

## **Class of 58 Mini Reunion 2020** **New Orleans, Louisiana**

**Planning:** In October 2019, planning was initiated to schedule a Mini Reunion in New Orleans at the World War II Museum's Higgins Hotel, May 26-28, 2020. By March 1, 2020, 60 classmates/widows had made reservations to attend. The total "head count" at the time was 120. The covid19 pandemic put a damper on the planning process that resulted in revising the dates for the reunion from May until November 1-3. These dates were selected after discussions with the hotel management and, obviously, overly optimistic tourism oriented city staff members who opined that by November "you should be good to go" for a group that size. On September 30<sup>th</sup> there were 24 classmates/widows with reservations for November, with an estimated total head count of 46. By October 26<sup>th</sup> that number had dwindled to 4 classmates, a "Final 4", for a total attendee count of 7. Unfortunately, on October 29<sup>th</sup> another dropped off the list. In a two day period we went from a "Final 4" to "3 Musketeers", Sands, Shepard and Stambaugh. Adding Barbara and Oksana to the list gave us total of 5 attendees, the "Fab 5". As you can tell, F-1 dominated the attendee count. The ultimate goal of the planning process was to ensure that, regardless of number, those that attended would "pass a good time" in the Crescent City. I believe that was accomplished.

**Activities:** We attempted to follow the same schedule of activities as outlined for the May dates:

### Day 1(Arrival)

- 1000 – Benny Havens available for mini registration in the Eisenhower Suite.
- 1800-1930 – Welcome Reception – Kilroy's (A number of WW2 Museum executives, including Dr. Gordon "Nick" Muller, Co-Founder/CEO Emeritus, Steve Watson, CEO and others)
- Dinner on your own
- Benny Havens open until 2400 (if needed)

### Day 2

- Breakfast on your own
- 1000 -1100 – WW2 Museum, Solomon Theater, welcome by Museum Staff and view "Beyond All Boundaries"
- Remainder of day open, visit Museum, shop, Company dinners, etc.
- 1200-2400 – Benny Havens open

### Day 3

- Breakfast on your own, visit Museum, Shop, Etc.
- Benny Havens Open 1000-1830 and 2230-2400
- 1830-2200 –Memorial Service, Class Meeting and Dinner – Hotel Arcadia Ballroom

Although we tried to accomplish the activities as scheduled, the when, where and how changed significantly. For example, there was no in Hotel "Welcome Reception", "Benny Havens" or "Memorial Service, Class Meeting and Dinner" as you will note from the "Results".

**Results:** Saturday, October 31<sup>st</sup> (Day 1 minus), Bill Shepard arrived, in the late afternoon, from San Diego after an arduous one stop change planes in Dallas, essentially, transcontinental journey. As a reward for his being the "most distance traveler", he was provided transportation from the airport to the Higgins and treated to an early dinner at "Le Baguette". Le Baguette is a small Vietnamese restaurant located in a residential area that serves excellent food. The Vietnamese owner and I were both stationed at Bien Hoa Air Base at the same time (66-67).

Sunday, November 1<sup>st</sup> (Day 1): Since Bill and Oksana Stambaugh were not scheduled to arrive until mid-afternoon, Bill Shepard and I decided to use our time wisely. We went to the Audubon Park Golf Course for 18 holes worth of exercise. To be on the safe side, we decided to invite a doctor, Charles Dupin, to join us. Charles is a former Navy Flight Surgeon who ensured we were able to complete the round without incident. After

changing from golf to causal dinner acceptable attire Bill and I picked up the Stambaughs for a quick tour of uptown New Orleans to include Tulane. Bill Shepard spent two “tough” years attending Tulane courtesy of Uncle Sam. We then went to another major schedule change. The “Welcome Reception” was held at 1522 Short Street (the Sands) absent the Museum executives, et al. After “catching up”, without discussing any issues that could not be solved on the spot, and fortified with the available liquid refreshments we went to a near-by restaurant, Cote Sud, for dinner. A photo of the assembled group is attached below). After a superb meal, the “out-of-towners” were able to view one of our 100+ year old pumps that help attempt to keep the city dry as well as one of the new public housing areas on the return to their lodgings. Bill and Oksana Stambaugh were staying at Le Belle Maison located a few blocks from the Museum.

Monday, November 2<sup>nd</sup> (Day2): We gathered at the Higgins and “marched” across the street to the Museum’s Solomon Theater for the 1000 showing of “Beyond All Boundaries”. Narrated by Tom Hanks, it is a 50 minute 4D presentation that provides a snapshot of the war years. After the movie, the “Fab 5” (minus 1, Barbara had other obligations) took a quick walk through the Museum to determine “what was where”, had lunch in the Museum’s American Sector Restaurant then dedicated the remainder of the time to independent touring. Although we did not have any of the Museum executives at either our “Welcome Reception” or “Boundaries” welcome, I was able to introduce our group to Dr. Nick Mueller, Museum Co-Founder, while we were in line ordering our lunch. In addition to the permanent exhibits, The D-Day Landings, Road to Berlin, Road to Tokyo and Arsenal of Democracy, at various times the Museum will host temporary exhibits. We were able to view two that were most interesting, “Remembered Light: Glass Fragments from WW2, The McDonald Windows” and “Ghost Army: The Combat Con Artist of WW2”. “Light” is a collection of 25 art pieces that were constructed in 2003 from shards of glass collected in 44-45 from damaged or destroyed churches in England, France, The Netherlands, Belgium and Germany by Chaplain Fredrick McDonald. The permanent home of “Glass” will be the restored Post Chapel at the Presidio of San Francisco. “Ghost” told the story of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Headquarters Special Troops. Apparently the existence and activities of this unit, whose sole mission was to deceive the enemy, were classified until the 1990’s. A PBS documentary was produced about the unit in 2013. The Museum exhibit was thorough and well done. The oral histories part of the exhibit featured George Rebh, Jan ’43, who commanded a company in the 23<sup>rd</sup>. He served on the Commandant’s Staff during our cadet days and retired as a Corps of Engineers MG. At 1700 we met at Rosie’s, the Higgins’ rooftop bar that provides a great view of the city, in order to develop the appropriate attitude prior to a superb meal at Restaurant Peche, located a short distance from the hotel. By observing the attached photo taken in Rosie’s (minipic3), you may confirm that our attitude had been properly adjusted. The photographer actually thought the camera was level.

