



Newsletter of the USMC/Vietnam Helicopter Pilots & Aircrew Reunion

15 NOVEMBER '94

FROM THE REUNION HOOCH..... Another R&R party is in the books. The Pensacola Reunion (forever to be known affectionately by the code name "Operation Monsoon"), has been completed. From the tone of the *after action* letters that we've been receiving, it sounds like a good time was had by all. The total attendance figures (as in *body count*) are in, and another one of our traditions is still intact. We once again nearly doubled in size at this reunion over the previous reunion. The Pensacola get together was right at 1,000 happy (but wet) campers. A very special thanks to all who helped out to make this our largest and most successful reunion to date.

After the first two days of beautiful weather in Pensacola, as all those of you who attended know, two weather patterns joined forces 75 miles due south of Pensacola and headed inland very quickly. It happened so fast that the weather bureau didn't even have time to put a name on it, or evacuate the beach as they had done for a less powerful storm during the July 4th weekend a few months

earlier in the summer. We'll put a name on it though, 1369. It's in honor of Harvey Bell, the '94 reunion coordinator and author of the Vietnam book of the same name. Again, as all of you know who attended, it was Harvey who contacted Johnny Cash for our Saturday night phone patch into the assembled crowd at the Clarion ballroom. Nice job, Harv. And speaking of hard workers, there isn't enough space in this newsletter to tell you of all the effort that was put out by "Frenchy" LaFountaine. As mentioned at Trader's and at the Clarion, without exaggeration, he did the work of twenty people. We all owe these two a tremendous debt of gratitude for everything that they not only did during the last year in helping to plan out the reunion, but also for all of their efforts in helping us to further organize our very special group. Additionally, there were many others who also stepped forward to help out at the reunion, and they will be listed later in this newsletter. As you know, this is truly an *all volunteer* force. No one gets paid for their many hours of hard work. We'd also like to thank the people of Pensacola for the red carpet welcome.

REUNION '94 \$\$ TRIVIA, etc.



DID YOU KNOW THAT....

It took over a year to plan.

Was the most challenging of all reunions to plan due to the multi-hotel/beach scenario.

Required an advance party visit by planners prior to the event.

Was the most expensive reunion to put together thus far, but we charged the least per person of all reunions due to large turn out.

The total catering bill was over \$40,000, and this was a much better deal than we had with the original caterer that we started with, but had to let go.

Over \$2,500 was spent on just shipping all the reunion "goodies". The "goodies" price..... \$30,000+

For the events at Trader Jon's / Seville Quarter, we had to bring in buses from Mobile, and paid \$2,500, due to the local demand.

Because of the heavy rains, that it cost us thousands more to tear down everything on the beach and reconstruct the stage, big screen T.V.'s, etc., inside.

For this reunion, we hired a private security firm for four days.

Some of the port-a-potties (also known as HQMC, I MAF HQ, Wing HQ, etc.) blew over in the gale force winds (shit happens).

The *marathon* Wall ceremony on Saturday, was featured on the local T.V. station.

The street signs on the corner next to *Trader Jon's* were re-named *Gate 2* and *BC* streets by the city, at our request (we now have 'em).

We hired a professional video photographer for the reunion. He shot over 15 hours of film, which he has edited to approx. 11/2 hours, and it is now available to all. (see the ad in this newsletter)

The best comment heard about the monsoon conditions was from one of the wives....*Had a great time, felt like I did a 13 month tour in four days, but I think you guys over did it on the weather special effects!*

We didn't break anything big this time. Pensacola loves us, wants us back, and we shall return. But, the next reunion will be held out west.

