

2014 Reunion After Action Report

August 14, 2014

Attention All Hotel Company Marines and Corpsmen:

The reunion in San Diego has concluded and, by now, almost everyone has returned home--although a few are on extended tours. It was reported that a good time was had by all. The Crowne Plaza Hotel treated us to a good location, a good breakfast, and a good banquet dinner.

I am sitting on the patio drinking a glass of left over Hotel Company wine and writing this report; ignoring the sh** load of work that stacked up while I finished last minute reunion details and the other stuff that came up while I was gone. Thanks to other attorneys I work with, my cases were all covered and continued to my return date because they understand how important these reunions are to me.

Most importantly, I survived. I have been helping out with the previous 6 reunions, however I agreed to host this year's reunion in a moment of complete insanity. Evidently, I had forgotten the unofficial Marine Corps motto, "Never Volunteer". Leading up to the reunion I found myself saying, "I will never do this again as long as I live". Now that it is over, I think maybe it wasn't so bad after all and I might just be willing to do it again in about 20 years; well, maybe only ten years. I could not have done it without all of the help I received from many individuals.

This reunion was marked by the attendance of many 1st timers. I hope they all got the same things out of this that I have over the years and they will return on a yearly basis--or as often as they able.

The attendees covered the spread: we had Marines and Corpsmen attending from Hotel's initial entry into Vietnam in April 1966 to February 1971, literally, the guys turning on the lights and the last man out who turned off the light.

With the large number of first timers came the presentation of a large number of Hotel Company Coins. This is a task I truly love.

Larry Tyler announced the launching of the Hotel web site. It can be found at: <http://hotel25vv.org/> Check out the site and send Larry your info, your photos, your writings, your memories and anything else you want to share. It is a work in progress. The best thing you can do is contribute. It is OUR site.

Two highlights of the reunion were the tours of Camp Pendleton and MCRD.

At Camp Pendleton we laid a wreath at the 5th Marine memorial garden. The Corps had their own press people covering the event. The article and photos can be found at:

<http://www.dvidshub.net/news/138975/vietnam-veterans-attend-wreath-laying-memorial-garden#.U-0QOSgn1sR>

The memorial has a bell from Go Noi Island. The bell was presented by the 27th Marines. I asked how the 27th ended up with a bell that should have been ours. Capt. Drez gave me a plausible explanation which, if believed, gives them some right to the bell. Having viewed the entire memorial, including the bell, Capt. Drez suggested that we start work on our own contribution to the memorial on behalf of Hotel Company. I have nominated him as chair of the committee. Contact him directly to volunteer for duty on this committee.

The unit was guided around Camp Pendleton under the care of Capt. Burns. He was presented with a Company Coin and made an honorary member of Hotel Company--an honor for which he gratefully thanked us. A surprise visit was made by Major General Lawrence D. Nicholson, Commanding General, 1st Marine Division. This was probably to the consternation of the troops on the ground. The last thing an enlisted man wants to see is the Commanding General of his division. Major General Nicholson addressed our unit in a impassioned speech that demonstrated his commitment to the Corps, his own troops, as well as the members of Hotel Company. Sitting in the front row, I saw the tears well up in his eyes as he discussed the treatment that many returning Vietnam era Marines suffered as they landed in the states.

At the planning meeting, the status and logistics of the 2015 reunion to be held in Pidgeon Forge, Tennessee were discussed. While the host, Jim Hayden, is moving ahead with the planning, a date has not been designated. This should be forthcoming shortly. Maintaining the plan to host the reunions in alternating years on the East Coast, West Coast, and Middle

America, the location for 2016 was discussed and agreed that the offer to host the 2016 reunion by Lt. Homer "Bo" Brookshire should be accepted before he regains his sanity. Lt. Brookshire has tentatively identified Winston Salem, North Carolina as the location. However, as always, everything is subject to change.

We also discussed the 1st Marine Division Association as a possible affiliate with whom we might want to align our reunions. It was agreed that we would continue to be autonomous, but look into meeting at the locations and at times they have designated in order to obtain favorable hotel rates and allow attendees who desire to attend both functions the opportunity to maximize their presence. At this time, it is merely a concept to be explored.

My only disappointment with the reunion was my inability to spend as much time with my fellow Marines and Corpsmen. I was too busy stepping-and-fetching to commit the time I have in the past to talking with everyone.

However, there were a couple of moments at the reunion which made every hair-pulling minute of preparation worthwhile. Robert van Leeuwen came to me and, with tears in his eyes, told me he had just discovered that a Marine who he thought had been killed over 45 years ago was still alive. Another moment that brought tears to my eyes was when my daughter, who was attending for the first time and had spent countless hours helping me, bought a belt from Frank Armenta. These belts are designed to commemorate our service in Vietnam. She had Frank imprint "Proud Daughter of..." along with my service dates, a proud moment in my life.

I sincerely hope the reunion was enjoyed by all. If you approached me and asked me to do anything for you in the future, please send me an email to remind me otherwise it is not likely to get done.

Semper Fi and start planning for next year.

Jay