accomplished much over the past few years, and, of course, there remains much to accomplish.

The remaining priority for my limited time in office is to work to ensure organizational stability by shifting from a culture in which the Association operates under one or two key people rather than under a broader base of shared responsibility and accountability.

Frankly, as a group we have come to look for the “indispensable person” who can do anything and everything that needs to be done to make the Association function smoothly. Those with strong personalities and talents have been allowed to shoulder ever-increasing burdens in an effort to promote efficiency and economy.

There are many problems with the “indispensable person” approach. The realities of life practically ensure that at some point that person will be unavailable to continue all the work he or she has undertaken. It is irresponsible to run an organization by pretending those key people will be around forever. It deprives the organization of the chance to identify and groom new leadership and avoid burnout or indifference on the part of current leadership.

Finally, the “indispensable person” approach fosters a sense of entitlement to an office or position and does not create the necessary expectation that the Association continuously needs new people to step forward and serve at all levels.

I confess that I have been one of those who has shouldered more than I should as we have tried to plan operations and allocate resources so the Association can thrive despite the regular rotation of personnel. In working to provide opportunities for others, I—along with other Board members—have been doing quite a lot of administrative and clerical work that takes us away from the real work of promoting the scholarly study of flags. But that is coming to an end.

In preparation for a new professional post in Washington, I have worked with my Board colleagues and other committed
banner is known as the battle flag of the Ukrayins’ka Povstans’ka Armiya (UPA), or Ukrainian Insurgent Army, a fiercely nationalist force active during World War II that at points fought occupying Nazis, encroaching Soviets, and conducted ethnic cleansing of tens of thousands of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia. While the primary drive of Euromaidan protests was, and is, expanded European integration with Ukraine, Russian media has repeatedly portrayed the uprising as a fascist movement with ties to Nazism. The reappropriated red-and-black of the UPA—which the Russians consider to have been Nazi collaborators—has been characterized as “proof” of the reemergence of fascism.

“In many ways, the flags chosen by both sides are being used to provoke their opponents,” stated NAVA member Annie Platoff. Platoff has authored several papers detailing the vexillological history of the former Soviet Union including: “Of Tablecloths and Soviet Relics: A Study of the Banner of Victory (Znamia Pobedy),” Raven: A Journal of Vexillology 20 (2013): 55. Many Ukrainian nationalists are choosing flags which are interpreted by Russians as extremely right-wing in meaning, while the pro-Russian protesters are using old Soviet symbols that remind ethnic Ukrainians of how they were persecuted under the Soviet regime. In both cases the messages sent by these flags are further inflaming the situation.”

The pro-Russian, anti-Kiev side has seen a revival of old Soviet and pre-Soviet colors in addition to new designs made of older elements. The black-and-orange striped “ribbon of St. George” has been seen in both flag form and as fabric ribbons attached to clothing. These colors derive from the Order of St. George, which was established in 1769 and is the Russian Federation’s highest military decoration. Even more important to Russians living in Ukraine, the orange-and-black ribbon was used on the medal “For the Victory over Germany in the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945.” The revival of this simple bicolor arrangement by pro-Russian forces sends a subtle telegraph that their opponents are akin to “traitors” and “Nazi collaborators.”

Interestingly, pro-Ukrainian forces pejoratively describe this striped bicolor convention and those who wear it as “Colorados,” due to its resemblance to an insecticide-resistant, black-and-orange striped beetle native to the Rocky Mountain state. This kind of linguistic dehumanization has often been utilized throughout history to mitigate the psychological traumas associated with prosecuting organized violence and warfare. If your “enemy” can be portrayed as something less than human, any guilt or anguish associated with civil strife is potentially anesthetized.

Another pro-Russian flag in use is that of the Donetsk Republic in two variations: a plain tricolor of black, blue, and red; and another which features a double-headed eagle with all its charges. This tricolor configuration is drawn from the flag of the Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic founded and disbanded in 1918. Other flags hoisted by pro-Russian forces include the flag of Soviet Ukraine (similar to the Soviet national flag, but with a sky-blue stripe on the lower third of the flag), and a Russian Imperial tricolor of black, yellow, and white.