OOORAH

MISSING IN ACTION

After Tropical Storm 1369, our banner that had been lashed to the pool area fence behind the Best Western came up missing. It was the white banner with red lettering that read **MMAF "O" CLUB (EAST)**. If anyone knows what happened to it, please give us a call. The organization paid a couple of hundred dollars to have it made just for the reunions, and would rather not have to make up another one at an additional expense to the members. If anyone accidentally took it home as a souvenir, we hereby grant a one-time amnesty for its safe return. No questions asked.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO BERT ZWAAGSTRA, SCOTTY ROBERTS AND DAVE SCHMITZ FOR THEIR GREAT FORMATION FLYOVERS PERFORMED OVER PENSACOLA BEACH IN THEIR T-28'S AND T-6. IT WAS A NICELY ADDED SPECIAL TOUCH TO THE REUNION. FYI, WE WERE ALSO SUPPOSED TO HAVE AN H-46 ON STATIC DISPLAY AT THE BEACH, BUT THE RESERVE SQUADRON FROM NORFOLK COULDN'T GET AIRBORNE.....

THE FOLLOWING REUNION ATTENDEES ARE RECOGNIZED FOR HAVING THE BEST RETURN ADDRESSES LISTED ON THE ENVELOPES THEY SENT IN.....

Jerry McClees
5709 Lois Lane

Ralph Nicholas
4151 Clinton Cemetery Road

Larry Turner
(still flying '34's...see below)

TURNER COPTER SERVICE, INC.
Route 1 Box 67
Elliott, Iowa 51532



The USMC/Vietnam Helicopter Pilots & Aircrew Reunion, Inc. is a non-profit corporation. The "POP A SMOKE" newsletter offices are located at 11151 Alejo Place, San Diego, CA 92124. Our Phone/Fax number is (619) 279-5549. The newsletters, published four times a year, provide information on the group and its reunions. This veteran's organization is incorporated in Arkansas. The annual newsletter subscription rate is \$20.00.

FREE FIRE ZONE



INCOMING!!..... mail, not arty. The following letters to the editor reflect the views of the readers. They'll probably also re-ignite thoughts of long ago memories of *no shit* war stories, good friends, fluctuating oil pressures, taking fire from "friendly" villes, "one pers", emergency recon extracts, and those imaginary (but very real sounding at the time) engine noises, that always occurred in the middle of a *hot* night medevac. And after the mission, they would always.... *"ground check - O.K."*

YOU CAN'T MAKE THIS STUFF UP !

The following was received prior to the reunion.....

Enclosed is my entry fee and bail bond guarantee. Spoke to Connie Sillard and he informs me that he has contacted over 60 former 367ers.

WARREN CRETNEY

editor's note: As far as we know, Warren didn't require bailing out. Con did a helluva job with SCARFACE.

The '94 directory has Lewis Zeigler's name but no contact point. The lost are found. Story follows..... Lew is an FAA air carrier inspector based in Frankfurt, Germany. He gets on in Frankfurt to give us a check ride to St. Petersburg, Russia, via Warsaw, Poland. Somewhere along the way, the USMC word is used. Then the magic word "H-34", and then "Pensacola", "Danang", etc. My fellow crewmembers are former USAF jet jocks. The same jet jocks who love to use the terms "rotorhead" and "jarhead". Now they are trapped, because the ACI is a former "rotor wing jarhead". As you'd expect from a USMC/RVN vet, I took full advantage of the moment. Getting even is so much fun!

"GOAT" HOGAN

The following comments are representative of the *after action* letters that we have been receiving.....

We really enjoyed the reunion at Pensacola Beach and appreciate all the time and effort you and your coordinators put in to make it a success. We're already looking forward to the next one!

Thanks for another great time. I am personally embarrassed by the antics of a few drunks who tried to disrupt the Johnny Cash phone call on Saturday night. They are not representative of this fine group of Marines. Keep up the great work, see 'ya at the next one.



YOUR INPUTS ARE DESIRED FOR FOR FUTURE POP A SMOKE NEWSLETTERS. IF YOU HAVE SOMETHING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE INCLUDED (SHORT STORIES, SQDRN. INSIGNIAS, IN-COUNTRY WAR STORIES, PICTURES, CARTOONS, NEWSPAPER ARTICLES, ETC.), SEND THEM IN TO OUR SAN DIEGO ADDRESS THAT IS LISTED ON PAGE #3. ALSO, IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE A VOLUNTEER IN THE GROUP OR WORK AT THE NEXT REUNION, WE'D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU.



