

Silver Spur Reunion 2016
20-23 April, Branson, Missouri
After Action Report

The Radisson Hotel hosted our reunion in Branson. The location was in the heart of the Branson show district, and also adjacent to many restaurants, with a bar and restaurant inside the hotel. Silver Spurs enjoyed two complimentary breakfast coupons for every night booked in the hotel.

Most arrivals came into town Wednesday, 20 April, and the registration desk was ready for them. We had about 70 attendees. Two former commanders, Nathan Pulliam and Robert Witcher, attended. Two men from C Troop, one from B Troop, and one from the 575th Maintenance Detachment attended. This reunion was the first attended by 12 men, and we hope it will not be their last. The very well-attended hospitality suite was open throughout the reunion and went through a lot of beer. Spurs met there to talk and compare war stories. The Radisson is one of the few hotels which allow us to bring in food and drink.

Those who attended their first reunion were David Baillie, Robert Bretschneider, Henry Brown, Olen Clary, Sid Cowand, Russ Good, Lewis Rowan, Paul Schneider, Charles Skitsko, Kenneth Therrien, Charles Womble, and Larry Penrose from C Troop. Also present as an honored guest was Jan Jackson, widow of Silver Spur Joe Jackson.

John Pepper provided his usual outstanding Cavalry table display, which the hotel allowed to stand in a prominent lobby location during the entire reunion period.

Our first big gathering, a welcome reception, occurred Wednesday evening and gave all arrivals a chance to renew friendships and make new ones.

On Thursday, registration continued briefly just prior to our business meeting. Since President Al LaGrange, who conducted the meeting, declined to run for reelection, John "Waldo" Pepper was elected to serve as president for the next two years. Tom Hennessy was reelected vice president, Bill McCalister was reelected treasurer, and McCalister agreed to continue as head of the reunion committee. Chuck Oualline agreed to continue as Bill's assistant. Charles Stutzman was re-elected as Membership Committee Chairman. Clayton Marsh also volunteered to continue the task of forwarding mass e-mails to our members. We really appreciate this, Clayton. Roger "Bear" Young remains our Webmaster, of course, since he could not be present this year to defend himself. His website is invaluable in attracting troopers lost to us for many years, and in keeping all of us informed.

Thursday afternoon, 46 troop members and their ladies boarded busses for a short ride to the theater of the "Hits of the 60s and 50s Too Show." That's exactly what it was, songs we all loved accompanied by dancing. But the best part included us. When they found out we were coming, early in the year, show management requested any old photos we had from our time in Vietnam. I passed the request to Roger Young, and he put

together a fantastic disc of photos. This theater edited Roger's disc (but used everything) and set it all to live music from our time in Nam. The video was shown on the large screens, with the preface, "Some of the men in this video may be in the audience today." We were. They gave McCalister a thumb drive of their finished product, with permission to reproduce. Bill has promised to send duplicates to all who attended the reunion.

Later that evening, 37 of us boarded busses to travel to the nearby "Baldknobbers Jamboree Show." The Baldknobbers were a vigilante band which met atop a hill's "bald knob" in early, lawless days of Branson. The show included classic and contemporary country music, some gospel, and lots of clean comedy, which reflected the character of the Ozarks. This longest-running show is the first which started the show business industry in Branson.

On Friday morning, Chuck Oualline conducted a moving Memorial Ceremony. But just before the proceedings began, we had a little excitement. The hotel fire alarm sounded, security personnel asked us to evacuate, and we were led outside for about 30 minutes in the parking lot. Apparently it was a false alarm. We were fortunate this did not happen during our ceremony.

A Missing Man Table was set up at the front of the room, and Chuck first gave an explanation of the meaning of all items on the table. He then led all in the Pledge of Allegiance, and read the names and dates of passing of the 18 men we have lost since the last reunion, or of whose passing we were not aware during the last reunion. Next came the actual Memorial Ceremony, when the names of our KIAs were read during a DVD presentation, professionally produced by John Pepper. Our fallen include one whose remains may have been returned from Cambodia, but who has not been identified (Gregory Antunano.) We included the four KIAs suffered by the present-day Silver Spurs during a tour in Iraq, The ceremony concluded with the playing of Taps with the troop at Present Arms.

