

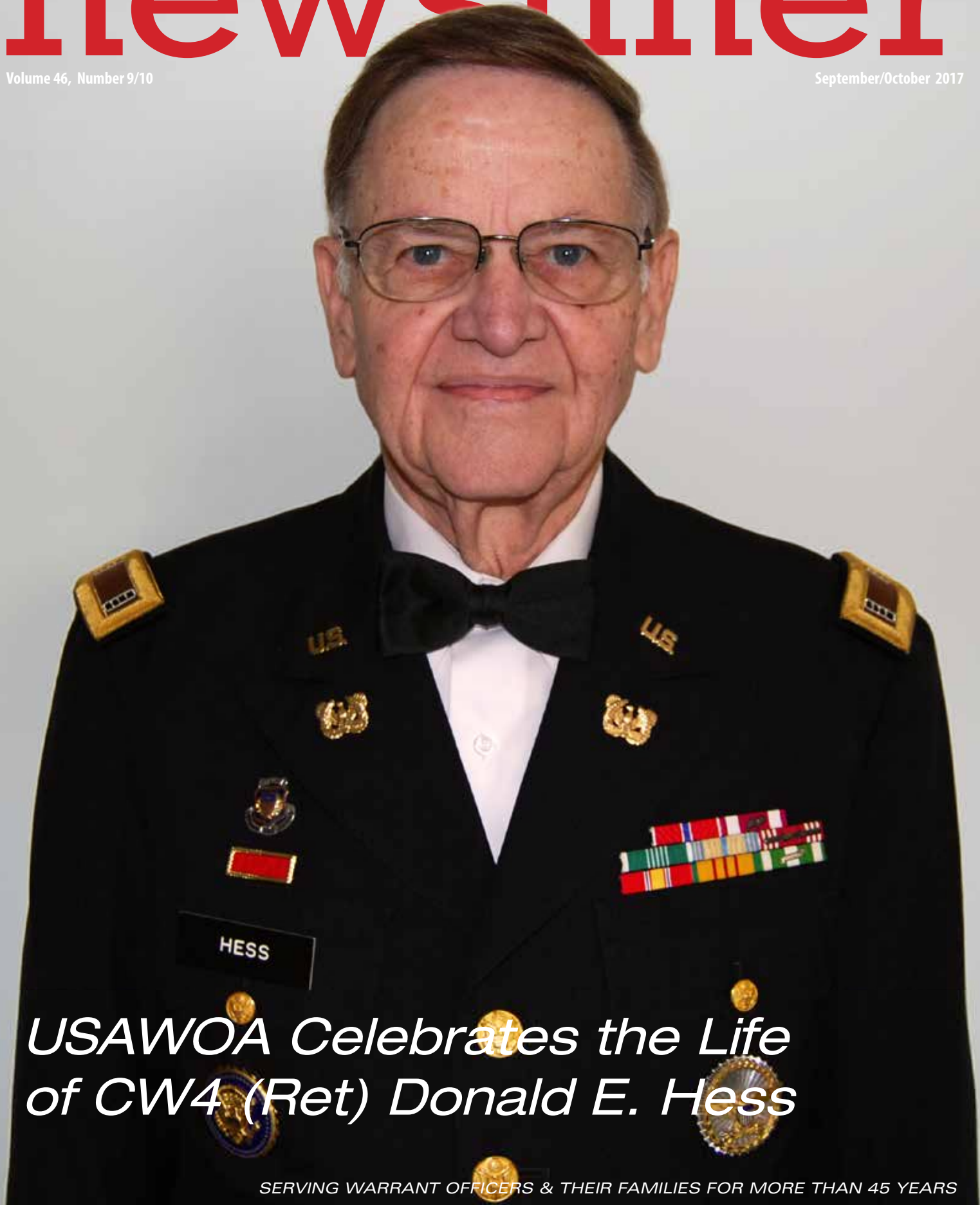
UNITED STATES ARMY WARRANT OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS®

newsliner

Volume 46, Number 9/10

September/October 2017



*USAWOA Celebrates the Life
of CW4 (Ret) Donald E. Hess*

SERVING WARRANT OFFICERS & THEIR FAMILIES FOR MORE THAN 45 YEARS

Remembrance of Don Hess – Mentor and Friend

By CW5 (Ret) Raymond A. Bell

Past President and Executive Director



I met Don Hess in 1973, at the Officers Club in Katterbach, Germany, as a recently appointed WO1. Don was there to talk to Warrant Officers of the Ansbach-Katterbach area about a vision of a worldwide association of Army Warrant Officers. This association would not only be a venue for local camaraderie – like the European Warrant Officers Association (EWOA) I already belonged to – but also a channel to communicate ideas and concerns of the Warrant Officer community to the Army leadership.

