Trust me; They're out there!

By Chaplain William Stewart

They are all around us. They are communicating with us. They are even changing the way we see things. Now, before you think I am an "alien chaser," or conspiracy theorist, let me explain what I am talking about. I am talking about signs and symbols. Symbols are one of the most important elements of communication in our world, and not just for humans, but all creation. They are so much a part of our world that we rarely even notice most of them, but trust me, they're out there!

Some of our greatest philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and St. Augustine realized importance of signs and symbols. The modern day term for this field of study is called semiotics and is quite fascinating and its significance in higher academics continues to grow. Many symbols are quite noticeable and make perfect, logical sense, like something as common as a road sign which directs our thinking on how we should drive. Others are more relative like the wearing of a cross, Star of David or even a peace sign. To one person, it might be a fashion statement, but to another, it might be a symbol of one of the most important aspects of his or her life, their faith or belief system.

But what is interesting to me is that symbols do not always have to be in the form of a shape. They can involve any of the senses, such as touch, smell, sounds or even color. The other day, I was in an unfamiliar place when nature called; in fact called very quickly and loudly! I jumped into the bathroom and headed to that oh so very convenient device for men called a urinal, only to realize the bathroom was not so equipped. It was then that I got chills down my spine as I noticed the tile on the walls were colored pink. Yes, you guessed it, nature called me to the wrong place and it ended up being a very embarrassing situation as I passed a woman on the way out. I covered as best as possible by lowering my voice, saying "Good afternoon ma'am" and proceeded out hoping she thought I was an inspector or something (after all, I was in uniform)! What was that symbol that communicated to me enough to get chills? Just that beautiful color, pink!

As Americans, we are coming up on a very special day that many may not notice. It's not a day that we get off from work. It's not a day that we buy or receive gifts for. It's not even a day that will most likely have parades and fanfare in most places. But it is a day that represents most everything we do and sacrifice for in the military. It's June 14 and it's our Flag Day. But honestly, have you ever thought about what this day stands for, or what it truly represents? Is it really possible that men and women throughout the decades and centuries have been willing to give their lives for what this symbol nicknamed "Old Glory" means? I think, yes.

From its adoption, June 14, 1777, it has changed a bit throughout the years, adding stars as our nation grew. It has been soaked with blood on many a battlefield, it has been burned in protests, and it has been placed atop rubble that resulted from terrorists destroying our buildings because they do not like what it stands for. But, what has never changed and I pray never will, is the meaning of this great symbol: Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all. I hope that we of this great nation will forever be cognizant of what this most incredible symbol means for us and others. Whether it be colors, taps, crossing the brow, reciting the pledge of allegiance or any other occasion to see Old Glory, I encourage you to take time and reflect on what those stars and stripes truly mean. It's a beautiful symbol. God bless you and happy Flag Day!

Cowpens Sailors deliver fun, smiles to local orphanage

Story by MC3 Mike Mulcare, Navy Public Affairs Support Element West Detachment Japan

More than 50 *USS Cowpens* (CG 63) Sailors and their family members participated in a community service (COMSERV) project at the Misono Orphanage June 5.

Past and present officers and crew of the Ticonderoga class guided-missile cruiser have volunteered for COMSERVs at the orphanage, which is located in Fujisawa city, for more than five years.

Cowpens Sailors usually visit the orphanage around the holidays, however, rather than waiting for their annual holiday visit with the kids, *Cowpens* volunteers brought their smiles and a few party tricks for an early and entertaining visit.

"We're here at the Misono Orphanage to entertain the children and to strengthen an already strong relationship we have with the orphanage," said Lt. Kermit Jones Jr., *Cowpens* command chaplain. "We adopted this orphanage many years ago and brought things today for the children to play with from our base MWR (Morale Welfare and Recreation)."

The COMSERV event started with a game of tag between the children and *Cowpens* "mascot," Interior Communications Electrician 2nd Class (SW) Dixon Rivera, who happily donned a cow costume for the day.