Tuesday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> (Day 3): No official Mini activities were scheduled for the morning and early afternoon. Additional time was devoted to the Museum, in particular the Boeing Center. The Center houses a number of WW2 aircraft along with a display honoring each of those awarded the Medal of Honor in WW2. At 1630, I took the group on a tour of the Lake Pontchartrain area of the city to include a stop at Lakefront Airport. The airport was built in the 1930’s and, at the time, was one of the most modern airports in the US. It was subjected to alterations over the years, especially after commercial air activities were relocated. However, after Hurricane Katrina, 2005, a decision was taken to restore Lakefront to its original art-deco design. Today it is a gorgeous facility. Private aviation operations are conducted at Lakefront and the WW2 Museum operates its PT 309 boat tour from a near-by marina. The terminal building contains a restaurant and is available for private parties. After viewing various aspects of the hurricane protection/drainage systems and harbor operations along the lake we arrived at Ralph’s on the Park for our “Mini Closing Activities”. Ralph’s is delightful restaurant with a superb atmosphere located adjacent to City Park. Recognizing classmates that are no longer among us and enjoying the meal presented no problem for us. However, the conduct of a “Class Meeting” was a challenge. First of all, there was no one present with any authority to initiate a meeting; no Class Officer, no member of the ExCom, etc. A considerable amount of time was devoted to resolving this dilemma. We did not know if we should compare Cullum numbers or “draw straws” to determine who should initiate the meeting. From a “short straw (height perspective)”, it was easy, F-1 vs K-1. So, I initiated the meeting. Since there was no agenda, it seemed appropriate to entertain a motion to adjourn. During the discussion associated with the motion, Bill Shepard and I thought we might have an idea that the ExCom might consider as a method of developing revenue to support the Class

Perpetual Fund. We discovered that Dr. Stambaugh is not only a recognized intellectual but also a “Gentleman Farmer” of some renown. He is a prodigious producer of produce. Oksana devotes a considerable amount of time determining what to do with the volume of produce generated. In fact, after preparing all that can be reasonably consumed by family and guests, it appears a substantial amount is given to others free of charge. Since all of these agricultural activities occur within a reasonable distance of the DC area, it appears appropriate for the ExCom to consider options for utilizing a portion of the produce for the benefit of the Class. The condition precedent, obviously, is Bill Stambaugh’s willingness to provide produce, without charge, for Class use. For example, the ExCom might consider establishing Produce Stands at one or more locations within the area. The cost of constructing and managing the stands would be a responsibility of the ExCom. Staffing the stands could be readily accommodated by establishing a duty roster based on the classmates in the area. Sales revenue generated would benefit the Perpetual Fund. Although a formal motion was not entertained at the Mini Reunion Class Meeting, we offer the results of the discussion for your consideration. It seems that one attendee raised questions regarding legality of the meeting, lack of approved process, etc. Before discussion was complete, the final round of drinks was served and the meeting faded away. The attached photo (minipic1) clearly demonstrates a good time was had by all.

Wednesday, November 4<sup>th</sup> (Day 4): Billed as the scheduled departure day, Bill Shepard was transported the New Orleans Airport for a late morning flight to San Diego via Dallas. Bill and Oksana Stambaugh elected to stay until Sunday, November 8<sup>th</sup> and were able to take advantage of what the city has to offer without the usual large crowds. Among the newest attractions added to the “things to do list” are the local distilleries. The Sezerac House, in particular, has a great whiskey tasting program. We had a pre-departure dinner together on Saturday, November 7<sup>th</sup>, at Mandina’s, located in Mid-City. Mandina’s is a long established and very popular restaurant among the locals.

Although we missed not having a large gathering, covid19 dictated that all stay safe and understand problems associated with travel. All of you were in our thoughts and we felt you among us in spirit. I recommend you add the WW2 Museum to your “Bucket List”. It is truly a tribute to our fathers, uncles, aunts and etc. who were all members of the “Greatest Generation”. In the near future, the Museum will “break ground” on the last of the buildings planned for the complex. The “Liberation Pavilion” will be three stories and dedicated to the years after the cessation of hostilities.

Tom Sands

Scribe, Short Gray Line\*

\*A tag put on us by a Marine Corps friend who saw us at Cote Sud.

[Pictures on next page]

