

174th AHC Association
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174th AHC ASSOCIATION'S 22nd ANNIVERSARY 2015 ANNUAL REUNION AFTER ACTION REPORT

The 2015 annual reunion of the Dolphins, Sharks, Witch Doctors, 452nd Signal Det., 133rd Ord. Det., and 756th Med. Det., together with a number of very special guests was once again a success! There were two "first time reunion attendees" at Fort Walton Beach, FL, this year, John W. Wall, Enterprise, AL and Gerald P. "Jerry" Murray, Collinsville, OK. making this reunion special. Several members were not able to attend this due to surgery, recovering from surgery or serious illness: Jim McDaniel, P.J. Roth, Hal Koster, Chris Garbow, Kenneth Durham, and Spencer Taylor. We missed each and every one of these men...

We were especially glad to see President Ron Conner and member Sam Davis back at the reunion and into the swing of things. Both have had serious health issues which they have overcome and are still smiling. Bob Jones was back this year, after missing last year due to hip replacement surgery.

Past Sec/Treas. Bob Jones was in the lobby this year, prior to departing for home, slipped and fell while attempting to sit on an art deco bench. "Doc" Langford just happened to be nearby and declared that Bob would be alright. We all checked on him when he, and his bride – Miss Mary, were checking out of the hotel and he assured us he was OK! Bob Jones is our most senior member and one of only two members who served in WWII, Korea AND Viet Nam. The other is P.T. Yowell (he lied about his age!).

Sadly each year we lose another member, spouse or family member of the association. The names of former 174th AHC members are added to Mel Lutgring's "Flag of Honor" each year and read aloud during the Memorial Service at our annual Saturday night banquet. This year we sadly said goodbye to the following soldiers of the 174th AHC who "Died After Tour" (DAT) during the past year: Jerry A. Simmons, 17 Jan. 2014, Robert V. O'Donnell, 3 Apr. 2014, Mike W.

Gunnels, 11 May 2014, Brent Barnes, 27 May 2014, William Conklin, 27 Jun. 2014, Albert Garza, 1 Jan. 2015, and Leroy Shelby, 3 Jan. 2015.

In addition, Ken Johnson's son, Kenny Jr. (age 53) was killed in a tragic motorcycle accident in April 2015. Kenny Jr. was also a U.S. Army veteran and helicopter repairman.

2015 Reunion attendees totaled 153 (74 members and 79 guests (wives, significant others, sons, daughters and/or grandkids!)).

The "Hospitality Room" was set up and stocked with Mel Lutgring's 174th helicopter memorabilia, Flag of Honor - scrap-books, photo albums, wash tubs full of ice for the sodas, kegs of beer iced down, all ready to go. Tables were set up along the wall loaded with snack food. One vendor, "Heliplaques," hosted by Paul Bartlett attended this year and sold VN patches and custom made wooden plaques (using cross sections of UH-1 main rotor blades). Thanks to Dennis Fisher and Darrell Bennett for gathering supplies at Sam's Club and keeping the room well stocked!

Once again our Ladies were a major part of the reunion. They were able to take advantage of the local shopping and visited various shops and malls to enjoy their spare time. Many were gone for hours and we sure did miss them!

The registration/sign-up table was set up Friday and kept Billy & Carolyn Wood, Nancy (Reinshagen) Hypes, and Charlie Doherty very involved for several hours. The Best Western Beach Front Hotel (Toni Richardson, bartenders Don Fuller, Danielle Cowart and entire hotel staff) did everything to make our reunion a total success! The hotel provided a continental breakfast each morning that gets better each year. Since our 174th members/guests had filled the Best Western to overflowing, several condos were rented next door at "The Breakers" for association members.

This year's members' reunion gift was a very nice dark navy blue umbrella with the 174th AHC "Nothing Impossible" unit patch on one side and three "nose art" logos (Dolphins, Sharks and Witch Doctors) on the opposite side. There are "extras" available for purchase through the 174th Company Store.

174th Company Store: "Company Store" manager, Mel Lutgring, assembled a team of helpers, Dee Lutgring, Darrell & Nancy Bennett to set up their sales operation in the hotel lobby on Friday/Saturday and sold unit shirts, hats, unit pins, decals, patches, blankets, polo shirts, with 174th AHC unit logos, "Dolphins," "Sharks," and "Witch Doctors." Thanks to Mel and crew for an exceptional job at the reunion and to Mel for all that he does year-round for the 174th AHC Assoc. and with the Company Store.

