



39TH ENGINEER BATTALION ALUMNI NEWS



www.39thengrbn.com

November, 2019

President.....	Bill Ray	Webmaster.....	Walter Lester
Vice President.....	John Lewis	Historian.....	Jerry Bright
Secretary.....	Jim Lewis	Member at Large.....	Oly Guerra
Treasurer.....	Jim Shamblen	Member at Large.....	TBD
Chaplain.....	Fr. Vasilios (Billy) Bassakyros	Past President.....	Bruce Fonest
Sgt. at Arms.....	Mike Male	Reunion Chair.....	Jim & Sandy Lewis

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Time to say goodbye to 2019; it was a good year for Carolyn and myself and the Association acquired more new members. We had a wonderful reunion in Milwaukee with a good turnout and the host hotel was exceptional as I am sure all in attendance will attest. We had 5 new members in attendance. We hope that they enjoyed themselves as much as we enjoyed having them with us and we hope to see them at future reunions. The ladies, sons, daughters, grandchildren and nephews of our members were, as always, a great help and kept things running smoothly during our stay and they deserve a large thank you. The silent auctions were very successful. I would like to give a special thank you to all who made donations; the items donated were exceptional and helped replenish the general fund. Gaylon Waters was the lucky winner for the 2020 room raffle.

Donald Boney is our Blue Bull of the year; he has been very helpful in all that we have asked of him. Unfortunately, he was unable to attend this year. Fr. Billy accepted the award for him. The plaque was mailed to him following the reunion.

A special award was presented to Diane Helser for her steadfast love for the 39th while assisting Gale with reunion planning and taking over the publication of our quarterly newsletter in 2010, which she is still doing today. I worked with Gale on several reunions and believe me when I say, "she did a lot of work."

Special guests at our banquet were Kevin and Debbie Stephenson. They were presented with our Certificate of Appreciation for their contribution to the legacy of the 39th. Debbie's father, Warren Harris served with the 39th during WWII and they gave his diary of his time in South Africa and Europe along with pictures of the WWII 39th Alumni Association from the late 1940's to their disbanding in in the early 2000's to the Association for display at our reunions.

Election of officers were held: Officers for 2020-2021 are President-Bill Ray, Vice President-John Lewis, Secretary-Jim Lewis, Treasurer-Jim Shamblen, Chaplain-Fr. Billy Bassakyros, Sgt. at Arms-Mike Male, Webmaster-Walter Lester, Historian- Jerry Bright, Member at Large-Oly Guerra and Reunion Chair-Jim & Sandy Lewis.

Also discussed was status on an LLC for the Association which we need done before we can apply for our 501-C tax exemption and Jim Shamblen is moving forward with the project. He has discovered several obstacles which has slowed the process more than we expected.

We have a wonderful site selected for 2020 in Dayton, OH and we are hoping for a large turnout once again. Reunion dates are September 30-October 4, 2020. Registration, hotel information, etc. will be published in the March 2020 newsletter. The hotel is set with a signed contract and Jim & Sandy Lewis are putting together a good itinerary for our stay. Room rates are \$119.00 per night with rate guaranteed 3 nights before and following the reunion. Although you have made reservations and received a confirmation number, you do have to abide by the hotel's check-in time which is 4:00pm. The hotel will attempt to accommodate early arrivals if possible. Once again, I want to mention, and can't emphasize enough, that **"if you have the need for special accommodations such as handicap accessible, it is your responsibility to take care of that with the hotel when you make your reservations"**; the Association can't do that for you.

Now for a big "Blue Bull Welcome" to our new members and LifeTime members. Welcome and we look forward to seeing you at one of our future reunions.