That afternoon, 45 Silver Spurs and their ladies loaded up to "Ride the Ducks," an outing which many considered to be the most fun of this reunion. A DUKW is an amphibious, wheeled, World War II truck. In Branson, a fleet of these has been rebuilt, refurbished, maintained, and outfitted to carry 35 passengers each. Two of these "Ducks" picked us up at the hotel. They took us for a tour through the show district, through the mountains, through an exhibit of antique military vehicles atop one mountain, then across the dam and INTO Table Rock Lake for an actual swim! The captains invited us to "drive" the ducks on the lake, and many of us did. The Ducks then swam/rolled up an exit ramp and carried us to a nearby paddlewheel showboat, the Branson Belle. We went aboard, were served dinner as the boat got underway, and enjoyed an unusual show while sailing on the lake on this large boat, actually propelled by a paddlewheel. After this cruise, the Ducks returned us to the hotel.

Saturday morning, Bill McCalister led an informal Personal History Forum. Insights and memories of the war years were shared. Bill also entertained ideas for when and where the next reunion might be held. He asked for any expressed interest for a

reunion in 2017, which is the 50-year anniversary of A Troop's arrival in Vietnam. Several ideas were discussed. Bill also requested that we fill out and return the comment sheets included in our registration packets. Suggestions were noted, but it is too early for any decisions.

Saturday afternoon, 44 were taken by bus to another musical show, "New Jersey Nights," featuring music by Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. This was another fun time together, in our own seating section.

We met again at 1700 on Saturday for cocktails in our private banquet room at the hotel. Special thanks are due to Major General Dennis Kenneally, who graciously hosted the banquet bar and bought everyone's drinks the entire evening. Thank you, sir.

The Missing Man Table again greeted Spurs as they entered. About 70 Spurs and their guests attended the banquet. As with all our events, the U.S. flag and our guidon were prominently posted. (This guidon will be in the possession of each Silver Spur President during his two-year term.) The "Wings of Swing Combo" provided enjoyable music during the reception and meal.

Before dinner, Bill McCalister welcomed all and led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. Waldo Pepper led us in prayer. Chuck Oualline again gave an explanation of the Missing Man Table, for the benefit of guests who had not been at the Memorial Ceremony. We toasted our fallen and missing. Nathan Pulliam, the first commander of our unit, delivered his commander's remarks.

Outgoing President Al LaGrange presented Col. Pulliam with a working, firing replica of a Model 1860 cap-and-ball revolver in a presentation case, on behalf of all the Silver Spurs. Al remarked that we wanted Nate to have a sidearm like the one he was issued when he reported to his first Cavalry unit.

We did not want the night to end, and the night did not end for some who did not have early flights. The downstairs bar rocked on until early morning.

Bill McCalister should be commended for all his very hard work as the Reunion Committee Chairman, while also acting as the unit's Treasurer and paying the bills. Russ Good, a first-time attendee, is also commended and thanked. Russ is a professional photographer and voluntarily made photos during all our events. He has volunteered to mail a disc of all the photos to anyone who was there and requests one. Thank you, Russ, for supporting the troops.

Roger Young, our webmaster, is a member who spent countless hours on his outstanding website to update all the reunion information and to keep track of our losses. John Pepper also was invaluable in planning, printing name cards and table cards, and providing the very professional video used in our Memorial Ceremony. John also designed and produced the outstanding printed program for our banquet, which included

descriptive depictions of Air Cavalry troopers. Please thank your daughter, John, for her help with some of this.

Most of us departed on Sunday, 24 April 2016. We had renewed old friendships and forged some new ones. We hope that our brothers from other troops and from the 575th will return and bring others. I said this in previous after action reports: It is sad to think that all of us might not be around for the next reunion in 2017 or 2018. I pray it is not so. But reality and age tell me that it is likely. Each time we meet could be our last. So, don't blow off the next reunion. Don't put off attendance until the one after that. Be there. For each other. And for loads of fun, just like old times.

Chuck Oualline
2016/2018 Reunion Committee