If you would like to have a Joe Kline "Nothing Impossible" numbered print for your local VFW Post, American Legion, Disabled American Veterans organization contact Mel Lutgring. He will mail you a print for only \$10.00. You will be expected to have the print framed and officially presented to your veteran's organization.

Friday Evening "Kentucky Derby (theme) Buffet and DJ Dance": Our ladies were 'decked out' in their finest spring outfits with marvelous, highly decorated Kentucky Derby hats for the affair.

The buffet was served in the Best Western hotel lobby, with seating in the lobby, hospitality room and under the tent on the patio. It was announced prior to the dinner the ladies hats would be judged after dinner in a ceremonial “promenade” under tent. Impartial judges provided by Best Western would judge the ladies’ Kentucky Derby hats and award cash prizes for 1st Place (\$100), 2nd Place (\$50) and 3rd Place (\$25). Winners were Helen Davis 1st Place, Lena Simpson 2nd Place and Joan Hardy (guest of Carl and Judy Muthersbaugh) 3rd Place. All of the ladies hats were spectacular and everyone really enjoyed this evening!

During and after Friday night’s dinner, local DJ, Steve Williams (USAF retired) entertained us with dance music from our Viet Nam days under the tent. “Doc” (Tom) Langford, Gene Teague and J.M. Nichols showed a lot of soul and they lit up the dance floor. Gene’s son, Bryon Teague brought him this year to the reunion from Texas and “Doc” Langford brought his son, Kirby also. A good time was had by all...

Friday’s “Silent Auction”: The presentation of silent auction items was handled by volunteer Dwight Wise. Dwight did an exceptional job of watching over all the donated items. Special thanks goes out to Bill Brown, master wood worker for his many hours of labor building the wood mountings for the UH-1 flight instruments and gauges in the auction. Thanks to all of the members and guests who donated wonderful items this year. The silent auction items were displayed from 1300 hrs to 1900 hrs Friday and winners were announced by President Conner under the tent that evening. The auction provided \$1,288.00 in proceeds.

Saturday’s 4th Annual Meeting of the “Patron & Pickle Juice Sisterhood” – The “Ladies Only” event was presided over by Charter member and “President for Life” Helen Davis, and Betty Fisher stood in as “Exalted Reader of the Rules” for Char McDaniel. Char was home in Springfield, VA nursing Jim back to health after open heart surgery.

Sam and Helen provided the extraordinary pink “Patron & Pickle Juice Sisterhood” T-shirts for the ladies and they were visible throughout as they conducted their “secret” initiation and danced to DJ Steve William’s lively music under the patio tent. Many new members were initiated including Ashley Koke (just turned 21!), Karen Farley, Irene Nunn, Lindsey Lutgring and the youngest new member – Zoey Lutgring (grand-daughter of Mel & Dee). A light lunch and “Smack Ass” wine was provided by Sam and Helen for our ladies. This has become a new tradition at the reunion and looks like it will continue...

Saturday Golf Tournament: This year was the 14th anniversary for the 174th AHC Association “Black Sam Kalagain Golf Classic”. Carl Muthersbaugh presented special 174th AHC Assoc. white embroidered golf hats to the players this year. There were ten players for this year’s tournament. Some players tried to play both Friday and Saturday, and discovered they weren’t getting any younger. Carl suggests they only play on Saturday next year!

Saturday afternoon Business Meeting: The official 174th AHC Association business meeting was called to order by President Conner at 1500 hrs., Saturday, 2 May 2015 with approximately 40 members in attendance and about twice that number remaining at the bar... The business meeting adjourned at 1525 hrs.

Past, First and Only Ever “Interim President” Wayne Lovett presented both President Ron Conner and Sec/Treasurer Billy Wood a very attractive laser engraved, wooden plaque “in recognition and

appreciation for..." their respective service to the 174th AHC Association. Both Conner and Wood also received an American Eagle statue "in appreciation..." from the members of the association.

Saturday evening 174th AHC Association "22nd Anniversary" Annual Reunion Banquet - Elks Lodge, FWB: Our dinner banquet was once again held at the FWB Elks Lodge. The "Social Hour" began at 1630 hrs. at the dining room bar. The Elks Club Restaurant is located a short distance from our Best Western Beachfront Hotel on the road to Destin. A combination of round tables and long tables were used as the Elks waiters and waitresses served dinner to 174th members and guests already seated at their tables!

