

Flagstaff 2010 Armed Forces Day Parade Trip Report

This event was the Armed Forces Day Parade in Historic Downtown Flagstaff. The documents sent to us by the parade organizers, M.A.N.A. Support Network, were clear about time and place for check-in.

Joe Varese towed the float up to Flagstaff with the assistance of Rick Simmons on Friday May 14. At Joe's recommendation we took 99th Ave./Lake Pleasant Rd. up to Route 87 and cut over to New River Road to get up to I-17 and avoid the construction backup. We had no delay proceeding North using this route.

We stayed at the Econo-Lodge on Lucky Lane. They had told Joe that there was parking across the street for the float but we couldn't see what they were talking about once we got there. They had us park in front of the Motel taking up about 4 or 5 parking spaces which worked out well.

Recommendation: The Ramada Inn on Lucky Lane appeared to have more than adequate parking for the float and tow vehicle and may be a better choice. AAA lists the rates as \$55 to \$120 a night. It would be even better to have David Carpenter, our Perch member in Flagstaff, scope out motels for us if he can. Reservations prior to arrival are recommended so you are not towing the float around on your search.

Since we only had one vehicle traveling up on Friday it limited our meal options to places within walking distance. One of the reasons we stayed where we did is because they were supposed to have restaurants within walking distance. They did, but the 2 choices we had were a pretty good walk and it was raining.

Recommendation: More than one vehicle should be taken on any overnight trip such as this to give everyone more options for getting around.

On Saturday the 15th check-in for the parade was easy to find but poorly set up. We were directed to pull into a fenced in parking lot and then immediately told to go to a staging area down the street. The problem came when we had to maneuver the float through the parking lot full of people and floats and out the back entrance, which had a wicked dip that caused the hitch to bottom out. Check-in out in the street would have worked so much better. No number placards were handed out to indicate your staging order consequently, many of the entrants spent most of the pre-parade time walking around asking one another "what number are you?". It was also very hard to determine who was a parade official to direct questions to. The entire street was the staging area, 3 lines across. Joe and I had no idea if we needed to save 1 or 2 additional spaces in the staging area. We only managed to hang on to 1 additional space, which turned out to be enough. It was very lucky the second vehicle showed up when it did to get in line. Another half hour and the street was completely blocked.

Jack and Nancy Moore, Chuck Emmet, Walt Blomgren, Ed Brooks and Brad Veek joined us at the parade staging area. Fortunately, we had enough room for everyone between Joe's truck and Jack's van.

Recommendation: Get a firm count of who will attend and assign which vehicles will be in the parade. Set a time and place to meet and proceed to the check-in and staging area as a group and in the order we want to be in.

The parade organizers did not have a person acting as a starter telling entries when to proceed consequently, we were out of order in the parade and no one realized it until we reached the announcer's stand half way through the parade. As always, people along the parade route really liked the float, the music and the klaxon.

Once again, there was no end of parade dispersal plan. We ended up searching out a side street to break down the float enough to drive at a higher speed over to the static display at the airport. This seems to be a very common problem with most parades we participate in.

No directions were provided for where to go at the airport or even how to get there. It was probably obvious to locals but us "out of towners" would have appreciated some direction. Additionally, no identification was provided to us to show the guards at the airport we were authorized to get in. They either took it on faith or Jack's smooth talking got us in but no one had any idea where we should set up. We ended up right by the entrance gate, which made for a long hike to the 3 port-a pottys. The flyer said that food would be available but it was difficult to find and a long way from where we were set up. No one appeared to be in charge so there was no one to even ask a question of. We were the only non-airplane related display at the airport. Even the flyer indicated it was a display of aircraft. We need to examine our participation in this part of the event if we go next year.

Recommendation: Send a letter from the Base to the parade organizers with suggestions for improving the next parade.

Ed and Brad had hopped out right at the end of the parade to head back to their car, which was parked downtown. Once we got set up at the airport rest of our crew started to head out. Joe and I spent the next 2 and a half hours handing out information and answering questions. One thing we didn't do was play the music at the static display. We found it much easier to talk with people without having to shout. In all the confusion we completely forgot to put out the donation box. We did have a lot of people stop by and talk with us. This was a positive side effect of being right next to the entrance gate. Lots of folks took the information cards and the really liked seeing the float up close. We probably could have sold hats or other "Save Our Sail" items but we won't know since we didn't have any. Both the information board and the evolution of the submarine service sign drew lots of interest and people liked it when we would point out the boats we had been on.

Recommendation: Any time we are going to do a static display we need to take some items to sell as well as remember to put out the donation box.

For the trip home Chuck was able to give us aerial surveillance of I-17 construction, which told us the New River Rd. exit was the best choice for going home. We took 99th Ave to Happy Valley Rd. and that out to the 303, which we took down to Indian School before cutting over to Litchfield Rd. to drop off the float. That route avoided lots of stoplights and the construction on I-10.

Recommendation: As with all the parades and events we go to the public seems to really appreciate our float. However, we do have to look into establishing a policy for future float participation. A serious cost benefit analysis needs to be made about participating in events that are long distances from Maricopa County. The costs to be considered are not just the dollars our members for expend for fuel, meals and lodging but also the wear and tear on the float, related equipment and personal vehicles.