“In the current conflict in Ukraine, the different flags used by both sides further demonstrate the divisiveness that exists among people in the country. People in the western part, who are mostly ethnic Ukrainians, want to move their country closer to integration with the rest of Europe. Many of the people in the east still see themselves as Russian and want stronger ties with the Russian Federation. Until a solution is found to truly unite all the people of Ukraine, we will continue to see the divisions in their society illustrated by the flags they use to represent themselves,” said Platoff.
We especially have fond memories of John attending ICV 13 in Melbourne, of his enthusiasm and his skill as a judge in the inaugural award of the Vexillon. His specialist study of U.S. civic flags and heraldry is highly regarded—and rightly acknowledged in the related special 2002 issue of Raven, and as a later recipient himself of the Vexillon in 2005 and as a Fellow of FIAV in the same year.

John is and will be sorely missed. We offer our condolences to John’s family, NAVA, and Great Waters Association of Vexillology in their loss.

Ralph Bartlett FF
President, Flags Australia (Flag Society of Australia)
Secretary-General Emeritus, Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques

The Flag Institute would like to convey to its American colleagues its sadness at the loss of John Purcell.

John was one of America’s leading vexillologists and a pillar of NAVA and the Great Waters Association of Vexillology. Our members who met John at various ICVs remember him as a very knowledgeable person who it was a great pleasure to talk to.

“American City Flags,” for which John and the rest of the Raven editorial team won the Vexillon in Buenos Aires, is a seminal work on modern civic flags, which we use in the UK to show towns and cities considering adopting a flag examples of good and poor designs.

We will miss his smile and dry sense of humour, and our thoughts are with John’s family and friends.

Graham Bartram FF
Chief Vexillologist, The Flag Institute
Secretary-General for Congresses, Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques
When I attended my first NAVA meeting in 1985, I enjoyed making new friends with many people, but two stood out in particular due to their strong intellectual curiosity, their welcoming attitude, and their strength of character: Grace Rogers Cooper and John Purcell. John was my friend from that first meeting on, and I never once heard an angry word from him directed towards me in all the years of our friendship. John was a model of kindness and patience, a gentle man with a good sense of humor who was quite capable of a sharp and witty aside, but always with a broad smile and sparkling eyes that let you know he was a peacemaker and a mediator, someone who sought the common good and no personal glory (a trait increasingly rare as the Twentieth Century progressed).

Everyone knew this about John, and everyone loved John. It made him a natural leader. I served on many committees with John, and came to appreciate very much his sense of fairness and justice that was counterbalanced by discipline for following the rules and resolute responsibility to complete every task required in a timely fashion. He was organized and disciplined, not only in the way he kept his flag research files, but in approaching all chores and academic pursuits, and over the years his insights as a teacher on effective classroom techniques or strategies for winning over recalcitrant students helped me more than once.

Of course John was a linchpin for NAVA, a strong and wise leader who didn’t disappear or retire after his presidency but stayed very active throughout all the years to help a discipline he sincerely believed in and an organization he guided. He was the force behind the rise of GWAV and its always reliable publication, and a leading authority on the civic flags of Ohio as well as the art and study of vexillology. He was much beloved by regular attendees from around the globe at biennial ICVs. But beyond all John published related to flags, I am painfully missing a true and caring friend today, as are we all. I loved spending time with him due to his keen mind, his deep heart, and his zest for life, travel, language, and adventure.

Some of my happiest memories with John involve going off on exploratory excursions, away from English speakers and not using English to communicate, spending time with locals he knew well in Argentina, or with some fellows from Spain we met and befriended while wandering in Berlin. When we were headed to Buenos Aires together in 2005 and our flight was unexpectedly delayed 24 hours due to turbulent weather, we didn’t mope—we made an adventure out of wandering into parts of Atlanta neither of us had even known or researched. But I didn’t have to travel to appreciate John—just having dinner with him alone was a great opportunity to discuss old movies, world literature, and a host of interesting things above and beyond his vast knowledge of flags.

