

SADDLE UP!!.....MOVE OUT!!

by Ralph Liebing, RA, CSI

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When John Wayne stared down his troops (in a flick about any war or armed forces situation) and called out these orders in his best command voice, he knew two things--where they were going, and what they were going to do!

So it is true today, in both the world of armed forces, as well as in the world of business. The costumes may vary widely, and the voices and faces change, but these commands mean exactly the same thing. And in that lies the expertise, the flexible adaptation of the abilities of the "troops" and the will to get the job done, post haste, and safely.

Where, and what!

In specifications writing, the landscape is changed a little. The "troops" are there but their workaday situation varies with the employer, the mission and the capabilities of the office. However, the fundamental support structure of their professional organization is universal and is or should be fully ready to facilitate and enhance the performance of the troops. The office demands functionality, and trains little; the mission being quite different and directed toward other ends (projects, client satisfaction, making a profit, etc).

From its inception, CSI was conceived, formed and worked as the bed rock support of its members in the profession. It was founded to make specifications better, through mutual interplay and exchanges of information between members, and has extended itself into the entire construction industry via the Divisional formatting and construction documents. CSI has long accepted--and met!--the charge to provide the overall support, and well-spring of information and other resources that members can always call upon for assistance, with free, open exchange of information, uplift programs, added expertise, and other augmentations. The members in turn utilize all these as they see fit in their office work.

But all this is also part of the larger "construction industry", which also has needs to be served in more limited ways, but in many venues--by both spec writers within their offices, and really by CSI as a root source for making better the process and production of quality written construction documents. In fact, the industry *needs* CSI (and the unique perspective of SCIP) as the resource for basic understanding of specifications, including contracting and procurement documents, (no time to do this "education" office by office, or firm by firm; more the work of SCIP) and the impact they have on construction--clarity of purpose, rationale for "being", fundamental principles of specifications, functions and interrelationships, advantages and discipline, impact on various parties, understanding enforcement, need for mutual, continual and valid communications, profitability, liability, etc.

There is much to do! Time and attitudes have clouded the situation and misconceptions, misunderstanding and unwarranted contention have crept into the process, and eroded the validity of construction specifications. Yet they remain as one-third of the contract documents! So whether despised, ignored, obviated, contested or whatever, they still are produced, with valid standing and stand ready to properly (!!!!) serve all parties.

The task, right now, is to contact and inform a wider base, and instill or change attitudes in other groups, along with the diligent task to maintain and improve production and writing specifications. Those groups need to be addressed--and convinced!--that the coordination of contract documents, procurement documents and specifications are to their advantage, and their understanding and use of them is critical to improved project production.

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Indeed, why continue to upgrade the product only to have it used as an "upgraded door stop"? You can do that, too, with a wedge of walnut!

The first task, though, may well be to find CSI's John Wayne, because it's time to "Saddle up.....and Move Out"!