

January, 2008

Greetings Dawgs,

Welcome to the first post-2007 Dawg Flight Reunion Newsletter, presented on the brand new 6918th Hakata website. What a sincere pleasure it is to communicate with you guys, and to have a means to share it!

Let's start with the most recent news, that being the 6918th Dawg Flight Reunion, held in Las Vegas on September, 2007. It all started in April, 2005, when I received a call from Bill Mink. Now I was in Japan from 1966 to 1968, and Bill was there '65 to '67. So I get this call, "Stan Freymuth, this is Bill Mink!" I said, "I don't know who you are because the only Bill Mink that I know, I haven't seen for forty years. He had a weird nickname and I am sure HE is dead from liver disease by now, the way he drank, so you are a fraud!" He laughed and said, "No, really Stan, this is Pinky from Hakata, Japan!" We talked for an hour or so, and Pinky said he was looking for guys that he had been with in Japan, and wanted to organize a reunion. He had found Rich (Seed) Caraway ('66 to '68), on the Internet and Seed gave him my phone number. Pinky had found a few other Dawgs, Troy Powell ('66 to '68) being one of them. I knew where Dave Bethard ('67 to '71) was, so I called Dave and Troy, and Troy called Pinky, and the wheels had begun to turn.

For the next seventeen months, Pinky, Troy, Dave and I e-mailed and conference called, and in September 2007, forty two Dawgs, three guests and thirty-three wives converged on the Imperial Palace, in Las Vegas, Nevada. We also had 2 Charlie Flighters—Carl Aegler ('67-'69) and Terry DuRei ('67-'69) joining our fun! What a time we had!

We had a hospitality room Thursday and Friday from noon until midnight (with a bar). We had Japan photos running the entire time on a photo viewer and a computer. We had a table full of memorabilia. We had nametags with '60's and '70's personal pictures. We had polo shirts to sell that Johnny Veatch ('67 to '69), had made for us. They had an embroidered emblem with Snoopy and 2007 Reunion on the front. We had various color

baseball hats to sell that Troy had made in Thailand. They had an embroidered Dawg Flight message on them. We had two disc DVD sets to sell that Dave Bethard made and produced. The first disc was of the base and area while we were there, then of present day. It also had photos of Dawgs while we were there, then of present day. He put it all to music of the years and era we were there. The second disc had the “Dawg Flight Ballad” and was filled with reunion pictures and video. The items we sold were, of course, to raise funds to help offset the cost of the reunion. It was fun to watch each new arrival put on his name tag, then go around and look at the picture on the others nametags, and say, “Well I’ll be!”

We told ‘remember when’ stories and we listened to ‘remember when’ stories. We had a lot of laughs and we had some tears. We had one termers and we had career people. We had officers and we had NCOs. We had handshakes and we had hugs. The one thing we had in common, even those who didn’t know each other at first, was the bond of comradeship--we had all, at one time, been a 6918th Dawg!

Saturday night we had a banquet room from 5:00 until midnight (with a bar). We did find that the sixty-year-old Dawgs did not consume the quantity of alcohol that the twenty-year-old ones did, however, the quality has improved. Saturday night was the only time that we had a structure to what we did. We had a one-hour cocktail hour. To open the program, Jim Howard, Pinky and Troy brought the colors forward and posted them. Besides the American flag, we had the Dawg Flight standard that Bobby Fuersteneau “acquired” from ops while in Japan. Then C.G. Green (’66 to ’68), led us in prayer, followed by a superb meal. We had a memorial segment for our departed comrades. We had a brief history of Dawg Flight reunions. We had letters to read from Dawgs that could not attend the 2007 gathering. We had “A Funny Thing happened On the Way TO the Reunion” roast of several of the Dawgs. We had a recap of a meeting that we held on Friday afternoon, discussing the future of Dawg Flight reunions. We viewed a DVD of the “Dawg Flight Ballad”, and the disc “one” that Dave made. All this was followed by, maybe the second saddest part of the evening, the closing. The saddest part, of course, was the memorial to our fallen brothers.

What a brief description of what really happened! Besides the above, several guys gathered to play golf. Several of the guys went to the cemetery to visit Jack's (Wil Jackson) grave. Several of the girls went shopping. Several of the guys exchanged their business endeavors, and are now doing business with each other. Did anyone gamble? But who would have thought that fifty old farts like us, many having not seen each other for forty plus years, would take the time and expense to go to Las Vegas just to see if we would remember each other?

We knew going in that there would be some guys there that we did not even know, but we went anyhow. And the thirty-three wives that came, why would they even consider going to spend four days with eighty complete strangers? We think we may have come up with a partial explanation to these questions.

There is a bond--no, let's use the correct word--there is a love alive in each of our hearts for the group of guys that we spent two years with, at a very young age, and thousands of miles from our homes and families. Those were troubling times--with the Viet Nam war going on; maybe we wouldn't make it back home alive. A sobering thought, and a reality, as a few of our friends truly paid the ultimate sacrifice.