Other activities included grappling in novelty sumo wrestler suits, bouncing in an inflatable bounce house and playing catch with the Sailors.

"I'm having a great time playing with the kids," said Electronics Technician 1st Class (SW) Love Terrell Harris III of Moss Point, Miss. "The kids here are wonderful, the staff is great and everyone welcomed us with open arms."

After a round of morning games, Sailors prepared American-style barbecue of cheeseburgers and hot dogs for the children.

The kids showed their appreciation by contributing a home-made cake to the meal.

"COMSERVs (community service projects) like this are very important for Sailors," said Harris. "It gives us a chance to get out and interact with the host nation and for them to experience a little of our culture and understand why we are here in Japan."

Following the barbecue, Sailors played western style games with the children, including red-light green-light, tug-of-war and kickball.

Cowpens Sailors are scheduled to return to the orphanage again this holiday season to distribute gifts as part of their annual Angel Tree Program.

"I think it's really important that we come out here, so the kids know that there is someone out there who loves them and wants to spend time with them," Jones said. "When we come back at Christmas, they'll be excited and remember us."

7th Fleet Band member a symbol of military tradition

Story by MC3 Devon Dow, Navy Public Affairs Support Element West Detachment Japan

For Musician 2nd Class (SW) Collin Reichow, a 7th Fleet band member from Herndon, Va., performing "Taps" at military functions and Memorial Day ceremonies as he did in Yokosuka, Japan May 31 has always touched close to home.

"I've always believed that this is one of the most important things I can do as a Navy trumpet player - honor Veterans," Reichow said of a musical tradition dating back to the Civil War. "I believe it is their sacrifices that make our way of life possible and to be able to show my appreciation and gratitude through music is a privilege."

Growing up as an Air Force family member and grandson of two World War II veterans, Reichow said it was a demonstration in his 6th grade class that changed his life forever and ultimately led him to graduate from East Carolina University with a degree in music before enlisting in the U.S. Navy in 2003.

"I can still remember when the instructor pulled out the trumpet and began to play a selection of bugle calls to our class," he said. "The sounds coming out of the instrument were so exciting; I knew then it was something that I had to learn."

Prior to his first taps performance while a Navy Musician "A" school student at Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, Reichow was approached by the son of a World War II veteran who put the significance and power of a military bugler into perspective for him.

"I remember when he walked over to me," he said. "He told me that he just wanted to shake the hand of the man that was going to make me cry that day. I was very taken back by his response. At that moment, one can imagine how focused I was," Reichow said of his daunting bugling debut.

Prior to coming to Yokosuka, Japan as lead trumpet player in the 7th Fleet Band, Reichow played for Navy Band New Orleans. During his time at the Big Easy, he performed countless memorial engagements honoring service members throughout the southeast. Reichow said he could see parallels in his own life at many of these functions.

"I knew where a lot of these young people were coming from when they would talk about their grandparents, mainly their grandfathers who had passed away," he said. "Many of them would talk about going to baseball games with their grandparents and just how they enjoyed life with them and how they would be missed."

In 2008, Reichow was faced with his own loss as his grandfather on his mother's side passed away. At his grandfather's ceremony in Minneapolis, Reichow, donned in his service dress uniform, performed taps to honor his grandfather's memory and service.

MU2 Collin Reichow of Hendon Va., plays taps at a Memorial Day ceremony at the USS Oneida memorial at Fleet Activities Yokosuka May 31.
Photo by MC3 Andrew Ryan Smith

"It was definitely one of the toughest things I have done in my life," he said. "Losing family is always hard, but for me, I understand what my grandfather's service meant to the U.S. and his family. It makes me very proud I was able to do that for him."

This year Reichow played taps at the USS Oneida memorial at Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, followed by gratitude and compliments from military veterans and current service and family members.

"During the performance this year I thought about both my grandfathers who served in World War II," he said. "I understand how important it is to the family members of these heroes and every time I raise my trumpet to perform, I make sure to sound as good as I can."