NEW MEMBERS

Gordon Crisp	Gerald Duhe	Ralph Grace
HHC 65-66	C Co 69-70	C Co 68-69

James Harris Mark Leatherwood Jesse Maldonado
C Co 68-69 C Co 87-89 B Co 67-68

Walter Noble George Petrusky Glen Sammons
C Co 68 544th FB 66-67 C Co 65-66

LTC Brian Sawser
39th BEB 2017-2019

LIFETIME MEMBERS

George Petrusky LTC Brian Sawser
544th FB 66-67 39th BEB 2017-2019

We held our second Memorial Service for all members who have passed at the reunion this year. Thanks to Dave Tanner for reading the names. It was a very moving part of our reunion. We hope to be able to include the members we lost during our time in Vietnam at the upcoming reunions. If you have a member that you would like to have recognized, please send me an e-mail with the member's name, unit, dates served and their date of passing.

DECEASED MEMBERS

George W. "GW" Thomas D Co. 1968 from Monroe, NC passed March 4, 2005.

Robert A. Griffin B Co. 1969 from Point Pleasant, NJ passed February 25, 2014.

Fr. Lathrop P. Utley HHC 1968-1969 from Forest Pines, SC passed December 26, 2014.

Donald E. Schaffer HHC 1965-1966 from Fayetteville, AR passed February 15, 2018.

Douglas R. Gray A Co 1968-1969 from Peachtree City, GA passed July 24, 2018.

These were not noted in past newsletters. Their obituaries can be found later in this newsletter.

As always, Carolyn and I wish each of you a happy and safe holiday season.

BROTHERS THEN, BROTHERS NOW, BROTHERS FOREVER

Bill Ray
3rd Plt. C Co. 67-68
bill39th@sbcglobal.net
817-239-0787 (Cell)

FROM THE VICE PRES.

I know a lot of you are very active in your local VFW and Legion posts. I'm a charter member in the local VFW 1973 and, years later, I became a life member but I was never very active. When asked to help with plumbing or heating or air conditioning, I would, but I never attended meetings. The WWII members kept it running and did

what was necessary. They're all gone now except one, 94 years old. I was always busy with work, family or the fire department, but now I'm retired from all that. I've only become active and going to meetings the last 2 years. Somehow, I've become the commander of the Honor Guard. We don't have enough members, so we call on the 3 legions in the county to come up with 18 to do a proper job at a funeral. I've met a lot of very fine men that are dedicated to doing a very proper job of honoring our fallen comrades. I would encourage those of you that don't belong, or belong and don't participate, to make an effort. You may be surprised at what you find. Get involved. If you don't go to the meetings, you can't complain. They need you and you may need them.
John Lewis, your new Vice President
C & D Co., 71
lewisjohn49@twc.com
Cell 812-385-6044

SECRETARY'S REPORT

General Membership Meeting
Milwaukee, WI

Date: 9-28-19 1000 hours

Opening prayer: Fr. Billy Bassakyros. Officers present: Bill Ray, President; Jim Lewis, Secretary; Jim Shamblen, Treasurer; Fr. Billy Bassakyros, Chaplain; Sgt at Arms, Mike Male; Oly Guerra and John Lewis, Members at Large. VP Mike Shaw, absent.

Secretary Jim Lewis read the minutes from the last meeting and the Executive Board meeting. 2019 Executive Board meeting was held 9-24-19 at 1700 hours and items discussed are covered below.

Treasurer Jim Shamblen reported our approximate cash balance (not including current expenses) \$21,637.10. The Treasurer apologized for neglecting to get our Form 9 filed within the 1-year grace period and for not completing the 501(c)3 status. He assured the group it will have his attention this year.

50/50 raffles were conducted on both outside tours: Winners: Dave Tanner and Dick Walker.

2020 room raffle winner: Gaylon Waters

2020 Reunion is Sept. 30 thru Oct 4 in Dayton, Ohio. Hotel is Crowne Plaza, room rates \$119.00 and good for 3 days prior and after the reunion.

Suggestions for 2021 reunion included Albuquerque, NM, Wichita, KS, Colorado Springs, CO, Bend, OR, and Gettysburg, PA. Gettysburg received the most votes followed by Albuquerque. It was suggested that we investigate at least 2 areas for each reunion in case we

have issues with our first choice. Bill Ray urged members of the need to submit reunion registration as soon as after being published in the newsletter. So much of the reunion planners' task depends on what the members want to participate in.