**UNCLE SAM WANTED
YOU ONCE, NOW YOUR
VIETNAM BUDDIES
WANT TO FIND YOU!**

The Reunion has just developed a new service for its members. We've named it **THE BASE LOCATOR**. SLJO John "J.D." Barber is the one doing all of the work on this project for us. J.D. has purchased a CD ROM computer program at his own expense that lists approximately 70 million names throughout the country. A nominal fee will be charged for each name that is researched. If you would like more info on how to find someone that you've been curious about since Vietnam, and who we have not yet found and published in our directory, send a SASE to:

**JD. BARBER
72 Lorraine Street
Weymouth MA 02189**



With the holidays just around the corner, we want to wish a Merry Christmas to.....

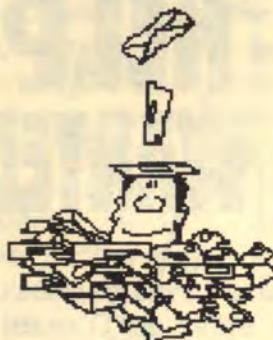
AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY

With gift giving in mind, don't forget to get something for yourself also. Remember that we still have an ample supply of Reunion '94 memorabilia items available. Just send in the *LUCKY CASH SALES* form that is enclosed in this mailing. This would also be a good time to get the Reunion '94 video that we have had professionally done (have your wife get it for you). See below.

If you would like a remembrance of the 1994 reunion in Pensacola, now is your chance. Cedar Crest Studio has produced a VHS format tape of the reunion. Highlights include activities of the attendees, the welcome aboard happy hour (that lasted all day and night), ceremonies at Trader Jon's and the Wall South, the Johnny Cash phone patch, in-country helo films, the infamous Pensacola monsoon, and much more. The price for this unique, one-of-a-kind, 1 1/2 hour film is only \$19.95 + \$4.00 (S&H). Send in your order today to:

CEDAR CREST STUDIO
(USMC Reunion Film)
P.O. Box 28
Mountain Home, AR 72653

OOPS!



A few of the 1994 directories that were mailed out this past summer contained some errors. The most common error noticed was that page #42 was missing. If your directory has this problem, or any other discrepancy, make a note of it and return the directory to us in San Diego. We will send you a brand new error-free version.

If you were a last minute "FNG" walk on at the '94 reunion in Pensacola, and did not receive your directory and other initial join-up items, contact us for a complete "FNG" start-up kit.

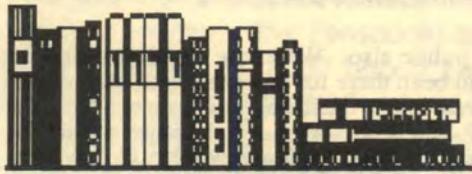
If you didn't receive all of the reunion package price items, i.e. T-shirts, visors, drink cups, etc., call Frenchy @ (508) 758-2314 for an emergency resupply.

GOMENASAI. G.I.

ODDS & ENDS

There is a book about to be published on "THE WALL SOUTH". Our ceremony held there during the Pensacola reunion will be a part of the final chapter. Once again our thanks to Lenny Collins and all of his volunteers who went the extra mile to have the memorial built.

On a sad note— We have received word through Ralph Nicholas that one of our most senior aircrewmen, Avery Norris, has passed away. "Gunny" Norris was one of the Marine Corps' pioneers in helicopter aviation. He flew helos in both Korea and Vietnam. Semper Fi, Marine.



FOR SALE BY OWNER

**Complete Set of
Encyclopedia Britannica**

Excellent Condition

No Longer Needed

F#@king Wife Knows Everything



**SPECIAL THANKS TO THE
FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS FOR
THEIR ASSISTANCE IN MAKING
REUNION '94 SUCH A SUCCESS.....**

SCOOP GUNNIS
LARRY BANCELLS
CHIC SCHOENER
WALT WISE
AL BARBOUR
JOHNELENE LaFOUNTAINE
MADELINE HERMAN
PHIL BECKERICH
ED EGAN
MIKE LEAHY
TRADER JON
SHIRLEY CRONLEY
C.J. POGANY
PETE SMITH
JEFF BURSTEIN
CON SILARD
GEORGE CASEY
LANA EWING
JOHN P. DONOGHUE
J.D. BARBER
TIM BURGESS
AL MOREY
TOM & NANCY WARNING
PAT GRAZIANO
LARRY WERT

.....and the many others too numerous to mention, who volunteered their time at the registration/check-in area when our position was being overrun.