So when we arrived in Japan, we were tough little boys who could drink more beer than anyone else, and we were scared and homesick, and thought it didn't show through our alligator skin. But the guys who were already there knew it. They felt the same when they arrived, so they did their best to make us feel at "home" and make us feel like part of their "family". Many of us didn't recognize it, but a bond was forming. Oh yes, we were way too macho to admit it or talk about it, but now as the years have passed, we can call it what it really was. Love! That even sounds a bit gushy now--but that's what it was. And it must have shown through those tough old skins, and when we started talking "reunion", we think the wives wanted to meet these dudes who made their husbands feel the way they do.

As organizers, we received a lot of e-mails and heard a lot of comments while in Vegas, and since we got home. Here are a few of those, abbreviated for space:

Fuersteneau: "Thanks for a reunion that was very special."

Allen: "Thanks, everyone really enjoyed themselves."

Winter: "Arigatou, it was great to see all you ole farts, had a great time, the memories continue."

Ryan: "You gave us an opportunity to rekindle friendships and memories that were so important to us forty years ago, and thanks to you, are even more endearing now."

Howard: "The reunion was absolutely fantastic. Thank you for bringing all of us together after thirty to forty years. With all of the pictures taken, the one thing we could not capture on film, was the thrill on each Dawg's face when someone new walked in the door."

Sheik: "Thanks, what a great time seeing old and meeting new Dawgs, we must not forget the wives (what a bunch). To all the Dawgs that did not attend; do not put off the next one. You don't know what tomorrow will bring. I can't wait for the next one."

Beeler: "Thanks, I had a wonderful time and I'm looking forward to the next one."

Veatch: "I received the DVD but I wasn't prepared to handle the emotions I experienced. As I watched it, tears filled my eyes such that I had to stop it several times and regroup."

Anderson: "Thanks, we had a wonderful time. I was surprised and gratified that no one tried to start a game of buzz."

Stephens: "I enjoyed every minute of it. Seeing and visiting with old pals, the program, the entire experience! See you in 2009."

Bolte: "Thanks for your efforts in reinforcing the old bond and putting on one helluva good time. I also want to say thanks to those who didn't show. That you didn't or couldn't, doesn't detract from the fact that you too were in Hakata as a Dawg. I just wish I could have shaken your hand. That's okay. Maybe I'll

see you in 2009. But if not, consider it a virtual handshake.”

Powell: “The time of our lives has come and gone. I can’t wait ‘til the next gathering. I don’t know when I’ve had as much fun or laughed as hard as I did this weekend. My emotions got the best of me several times, but this was truly one of the best times of my life. Hundreds of long forgotten memories flooded my feeble brain. To those of you that attended, I thank you for making the journey. To those of you that missed this great and historic event, believe me when I say you were talked about many times. I sincerely hope you felt the love because you were missed dearly. We all hope you can make the next one. All of you guys need a shirt and by all means a DVD. It just might be the best DVD you’ll ever own.”

Bolf: “Thanks for making the “magic” that is running through my veins after the incredibly awesome Dawg reunion. There aren’t words to explain my feeling of love for the guys and for their devotion to duty during most difficult times.”

Organizers: Please know that all of the “thanks” and “well-dones” are appreciated, but we had nothing to do with the excitement and thrills that you experienced at the reunion. Once you started arriving, there is nothing, right or wrong, that we could have done to change it. It was that gushy Dawg Flight thing. And it happened because YOU were there. For that, we would like to THANK YOU. And to our Charlie Flight brothers—thanks for coming and for demonstrating what we’ve been talking about—that ‘bond’ between all who served there--that we all feel.

So the 2007 reunion has come and gone.

Will 2009 be as good? I don’t know how it could be, but when you get a gushy group of Dawgs together, you cannot predict the outcome.

Work is being done on the 2009 event right now. Time and place has yet to be determined.

Countless hours have been spent finding you ninety-nine live Dawgs, and the twelve departed ones. To the live ones, PLEASE, if you change your e-mail or postal address or phone numbers, let us know. If you have old orders, or know the whereabouts of any Dawg not on the roster, let us know. All we need is a full correct name, and our Dawg Hunters can find them.

If you were not at the 2007 reunion and do not have a shirt and want one, let us know. If you were not at the 2007 reunion and do not have the two disc DVD set and want one, let us know.

As you have read above, you will not be sorry if you order this set. Concerning sales, the Reunion Fund is presently in the "black", but as life is, expenses go on--i.e. printer ink, postage, conference calls, web page maintenance, etc., so help us out if you would. Shirts and DVD's are \$20 each.

But most of all, keep in touch.

Congratulations To The Proud Grandparents!

Dave and Takeko's New Granddaughter

Lillie

Tex's New Grandson

Isaiah

SICKCALL: Please keep the following in your thoughts and prayers!

Miller (Bob) Farr: Very recent by-pass surgery.

Freddy Brelsford: Bladder cancer.

Future newsletters (we hope to have one every six weeks or so) will be full of new reunion information, Dawg information and pictures that you have forwarded to us. Dawg Flight wants to know what Dawg Flighters are doing!

Again, it has been a pleasure. We hope to hear from you soon. Stay tuned to the new webpage. sk