We had 5 new reunion members. 50-year Vietnam pins were handed out to all members who had not received one.

Election of Officers for 2020-2021 are: President-Bill Ray; Vice President-John Lewis; Secretary- Jim Lewis; Treasurer- Jim Shamblen; Chaplain-Fr. Billy Bassakyros; Sgt at Arms-Mike Male; Reunion Planner-Jim & Sandy Lewis; Member at Large-Oly Guerra – need another.

Jim Heafner noted a duplicate of the Wall has been constructed in Prairieville, MO and invited all to see it. Larry Morris invited the members to visit Bend, Oregon.

Executive Board Meeting

Milwaukee, WI

Date: 9-24-19 1700 hours

Prayer led by Chaplain Fr. Billy Bassakyros

Officers present: Bill Ray President, Jim Lewis Secretary, Jim Shamblen Treasurer, Fr. Billy Chaplain, Oly Guerra & John Lewis Member at Large, Sandy Lewis Reunion Planner, Vice President and Sgt. At Arms absent.

Additional members present Diane Helser and Carolyn Ray.

Bill Ray noted that sweatshirts will be handed out to membership at the general meeting and any extras will be available for sale at \$25 each.

There was lots of discussion on creating an LLC for our group, forming a 501-C19 tax exempt status and insurance issues. Jim Shamblen said he would devote the necessary time to the project. We established our date-of-organization as August 18, 2001. Scholarships tabled until above has been completed. Discussion on updating Association By-Laws but was tabled for further review.

The website renewal was quoted at \$719.54 for 3 years. Motion made and passed to pay \$719.54.

Election of 2020-2021 officers will be held at the General Membership Meeting.

Bill Ray mentioned that he had talked with Mike Shaw and was assured that he would be able to attend future reunions.

We have 20 unsold challenge coins. Bill Ray will check on buying more coins (possibly 100) and correct the spelling on the coin.

Room raffle for 2020 has been received and tickets will go on sale at the beginning of the reunion along with silent auction items. Winners will be announced following the banquet Saturday evening in the hospitality room.

There was a discussion on areas of interest for the 2021 reunion. This will be presented to the membership. It was noted we need to move back to the West after being in Milwaukee this year, Dayton, OH in 2020 & Washington, D.C. in 2022. Sites mentioned were Albuquerque, NM, Colorado Springs, CO, Wichita, KS, and Bend, OR.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Lewis, Secretary
Co A; 39th ENGR(CBT)
Veteran's Service Officer (VSO)
Vietnam Veterans of America
6664 W. 157th Lane
Lowell, IN 46356
Cell 219-730-8140
In God We Trust

REUNION 2019

Well, Milwaukee is behind us and we are already looking forward to Dayton, Ohio. Dates for the reunion are Sept. 30th thru Oct 4th. Room rates are \$119.00 with 3 days before and after the reunion available at the same rate. The Crowne Plaza is easy access off I-70 and airlines into Dayton International Airport include Allegiant, American, Delta and United. There are several non-stop flights out of major hubs. Our hotel offers a free shuttle.

Some attractions include the Air Force Museum, Carillon Park, Packard Museum, 2nd St. Market, Wright Brothers Memorial and Hawthorn Hill.

Just wanted to give a shout out to our helpers at Milwaukee...Brenda Lewis, Joe Pollack and Pam Guerra. Could not have done it without you. Of course, Bill and Carolyn put so much of their time and money into every reunion that just saying thanks doesn't seem enough. Diane Helser came thru, as always, with printed materials. We are so grateful for you all.

Hope you all had a great time and now on to Dayton.

Jim & Sandy Lewis, Reunion Chairs

A Co. 67-68

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REUNION RECAP



CHAPLAIN'S WORDS

Just Another Reunion!