AN OPEN LETTER TO ANYONE WHO SERVED IN VIETNAM

Dear Hero,

I was in my twenties during the Vietnam era. I was a single mother and, I'm sad to say, I was probably one of the most self-centered people on this planet. To be perfectly honest...painfully honest...I didn't care one way or the other about the war. All I cared about was ME—how I looked, what I wore, and where I was going. I worked and I played. I was never politically involved with anything, and I allowed my opinions to be formed by the media. It happened without my ever being aware. I listened to the protest songs and I watched the six o'clock news and I listened to all the people who were doing all of the talking. After awhile, I began to repeat their words and, if you were to ask me, I'd have told you I was against the war. It was very popular. Everyone was doing it, and we never saw what it was doing to our men. All we were shown was what they were doing to the people of Vietnam.

My brother joined the Navy and then he was sent to Vietnam. When he came home, I repeated the words to him. It surprised me at how angry he became. I hurt him very deeply and there were years of separation—not only of miles, but also of character. I still didn't understand.

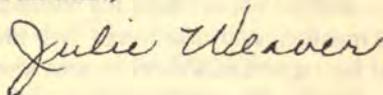
In fact, I didn't understand anything...until one day I opened my newspaper and saw the anguished face of a Vietnam veteran. The picture was taken at the opening of the Vietnam memorial in Washington, D.C. His countenance revealed the terrible burden of his soul. As I looked at his picture and his tears, I finally understood a tiny portion of what you had given for us and what we had done to you. I understood that I had been manipulated, but I also knew that I had failed to think for myself. It was like waking up out of a nightmare, except that the nightmare was real. I didn't know what to do.

One day about three years ago, I went to a member of the church I attended at that time, because he had served in Vietnam. I asked him if had been in Vietnam, and he got a look on his face and said, "Yes." Then, I took his hand, looked him square in the face, and said, "Thank you for going." His jaw dropped, he got an amazed look on his face, and then he said, "No one has ever said that to me." He hugged me and I could see that he was about to get tears in his eyes. It gave me an idea, because there is much more that needs to be said. How do we put into words...all the regret of so many years? I don't know, but when I have an opportunity I take it...so here goes.

Have YOU been to Vietnam? If so, I have something I want to say to you—THANK YOU FOR GOING! Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Please forgive me for my insensitivity. I don't know how I could have been so blind, but I was. When I woke up, you were wounded and the damage was done, and I don't know how to fix it. I will never stop regretting my actions and I will never let it happen again.

Please understand that I am speaking for the general public also. We know we blew it and we don't know how to make it up to you. We wish we had been there for you when you came home from Vietnam because you were a hero and you deserved better. Inside of you there is a pain that will never completely go away...and you know what? It's inside of us, too; because we let you down, we hurt ourselves, too. And we all know it...and we suffer guilt and we don't know what to do...so we cheer for our troops and write letters to "any soldier" and we hang out the yellow ribbons and fly the flag and we love America. We love you too, even if it doesn't feel like it to you. I know in my heart that when we cheer wildly for our troops, part of the reason is trying to make up for Vietnam. And while it may work for us, it does nothing for you. We failed you. You didn't fail us, but we failed you and we lost our only chance to be grateful to you at the time when you needed and deserved it. We have disgraced ourselves and brought shame to our country. We did it and we need your forgiveness. Please say you will forgive us and please take your rightful places as heroes of our country. We have learned a terribly painful lesson at your expense and we don't know how to fix it.

From the heart,



Julie Weaver
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Burleson, TX 76028
(817) 295-6287