

AUSA National Annual Convention 2011
Meghan McCabe

Every October in Washington, DC, The Association of the US Army holds their annual convention at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. During a few days in October, the surrounding area is transformed into a rolling sea of dark blue and camouflage as a massive school of business people and military gather to view the latest technology in the defense industry, and attend speeches, lunches and symposiums.

This year, the show was 40% larger than in previous years. Perhaps it is a sign of the times; of either coming out of a recession or a show of higher competition for contracts. The show this year was one that should not have been missed.

The opening ceremony at the national convention is always wonderful. It is a tribute to the history of the Army, staged and portrayed by members of the military. The room is full to capacity; standing room only as the lights dim and the voices of the actors on the stage transcend the ranks. This year's event, on the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, served as a poignant reminder of the sacrifices that service members and their families have made to their country since 2001. During the show, under a backdrop of video footage of the attacks and wreckage that was left behind, a solitary soldier sang, "An American Soldier". In a room full of hundreds, there was not a sound but his voice; moving even the most stoic of military folk to raw emotion; then transforming the room into thunderous applause. The ceremony continued, awards were handed out (including the Kuwait Chapter's own "Best Overseas Chapter" award), and the lights went up as people moved towards the exhibition halls.

So began a memorable convention.

In front of rows of military equipment set up across the street from the convention hall, a small group of peace protesters called for our troops to come home. It was yet another reminder of what our service members are fighting for: freedom of speech.

The equipment was most likely placed outside of the convention hall as a necessity as the exhibit halls inside were full to capacity with tanks, humvees, busses, and even several helicopters. All the usual defense contracting companies exhibited at the show and there were several interesting new additions. Foreign militaries seem to have joined the group this year and there was even a large and opulent booth from the United Arab Emirates; complete with Bedouin tent. They stated that they were participating more for show than to showcase military technology. They also showcased their tourism industry and handed out books in promotion of their country.

For anyone working with the military – as a service member or a contractor – the AUSA National Convention is something that should not be missed. There is a tremendous sense of community. People smile at each other and introduce themselves. Call it "networking" if you will, but it is still a good opportunity to share common interests. Often, if you attend more than one show, you begin to establish friendships through the years and recognize faces. Everyone in the industry should attend at least one show in their lifetime. Entry is free with membership and the industry leads that you develop from attending are invaluable. AUSA publishes an "Exhibitor Catalog" containing names and contact information for exhibitors.

Washington DC in October is usually very pretty and the weather is mild. While in the area, take a tour of Arlington Cemetery and watch the Changing of the Guard; yet another moving reminder of the ultimate sacrifice of military service.

From the AUSA Kuwait Chapter, Ziyad Selim and his family attended; as did SGM Melvin Johnson, and Meghan McCabe.