Thank you to all our brothers and sisters who attended this year's Reunion in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was a blast as usual. At every Reunion, I meet other 39ers and their families who have not attended a Reunion in the past. It is a wonderful way for us to talk about old times and our individual experiences during our tours. Each of us has very specific memories of our time in Vietnam, some that can only be expressed to those who have served.

Moreover, the palpable emotional release that many feel during the Reunion is a blessing in itself and it translates into our personal life. Reunions are a good time for us to get together and support each other as we did in Vietnam, except in an atmosphere of love and belonging. When talking with others from my company for the first time I realized that I have forgotten or may have miscomprehended certain events in which we were involved.

On the other hand, I have heard from many that it is painful to talk openly about their experiences in Nam. Yes, we all have memories that we do not want to remember or express openly. Each of us deals with situations we faced while in-country in different ways and it is up to each of us to find help where we can.

However, one of the best ways to release the tension that past experiences have upon us is to open up and unload them to those who understand and have walked down the same paths as yourself. That is why coming together as we do once a year is conducive to our mental and spiritual health. Every time I return home after a Reunion, I feel relaxed and spiritually uplifted. I guess most of you will say since I am a priest, I see the world in a different way than others.

On the contrary, those who have gotten to know me through the years of attending Reunions realize that I am no different than anyone else. If anything, I am a little more outspoken and see the good in almost anything. I learned at a young age from my family that humor is the key to a successful life. Humor is the release valve that the Good Lord has given us to make the unbearable, bearable. This is what I try to bring to every Reunion I attend.

Finally, I hope and pray that other 39ers find their way clear to attend a Reunion and experience the blessing that can be gained by being part of this encounter with those who have been through the same ordeals each of us has been through. May God bless all of you and keep you always under the shadow of His wings.

Fr. Vasilios Bassakyros

OBITUARIES



George Wesley Thomas, Sr., age 57, passed a way at his home, Friday morning, March 4, 2005.

Mr. Thomas was born September 5, 1947, in Union County, NC, a son of Mrs. Ruth Elizabeth Courtney Thomas and the late Mr. William Aaron Thomas. He was formerly employed by the Square D Company in Monroe and was

a U.S. Army veteran, having served in the Vietnam War.

Survivors include his mother, Mrs. Ruth C. Thomas of Monroe; his wife, Mrs. BeLynda Helms Thomas, of the home; one son, Wes and his wife, Kimberly, of Monroe; three granddaughters, Kelsey, Kayley and Kyndal Thomas, all of Monroe; one brother, Donny of Marshville; and one sister Ms. Aaronda Thomas of Monroe.

Funeral services were held at 2 p.m. on Sunday, March 6th in the McEwen Colonial Chapel, conducted by the Rev. Louis Lotharp and the Rev. Scott Laws, with burial following in Lakeland Memorial Park.



Robert A. Griffin, 64, of Point Pleasant, passed away Tuesday, Feb. 25, 2014. Born in Elizabeth, he lived there and in Lakewood, residing in Point Pleasant for the past 27 years. Mr. Griffin was a veteran of Vietnam and was awarded the Purple Heart for his service with the United States Army from which he retired.

He was a member of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Shore Chapter No. 701, Point Pleasant; the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post No. 1838, Manasquan; Disabled American Veterans, Chapter No. 20, Brick; and the B.P.O.E., Lodge No. 1432, Lakewood.

An avid runner, Mr. Griffin was also a member of the Ocean Running Club and Anytime Fitness. He enjoyed fishing, going to the gym, and was a passionate NY Jets and NY Mets fan. He was predeceased by his mother, Marjorie; father, Martin, and brother, Jeffrey. Surviving are his loving wife of 44 years, JoAnn DePalma Griffin; his sons, Robert Griffin Jr. and his wife Donna of Howell, and Ryan Griffin of Brick; daughter, Andrea Manzoli and her husband Christian of Brick; brother-in-law, Edward Herman of Jackson; and nephew, Jeffrey Griffin of Toms River. Also surviving is John Ulasewich, three grandchildren, Tyler, Gavin, and Lenamarie; and many more relatives and dear friends.