When I needed an introductory essay for a seminar I organized on the topic of vexillology, I knew immediately what to use to prod students to think about the way flags can affect them emotionally and the power these symbols might have in shaping their worldviews: John’s brief but eloquent reflection on this topic. I was very pleased to see Raven publish that piece in volume 19 in 2012, and to dedicate that entire issue to the memory and honor of the one person who always best fit the description “a gentleman and a scholar”: John M. Purcell. Rest in Peace, John—we’ll sorely miss you.

Scot Guenter, Ph.D., LF, FF, WSF
Past President / Ancien président
North American Vexillological Association / Association nord-américaine de vexillologie
Dear President of NAVA
Dear President of GWAV
Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear friends,

As FIAV President speaking in the name of all its Members, I take the opportunity of this memorial service, held in conjunction with NAVA’s annual convention, to address to you some words in memory of our departed friend, John Purcell.

I knew John since 1991 when I participated for the first time at an International Congress of Vexillology, that year in Barcelona.

I met him at each of the following Congresses he participated in. John was a good friend. It was always a pleasure to see from far away—he was taller than me!—his big smile, and he always addressed me with a friendly welcome, “Hello Michel, how are you?” I can no longer expect his welcome! We were very sad when we heard he was unable to join us in Washington and very shocked when he died a short time after.

John was a great vexillologist, he was very active in NAVA, he was a past president, and became a specialist in U.S. city flags, for which he received, with the other authors and editors, the Vexillon in 2005. The same year he also became a Fellow of FIAV. John was also a founder of GWAV and was active in that association through his participation and his articles published in Flagwaver.

For all these reasons, he will always stay present in our memories as an expert vexillologist.

John, we will never forget you!

I reiterate my deep sympathy to his family, his personal friends, and his flag friends.

Michel Lupant COC, CCOM, KCM-RC, FCVS
President, Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques

When we look at NAVA among the very small group of individuals who have been with us—from the beginning—a modest few stand out as having been major contributors to our success. The involvement that John made over the years is at the top of that group—he always seemed to be on the spot when needed most.

He understood our needs and provided solutions willingly to make the difference. His capability and dedication never lagged.

There was nothing flamboyant about John, and he never made others feel that he was grandstanding. Analyzing the problem, quietly figuring out how to get done what the job at hand required, was his way of making certain that everything worked like clockwork without fuss or fanfare. His contributions—especially in the early days of vexillology—were extraordinary.

Every member of NAVA today is indebted to what John did for us. I personally will miss John as he was one of the few existing “grand-old-men” of our discipline.

Whitney Smith, Ph.D., LF, FF, WSF, FFI, FVAst
Executive Director, The Flag Research Center
Secretary-General Emeritus, Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques
President Emeritus / Président émérite
North American Vexillological Association / Association nord-américaine de vexillologie

John will be remembered as a friend of SAVA’s who was quiet and unassuming, but always helpful and available with a positive suggestion or contribution based on his good eye for detail. He attended the ICV 17 in Cape Town in 1997 and thereafter always took the time to reminisce and enquire about the situation in South Africa and the region whenever he subsequently met other SAVA members. As an active vexillologist his contribution, humour, and caring personality will be sorely missed.

Bruce Berry FF
Secretary/Treasurer, Southern African Vexillological Association
Secretary-General Emeritus, Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques

The North American Vexillological Association pays tribute to the memory of
John M. Purcell, Ph.D., and presents upon him the
John Purcell Award.
Awarded in his honor, the Association recognizes Dr. Purcell for his great and vital contributions to the promotion of both the study and application of flags in the North American region, and for his significant contributions to the advancement of vexillology.

Flag wavers to all present.

2012.

John M. Purcell award given to John posthumously at NAVA 46 (Columbus 2012).
In a recent story about John in Flagmaster, our president Hugh Brady referred to the “Pillars of NAVA”: Whitney Smith, Grace Rogers Cooper, Scot Guenter, and John Purcell. It’s easy to see the qualities each brought to NAVA and vexillology generally. Whitney is the prophet and chief herald of vexillology. Grace was the strong leader who got things done, sometimes with tough love. Scot is the teacher who inspires us to make serious academic contributions.