Steve Kennedy offered a very appropriate invocation. The national anthem was played and the pledge of allegiance recited by all present.

Dinner at the Elks Club started at 1730 hrs after welcoming remarks and announcements by President Conner. The prime rib was very delicious, as was the sliced baked ham. Our meal included salad, rolls, green beans, scalloped potatoes and delicious deserts.

Special introductions were made by President Conner: He recognized all of the 174th "Boat People" and asked them to stand and accept a round of applause. He also recognized all of the members' guests and family members.

President Conner then expressed the association's sincere appreciation for all that the Best Western Beach Front Hotel staff does each year for our annual reunions. Recognized and introduced were Toni Richardson, Assistant General Manager, Danielle Cowart, "Swizzle Stik" bar tender and Don Fuller, "Cabana" bar tender. Don Fuller was attending the banquet for the very first time and was asked to come to the podium for special action! Don was presented a "Horse Collar Mirror" for all of his superb service to 174th AHC Association members over the past ten years or so. Don had actually bid on the horse collar mirror in the silent auction, but he was outbid! It was decided by a few members that they would buy and give this item to Don as a special gift. He was totally surprised and speechless.

The "Flag of Honor" and "Missing Man Memorial" were set-up on stage in tribute to our 174th AHC fallen soldiers by Mel Lutgring. We sorely missed having our traditional "bagpiper" Jim McDaniel pipe "Amazing Grace" for the memorial service this year; however, Jim provided an audio recording of Amazing Grace and DJ Steve Williams stepped up to the plate and played the recording. President Conner introduced the widow of Mike Gunnels and her sister Naomi Lamartiniere, who attended the reunion, both of Marksville, LA. President Conner then read a very special memorial note written by Mel Lutgring about his best friend, former 174th AHC Assoc. member, Mike Gunnels, who passed away 11 May 2014. Master Sergeant (ret) Mike Gunnels was the last and longest serving 174th AHC veteran, attaining that distinction with two years Active Duty in the U.S. Army and forty years military service in the Army National Guard.

Recognition was made of First Time Reunion Attendees: John W. Wall, Enterprise, AL and Gerald "Jerry" Murray, Collinsville, OK. Both were presented their "Nothing Impossible" Joe Kline prints by President Conner.

Incoming President Ralph E. "Butch" Elliott III presented a most interesting presentation and slide show on the "Return to Viet Nam" tour of February 2015. A group of fifteen 174th AHC

Association members, wives and/or guests flew from Los Angeles to Taipei to Viet Nam, arriving at Tan Son Nhut airport. They spent fourteen days touring South and North Viet Nam and many old 174th AHC base camps, landing zones and the site in Laos where Butch Elliott was shot down and earned the Silver Star! It was only too bad we didn't have two hours for the presentation...

As the banquet ended, our DJ played "You Are My Sunshine" and the entire room joined in and sang together...

Next Reunion: 29 April – 1 May 2016

Sunday Morning Devotional: A non-denominational devotional service was led Sunday morning by Steve Kennedy in the Best Western hotel "Hospitality Room." Several hymns were led by Butch Elliott. Wilma Kennedy did a special solo using what is called "Sacred Signing" to the beautiful, hallowed song "I Wonder..." A very sincere, heartfelt devotion was given by "my other brother" Darrell Bennett. Approximately 30-35 persons attended the devotional.

In conclusion: A very sincere and special thanks goes out to our new incoming 174th AHC Association Officers, President "Butch" Elliott, Vice President Dennis Fisher and Sec/Treas. James "Jim" Young, who will serve for the next several years. We look forward to their leadership and the plans/ideas they will bring to our organization.

And as always, this reunion would not be what it is today without the dedication, loyalty and desire to please from the entire staff of the Best Western Beach Front Hotel, FWB, FL. Toni Richardson, Assistant General Manager of the hotel deserves all kinds of "hero medals" for the hours upon hours of work, research, coordination and various "arrangements" she made and/or caused to happen on our behalf. Toni Richardson is one of the finest employees we've had the pleasure to work with since these reunions began in 1993. Thank you "Hot Lips" for everything...

Billy R. Wood

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