At 9:30 a.m., Monday, March 3, a service was held at the funeral home and followed by interment with military honors at the BGWCD Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Arnetown.

Excerpt from period ending 31 Oct. 1969 39th Engineer Bn.

Operation Report, page 6: SP/4 B Co., Bob was injured the

night of August 12, 1969 when two (2) NVA Sapper

Companies attacked LZ Dottie. Confirmed enemy KIA was 23.



Fr. Lathrop Palmer Utley

passed on Thursday, December 26, 2014 at his Forest Pines residence. Following graduation from high school, he enlisted in the United States Army as a

medic in 1945. After completing his enlistment, he earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Maryland in 1951. He realized his calling to serve the Lord and attended seminary. He was ordained an Episcopal priest on December 18, 1954. Following his ordination, he served as a priest in the Diocese of New Jersey for a number of years.

Father Utley married the love of his life, Florence Ellen Hambley on June 14, 1958 in The Diocesan Cathedral, Trenton, NJ, and they were happily married for more than 55 years. In 1968, Father Utley rejoined the army as a chaplain and retired at Fort Jackson, SC in 1985. While in the army, he travelled the world from Viet Nam to Korea to Germany and was stationed in various posts in the Continental United States. Following his retirement, Father Utley devoted his life to volunteering at the United States Army Chaplain School, Fort Jackson, because he loved the army, soldiers, and families. He also faithfully served as a retired priest associate at Saint Luke's Episcopal Church for nearly 20 years.

In addition to his parents, Romeyn and Dorothy Utley, Father Utley was preceded in death by his wife Florence and his sister Elizabeth. Father Utley is survived by his son, Major General Peter D. Utley and his wife Catherine of Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.

Services for Father Lathrop Palmer Utley were held 10:00 a.m. Saturday, January 3, 2015 at Anglican Church of the Epiphany, 2512 N. Bellline Blvd., Columbia, SC.



Donald Ernest Schaefer, age 85, of Fayetteville, passed away Thursday, February 15, 2018 at Willard Walker Hospice House in Fayetteville, Ark. after a short but courageous battle with pancreatic cancer.

He was born December 16, 1932 in Searcy, Ark. the son of William Herman and Nancy Whitford Schaefer. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Shirley Mills

Schaefer in 2012, after 57 years of marriage.

Don worked in school and university publications with Hurley Printing Company, Arkansas College, and the University of Arkansas Division of Information. He retired from the University of Arkansas University Relations Department in

1995. In retirement, he wrote the history of several buildings on the University of Arkansas campus. He earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from Arkansas State College and a M. Ed from the University of Arkansas. In college he was a member of Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity and Army ROTC. He also was a letterman with the Arkansas State track team, running hurdles and the half-mile. He served in United States Army Corp of Engineers and in the U.S. Army Reserve, reaching the rank of Captain.

He served as part of the deacon body at First Baptist Church Jonesboro, Ark., First Baptist Church Batesville, Ark., and University Baptist Church in Fayetteville, where he was a longtime, faithful member. He was active in Gideon's International as a member of the Fayetteville North Camp.

Don was a member of Kiwanis International for over 50 years, and served as Lt. Governor of Division 19 in the Arkansas Missouri District. He was also editor of the Arkansas Missouri Kiwanis newsletter for ten years. He was a member of the Washington County Historical Society and served as editor of their publication, The Flashback, winning awards for this publication.

He traveled extensively, visiting all 50 states, and camping in most of them. He also traveled to many foreign countries on four different continents. Other hobbies included photography, gardening, reading, genealogy, and stamp collecting.