John’s defining qualities were his loyalty to NAVA and the grace and friendship he always had, regardless of what was happening. I don’t think it’s a secret that NAVA politics sometimes has sharp elbows. However, there’s an extra special experience in being the president, shared only by the sixteen of us who have had the honor. “Frustration” would be a polite word to describe it to the rest of you. You may have noticed that some former presidents have chosen to be less active after their service in the center seat. But not John. Not at all. His presidency was 1981 to 1983, but when we met in Dallas in 1988, he was completely involved in NAVA. And so very friendly and polite.

This makes it sound like John was just a nice guy who worked hard. He certainly was that. He was also extremely smart, dedicated, and extraordinarily modest. And a good friend to so many of us. I am not aware that John ever said “no” to a president who asked him to do a task. He never did to me, even humorously commenting once, “I always say ‘yes’ when my president calls.” Some of those presidential assignments were very hard and occasionally unappreciated. But John never, ever complained, nor did he slow down in his service to NAVA. I know he had his opinions, but gentleman that he was, he was nuanced in his rare personal comments.

So we say goodbye to our dear friend who always, always reminded us to rise above the annoyances that happen in any group. I will remember John for his smile, for his sly sense of humor, and for that twinkle in the eye that Hugh describes so well. I will also remember his Christmas cards addressed to my husband, my son, and me.

There will be no Christmas card this year. But John will still be there for me—and for you—to help us remember that we are friends with a common purpose: flags. And we should never forget that the flag work we do should not be at the expense of our friendship.

I will always look for him, wherever we vexillologists meet.

Charles A. Spain, J.D.
Secretary-General, Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques
Past President / Ancien président
North American Vexillological Association / Association nord-américaine de vexillologie
Cuba Field Report

By Ted Kaye

On a recent trip to Cuba, a profusion of national flag use was in prominent display—and often as an instrument of political messaging. The ten days there (under a U.S. Treasury Department license) gave me a greater understanding of the country’s history, economy, politics, and people. While most of the time was spent in Havana, I also reached the colonial city of Trinidad, east of the Bay of Pigs.

Cuba loves its national flag and flies it broadly. The flag motif is frequently augmented by other graphic elements representing the government, the revolution, the nation, or its history. Actual flags appear to be flown mostly by the government (which controls the majority of the economy), but sometimes by private individuals. Some flags flown are quite large.

In the absence of commercial advertising, propaganda messages fill billboards in Havana and on the highways. They often incorporate the flag’s components—the instantly-recognizable triangle, star, and stripes in red, white, and blue.

A second flag appears often, the “Movimiento 26 Julio” (M-26-7) flag honoring the initial event of the Revolution on 26 July 1953, when Castro’s forces unsuccessfully attacked the Moncada barracks near Santiago, resulting in his imprisonment and exile. As a commemorative flag developed after the fact, it has many variants (see NAVA News 199 (2008): 7) and its design was widely used in insignia during the Revolution.

Avelino (Vely) Couceiro, a Cuban professor, presented the definitive work on the origin of the Cuban flag at ICV 24 (see Proceedings of the 24th International Congress of Vexillology (2011). He described its design in New York in 1849 by patriot Narciso López. In Havana, Vely gave me a private tour of the city and its greatest flag resources. Through his influence, the Museum of the City of Havana opened up its normally-closed Cuba, continued on page 9
Hall of flags, which includes the López flag and dozens of other flags of great historical importance.

While some vendors said that selling the flag was illegal (even hiding it in the shop), other vendors (such as at the high-end Hotel Nacional or at the airport) sold it openly; US$20-25 could buy a flag of 1.0 x 1.5 m. Sometimes the flag’s proportions reached 1:2. The blue ranged from medium to navy; it was never royal blue as is sometimes depicted in the United States.

Perhaps the most interesting display was at the U.S. Interests Section (without diplomatic relations, the U.S. has no embassy). In 2006, the Bush Administration erected a giant scrolling news feed on the building. The Cubans immediately responded by placing 138 enormous flagpoles in front of it, each flying the Cuban flag. The news feed has since been removed; the flagpoles remain.


President’s Message, continued from page 2

volunteers to move the Association from dependence on a small handful of individuals to functioning committees, editorial boards, and appointed officers, assisted by paid staff for clerical and technical work. This has required us to evaluate whether the Association operates efficiently and to candidly assess its infrastructure, particularly the web site.