The EWOA performed wonderful acts of community service, not unlike USAWOA Chapters of today. But true to the Warrant Officer culture of the time, meetings were often boozy; smoke-filled; profane; and filled with much swapping of “war stories,” and advice on how to “get over.” Admittedly, it was fun!

But after hearing Don Hess’ presentation, even with my limited experience, I recognized that he and those who shared his vision were a somewhat different “style” of Warrant Officer. I had already met many who operated with a narrow philosophy of “just leave me the heck alone to do my job – I don’t need the other crap.” By contrast, in a quiet, unassuming but highly professional manner, Don spoke of the creation of an association that would represent the entire Warrant Officer community – not specific individuals, single interests, or a small group. I was interested.

One challenge was to overcome a belief, held by many, that any such association would be nothing more than a group looking after the interests of a few well-connected individuals – those primarily concerned with ensuring the “favored” got the plum assignments, lengthy “on-station” times, and evasion of undesirable assignments. Indeed, for many years both commissioned officers and NCOs (and even some Warrants) made scoffing reference to a “Warrant Officer protective association (WOPA).”

However, “newbie” though I was, I believed that some form of associa-

tion was needed. At that time, formal education for Warrant Officers in my field (Quartermaster) and many others was pretty much “catch as catch can” – something done between PCS assignments. There were neither phased education programs nor education exclusively designed for Warrant Officers.

Also, the assignment system was not designed to provide expansion of knowledge at increasing levels of responsibility, but rather typically “your name is up – here’s where you are going.”

The vision of Don Hess, and others that shared his thinking, was threefold:

- (1) To bring about Army-wide recognition of the role of Warrant Officers and their contributions to the Army;
- (2) To create a standardized method of assignment management, regardless of career field; and
- (3) To establish specific educational programs designed to develop a community of well-rounded, knowledgeable Warrant Officers.

Impressive to me was the quiet manner with which Don Hess marshaled others to his point of view. Don would look you in the eye, speak of his vision, convince you of its worth, and make you believe that any contribution you made to the endeavor was important to its success. He convinced me. Don then would step aside and let others take the stage and make grand pronouncements, big promises, etc. Nevertheless, Don would continue his quiet direction – never seeking the spotlight.

I learned many years later that Don could have stayed on active duty longer – but rather, chose to retire and devote a large portion of his time and personal resources to making the USAWOA a reality. Many have heard the story of the “basement operation.” It’s true – I saw it. A two-room, self-finished office, work room, meeting room, storage room, and social gathering place – in the basement of the Hess home.

Early in my career, I became a USAWOA life member – a gift from my lovely wife Fran. I spent three tours in Germany, and was active in several USAWOA Chapters – at various levels of participation – and in two stateside locations. Follow-on assignments took me to Turkey and the Pentagon, where frankly, I fell away from regular USAWOA participation. I enjoyed my membership, but was not active.

This changed when Clay Kelley, then National Vice President, approached me about running for national office – not just any office, but President. It took some convincing, and long talks with Don ensued. He remained firm in his vision – and rekindled my spirit as well.

During my three years as President, I worked closely with Don – and grew to respect him even more. He and I worked many issues, the most significant being that of “finding Don’s replacement” – a daunting task.

As the deadline for Don’s retirement drew close, Fran and I relooked at our options and plans. In 1997, with the support of my wife and the association leadership, I assumed duties as Executive Director. I pledged to the leadership to do the job for five years, in the belief that any lesser period would be a disservice to the association. I stayed for seven years, stepping down in 2004.

In serving as both National President and then Executive Director, I benefited from both a close working relationship and personal friendship with Don Hess, over more than a decade. Many will miss him – I will miss him.

Perhaps the most memorable of many “Don-isms” (unabashedly borrowed from President Harry Truman) is the following:

“Wouldn’t it be wonderful – and imagine what might be achieved – if no one cared who got the credit.”

In many ways, Don lived his life in this manner. Observing the fruits of his labors, but never seeking the credit.

Rest in peace my friend. 🇺🇸