His survivors include his wife of four years, Gloria Johnson Schaefer; three daughters, Ann Covington and husband David, Carol Huneycutt and husband John, of Fayetteville, and Susan Seaman and husband Terry of Knoxville, Tenn.; one brother, Clair Schaefer and wife, Ruth, of Little Rock, Ark. He is also survived by 11 grandchildren, Matthew Covington, Katie Rogers, and James Covington, of Fayetteville, and Lisa Kieklak of Oklahoma City; Rebecca, Nathan, Caleb, and Noah Seaman of Knoxville, Tenn.; and Jacob, Samuel, and Hannah Huneycutt of Fayetteville. There are also nine great-grandsons.

The funeral service was held at 10:30 a.m. on Friday, February 23 at University Baptist Church, with Pastor Brad Wheeler officiating. Burial was at 1 p.m. at the Fayetteville National Cemetery, with Dr. H.D. McCarty officiating.



Lieutenant Colonel Douglas

Robinson Gray, United States Army (Retired), passed away peacefully and went to his Lord on July 24, 2018 in Peachtree City, Georgia. He was 71. Doug was born on October 16, 1946, in Washington, DC and raised in Rockville, Maryland until he enlisted in

the Army in 1966. He immediately attended Officer Candidate School and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant. He served in Vietnam with A Company, 39th Engineer Battalion on the South China Sea in I Corps from September 1968 to September 1969. He served two tours at the Pentagon including a tour in the Office of the Army Chief of Staff. He

retired in September 1989 from US Army Forces Command in Atlanta, Georgia where he decided to spend his retirement. He was awarded the Legion of Merit upon retirement. He went back to work as an Army civilian where he was chief of the Enlisted Personnel Management Branch and the Civilian Support Branch, Full-Time Support Directorate, US Army Reserve Command over the next 16 years. His final retirement was in July 2007.

He married the love of his life, Patricia Ann Obertots Gewe, on September 23, 1976. They shared the next 42 wonderful years together enjoying life and their mutual passion, golf. They remained in Peachtree City and raised two beautiful daughters, Kimberly and Jennifer.

He completed his Masters of Arts degree from Webster

University in the early 1980s. Colonel Gray was a proud member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and the Kiwanis International; all of Peachtree City.

Doug was preceded in death by his parents, James O. and Ellen T. Gray (Myrtle Beach, SC). He leaves behind his beautiful family; wife Patricia Ann Gray, daughters Kimberly Christine Cox, her husband Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Cox and three grandsons, Evan, Nathan and Logan Cox (Stafford, VA); daughter Jennifer Michelle Gray (Chantilly, VA), a sister Carlie Kingdon (Silver Spring, MD) and brother Gordon Gray (Mauldin, SC). He also leaves a niece Kathryn Ferguson (Goleta, CA), nephew Michael Flynn (Conshohocken, PA) and their lovely families as well as an aunt and uncle, Dave and Jane Sharpe (Ponte Vedra, FL).

39TH BEB FROM FORT CAMPBELL



November 6: Sapper Stakes season has begun! This week our 9 Sapper Squads began the validation process with a M4 Stress Shoot yesterday, followed by an ACFT and obstacle course this morning. All squads had a strong showing, and the competition is tight going into the field in the next 2 weeks! [#essayons](#) [#bullstrike](#) [#strike](#) [#airassault](#)

Check out our new Bull Strike Leadership website below! We have leadership resources, discussion forums, and information that will be updated regularly.

www.bullstrikeleader.com.





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Green Valley, AZ 85614

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2020
39TH ENGINEER
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION REUNION
30 SEPTEMBER 2020 – 4 OCTOBER 2020
DAYTON, OHIO

Save the dates! Room rates are \$119.00 with 3 days before and after the reunion available at the same rate. The Crowne Plaza is easy access off I-70 and airlines into Dayton International Airport include Allegiant, American, Delta and United. There are several non-stop flights out of major hubs. Our hotel offers a free shuttle.

Some attractions include the Air Force Museum, Carillon Park, Packard Museum, 2nd St. Market, Wright Brothers Memorial and Hawthorn Hill.

Watch upcoming newsletters for registration form and additional information.