This has been a hard transition. We have discovered problems that have not been addressed for far too long, and I apologize for the temporary inconveniences. But it is a necessary transition that has resulted in greater institutional stability and less dependence on individual whim. You are doubtless aware of difficulties in online membership renewal and delays in our publications, but those problems will soon be overcome as we implement real solutions—not quick fixes.

Whatever we do in our work lives, when we come together as vexillologists, our areas of expertise are flags, not filing; banners, not bookkeeping; standards, not shipping; and pennons, not processing paperwork. All these things need to be done, of course, but they can be done by professionals faster, at a higher quality, with greater accuracy, and better cost savings than by vexillologists.

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the Association’s founding, taking these actions now to free officers, committees, editorial boards, and other contributors to focus on flags is the best thing we can do to ensure that our successors will gather in Boston in 2067 to celebrate our 100th anniversary.

This column is perhaps my longest, yet I cannot conclude without a brief comment on the great man we honor in this issue: John Purcell. I have previously described John as a Pillar of our Association, and he certainly was. But I know that John would have modestly dismissed any suggestion that he was indispensable and redirected any such conversation to the task of running the Association with a focus on scholarship and collegiality. I miss him, but John would be the first to say that he did his work so that we could succeed in his absence. What better colleague, scholar, mentor, and—most of all—friend, could we have had?

Contact Hugh Brady: pres@nava.org

New Orleans · 3–5 Oct 2014

The Association’s Executive Board invites you to come to New Orleans for the 48th Annual Meeting of the North American Vexillological Association / Association nord-américaine de vexillologie.

Hotel

The 48th Annual Meeting will be held 3-5 October 2014 at the Sheraton New Orleans Hotel, 500 Canal Street, New Orleans. Fresh from a US$50 million revitalization, the Sheraton’s stylish rooms reflect New Orleans charm and many have views of the Mississippi River or French Quarter. The hotel itself is strategically situated between the French Quarter and the Garden District.

Sheraton New Orleans Hotel rates

Available October 1–7, 2014

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Additional person: US$25 per person. Plus 14.75% state and local taxes and US$3 occupancy tax per room per night

These rates are good for reservations made before 5:00 p.m. (New Orleans time) on September 1, 2014.

Registration Information

You may make your reservation by either calling (888) 627-7033 and ask for the NAVA rate or online at the Sheraton NAVA 48 reservation page (click the green “Reserve” button). If you can, please make your reservation using the NAVA group rate as it helps pay for the cost of the meeting rooms.

We are testing a new approach in meeting registration. In the past, many of us know we want to attend, but often cannot balance all of our work, family, and other civic commitments until the meeting draws closer.

For NAVA 48, there is a single registration rate of US$200 no matter when you register. However, you may receive a US$25 early-registration discount if you simply e-mail us at nava48@nava.org by July 1 and tell us you are planning on coming. It’s that simple!

We continue to offer the first-time attendance discount of US$25 as well (these discounts can be combined). So start making your plans now to meet us in New Orleans!

Full schedule of NAVA 48 fees and discounts:

Regular Registration: US$200 per person
Companion Registration: (Includes Whitney Smith Dinner): US$100 per person
Student Registration: US$100 per person*
Whitney Smith Dinner Only: US$75 per person
Supporter Registration (Meeting packet only): US$25 per person
Display Tables (Non-Commercial, First Table): No fee
Display Tables (Commercial and Additional Non-Commercial): US$10 per table
Early Registration Discount: US$25 per person+
First-Time Registrant Discount: US$25 per person

* Person must meet the student criteria for discounted active-membership dues under the bylaws to receive this registration price. Cannot be combined with other discounts.

+ A person may receive this discount through either (1) paying their registration fees in full by 1 July 2014 or (2) by sending an expression of interest to attend to the Program Committee by 1 July 2014.

Papers and Displays for NAVA 48

If you want to present a paper or have an exhibit for NAVA 48, send your submission to Gus Tracchia at gustracc@aol.com by June 30. For full information, including the NAVA 48 registration form, go to: nava.org/nava-meetings/meetings/48