

## THE CHYC FLAG CEREMONY ITS EARLY HISTORY

The date was March 5, 1991 and the first "CHYC SUNDOWNERS" ceremony had been performed before an audience of 130 members, 126 of whom stayed for a special low priced "Sundowners" menu. These members names were recorded and were honored with the title of "Charter Sundowner". Complementary hors d'oeuvres were served to all, and a free drink ticket was provided with the purchase of a first drink. The bar offered a special cocktail called "Van's Sundowner".

The first ceremony included a formation of past commodores (CHYC Blue Gavel), and a formation of flag officers: Commodore, V/Commodore, R/Commodore, Fleet Captain, Treasurer, and Secretary. The Harbormaster crew of Cannoneer and Flag Handlers completed the list of ceremonial participants. The ceremony has been modified in recent years to regularly now include the Harborlites' representation group, and the presenter of the patriotic message of the month. The fleet chaplain, a bugler, and a choral group have made random Sundowner presentations.

The original ceremony began when all participants were assembled at parade rest on the club's "parade grounds" overlooking the open harbor. A single cannon salute was followed by the calling of the participants to attention as the public address system played TO THE COLORS. Upon completion of TO THE COLORS the second cannon salute was sounded with the synchronous playing of TAPS while lowering the flag. The flag was then properly folded by the handlers and presented to the commodore for storage. The participants were then formally dismissed. It should be noted that the ceremony as originally conceived by CHYC was as being a living and unfinished tradition. Over its 15 year history at CHYC the ceremonial protocol has been modified many times, always improving and thereby earning its emulation at yacht and other clubs around the state. CHYC adopted the ceremony when its then sitting commodore borrowed (with permission) the ceremony from the Coral Reef Yacht Club where he had been a participant while a board member of the Miami club. Coral Reef had traced its early version to one of their commodores who had been a member of a New York yacht club in the early 1900's.

Participants in the ceremony were required to wear the club blue blazer, club tie, white shoes, and white trousers. A naval style white officer's cap with black band and black side buttons was prescribed for all male participants. Females were to wear the female version of the same uniform. From the very first Sundowners it was apparent that the club uniform was too warm in all but the winter months. The board immediately designed and adopted its present summer uniform. Like many yacht clubs, CHYC dress codes did not prescribe club caps. Most clubs had but one officer's cap which was utilized by upcoming commodores for their customary official club portrait. CHYC had its unofficial "Frank Wotitsky" cap that adorned the heads of many commodores' pictures prior to 1991. Several clubs in the Florida Council of Yacht Clubs have enshrined (retired) their well worn "club cap" to a glass display case after new officers began to purchase their own caps. The white officers caps thus became a club storage problem because some ceremony participants found it difficult to remember to bring their hat to the ceremony. Members donated effort and materials and built natural varnished shelves near the bar for easy access before and after the ceremony. Thus was born the colorful trek of the participants to find their caps just prior to the ceremony. This commotion had the effect of signaling the start of the upcoming ceremony. The club uniform with its cap thus play a symbolic and colorful role in this unique event.

Timing is said to be everything. And so it may be with the Sundowners. The original Sundowner concept was that the first cannon signal should mark the point where the bottom of the sun first touched the western horizon and the sundown process was beginning, and thus allowing the flag handlers approximately a 2 and 1/2 minute window for the flag to be lowered and for the sun to reach the point where the top of the sun disappeared beneath the western horizon. This point was also recognized by the sounding of the second cannon.....Sundown had just happened and we were at one with our ancient ancestors. Precise timing and coordination isn't everything for

a true Sundowner, but a perfect location ("location, location, location") of the club's parade ground facing the setting sun over Charlotte Harbor is the sine qua non for SUNDOWNERS.

In the beginning there were those who questioned the relevancy, desirability, or the cost/benefits of implementing the ceremony. The following were ideas that were uppermost in the minds of the creators: (1) One of the principal factors influencing the adoption of the ceremony was patriotism. The war with Iraq had just begun and the board sensed a need to express support for Operation Desert Storm. A celebration to honor the flag was especially timely. (2) The board had also sensed a need to show club unity by having its uniformed officers and club members participating together on a regular monthly basis in addition to the annual Change of Watch and the annual Commodore Ball. Having all members united in a single club activity would promote comradery. (3) Tradition has long provided that through their dress codes yacht clubs are paramilitary in nature. A proper yacht club is more than just a private restaurant. The Sundowner ceremony itself is the essence of naval/military tradition. (4) The bottom line exists even in a not-for-profit institution such as CHYC. Coral Reef YC officers discovered that the first Wednesday of each month is the best day of the month in terms of providing club traffic potential. In 1991 the US economy was in recession and institutions of all kinds were in need of traffic builders. The CHYC Bingo Club stepped up and came to the rescue by offering their time slot to the Sundowners. This rotation of time slots provides the club with the basis for club usage by an increase of 100 to 200 regular participants per month. (5) The ceremony itself is emotionally soothing every time it is witnessed.....it is more than just a seeing and forgetting thing; it is a total emotional involvement experience.

CHYC' Sundowners ceremony has become a fixture within the state and has moved on and has assumed a life of its own. Other clubs are requesting information from us on the nature and management of this enterprise. We hope that this short history will be useful to those who would wish to add patriotism to their lives. We thank everyone who has participated in its evolutionary development, including the white gloves for the flag handlers and to those who by their being a witness advanced the cause.....may we all eventually be a witness to the GREEN FLASH !

P/C George W. Cubberly  
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