

Silver Spur Reunion 2018
16-20 May, Denver, Colorado
After-Action Report

The Holiday Inn, Denver-East (Stapleton) hosted our reunion. The location was adjacent to many restaurants, with a bar and small restaurant inside the hotel. Bill McCalister, Reunion Chairman, provided all with a list of suggested eating places and directions. Much larger accommodations were under construction inside the hotel, but not complete as promised. We made it work anyway.

Most arrivals came into town Wednesday, 16 May, with a few arriving early. Three former commanders, Nathan Pulliam, Robert Witcher, and Bud Smith, attended. One man each from B Troop and C Troop joined us, and we are always glad to have other than Silver Spurs. This was the first reunion attended by Gunnar Schalin, Paul Clergy, Mike Cook, and Don Weems with wife Linda, and we hope it will not be their last. The hospitality suite was open throughout the reunion but got off to a slow start, then caught up when Waldo and others began showing videos of our wartime actions.

John (Waldo) Pepper, our president, provided his usual outstanding Cavalry table display. The hotel allowed us to place it in a prominent lobby location during the entire reunion period, and the assistant manager remarked that it was the most interesting he had ever seen.

Our first big gathering, a welcome reception, occurred Wednesday evening and gave all arrivals a chance to renew friendships and catch up. We completely took over the hotel bar.

On Thursday morning, Chuck Oualline conducted our memorial ceremony using the video of names which was produced by Waldo some years ago. A Missing Man Table was set up at the rear of the room, and Chuck first gave an explanation of the meaning of all items on the table. Gunnar Schalin had attended the dedication of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Monument in Arlington Cemetery in April, and gave a report. Gunnar said the monument is in a prominent location near the Tomb of the Unknowns, and over 3,000 attended the dedication. This granite monument, depicting a Huey helicopter, is the result of four years of persistence by the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association. It honors all lost crewmembers, not just pilots. Gunnar reported that at least two other Silver Spurs, MG Dennis Kenneally and Ambassador Mike Lemmon, also attended.

Just before our memorial ceremony at our last reunion, a false fire alarm required all of us to briefly evacuate the building. This time we had different excitement. Chuck nearly passed out, Bob Witcher briefly took over the reading of names, and then Chuck was able to finish. Turns out it had nothing to do with heart issues, as some feared, but Chuck was only dehydrated, a common problem in the mile-high city.

Our fallen comrades include one who was MIA for years, whose remains may have been returned from Cambodia, but who has not been identified (Gregory Antunano).

Thursday evening, over thirty of us boarded a bus to attend a play, Murder in Hollywood, at nearby Adams Mystery Playhouse. A surprise greeted us as we boarded our bus, which turned out to be a “party bus,” with a darkened, somewhat open area between opposing wall seats, colored strobe lights, and a dance pole! You can imagine what the atmosphere inspired. During the play, teams were made up of tables which competed to solve the murder mystery. Unfortunately, none of the Silver Spur tables cracked the case. The contest was won by some unknown civilians. The Adams owner acknowledged the Silver Spurs, and asked us to stand with all other veterans who were present.

President John Pepper ran our business meeting on Friday morning. He was railroaded to remain president, as were all the rest of us, to continue our present positions. Therefore, Tom Hennessy remains the vice president, and Bill McCalister was reelected treasurer and head of the reunion committee. Chuck Oualline agreed to continue as Bill’s assistant. Charles Stutzman was reelected as Membership Committee Chairman. Clayton Marsh and Roger Young were not present to defend themselves, so we assume (hope) that Clayton will continue the task of forwarding mass e-mails to our members and that Roger “Bear” Young remains our Webmaster. His website is likely the best and most complete veteran website in existence.

Waldo entertained ideas for where the next reunion might be held in 2020. Cities mentioned were Branson, San Antonio, Austin, Savannah, and Dothan/Ft. Rucker. The Reunion Committee discouraged a vote on the cities, because they feared they might not be able to deliver reunion plans for the winner. Suggestions were noted, but it is too early for any decisions. The reunion guys will gather information from these suggested locations during the next year.

That evening, 24 Silver Spurs and their ladies loaded up in another party bus for a short ride into the mountains just west of Denver. Mount Vernon Country Club is atop one of those mountains and offers a sweeping view of Denver and its lights at night. We enjoyed fine drinks and a fantastic meal as we took in this view. Then the bus returned us to the hotel. We thank Bill McCalister, member of this club, for hosting and allowing us to be there.

We met again at 1700 on Saturday for cocktails in our private banquet room at the hotel. The Missing Man Table again greeted Spurs as they entered. About 53 Spurs and their guests attended the banquet. As with all our events, the U.S. flag and our guidon were prominently posted. (This guidon is in the possession of each Silver Spur President during his two-year term.)

Reunion Chairman Bill McCalister surprised all of us by arranging the singing performance of a very talented and very young lady, still attending middle school in Denver. Her name is Emelise Munoz, only 12 years old, and she kept us entertained for

almost an hour with a variety of country, pop, Americana, and folk songs. She is very professional and versatile. As thanks, we gathered a collection toward her college fund. (She had volunteered to perform for us veterans.)

After Emelize finished her set, we were treated to a second surprise performance by an even younger singer, 6-year-old Gus Bower, Bill McCalister's grandson. He asked to take the stage and sang "Country Roads," assisted by Emelize on the sound controls, and he led the audience in singing the last verse! These two young singers were delightful, and Gus surprised even his grandfather.

Before dinner, Bill McCalister welcomed all and led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. Ed Roffe 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. As the most elder among us, he said that he had been privileged to talk to some veterans of the Civil War in his lifetime. He pointed out that in 1963, about when many of us entered the Army, the First World War had been over for the same period of time as the Vietnam War's end to the present.

We did not want the night to end, and it did not end for some who did not have early flights. The hotel 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. Bill spends a lot of time in Denver, where his two daughters reside, and he arranged this reunion almost singlehandedly.

Roger Young, our webmaster, is a member who spends countless hours on his outstanding website to update all the reunion information and to keep track of our losses. President John Pepper also was invaluable in planning, printing name cards and table cards, providing the Cavalry display, and providing the very professional video used in our memorial ceremony.

Most of us departed on Sunday, 20 May 2018. 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 2020. I pray it is not so. But reality and age tell me that it is likely. We have lost eight brothers since the 2016 reunion. 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
2018/2020 Reunion Committee