



# 39<sup>TH</sup> ENGINEER BATTALION ALUMNI NEWS



[www.39thengrbn.com](http://www.39thengrbn.com)

November, 2018

President.....Bill Ray  
 Vice President.....Mike Shaw  
 Secretary.....Jim Lewis  
 Treasurer.....Jim Shamblen  
 Chaplain.....Fr. Vasilios (Billy) Bassakyros  
 Sgt. at Arms.....Mike Male

Webmaster.....Walter Lester  
 Historian.....Jerry Bright  
 Member at Large.....Oly Guerra  
 Member at Large.....John Lewis  
 Past President.....Bruce Fonnest  
 Reunion Chair.....Jim & Sandy Lewis

## FROM THE PRESIDENT



How time does fly; seems like we just celebrated the beginning of 2018 and now it is almost over. We had a wonderful reunion in Tucson with a good turnout and the host hotel was exceptional as I am sure all in attendance will attest.



The ladies, sons, daughters and grandchildren 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 and 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. Dick Walker's daughter Dawn had a beautiful lamp handmade that she donated for the silent auction (pictured with Dick is Monty Montgomery, the lucky winner). Dawn, thank you for the very

generous gift and we look forward to meeting you in Milwaukee.



Fr. Vasilios is our Blue Bull of the Year; he has been very helpful in all that we have asked of him. Pam & Oly Guerra were the lucky winners for the 2019 room raffle.

At the General Membership meeting, we filled our second Member-at-Large; John Lewis was nominated for the position and he accepted. We appreciate John stepping up to assist in

the everyday operations of the Association. Also discussed was setting up an LLC for the Association which we need done before we can apply for our 501-C tax exemption. Jim Shamblen is moving forward with the project.

We have a wonderful site selected for 2019 in Milwaukee, WI and we are expecting a large turnout. Reunion dates are September 25-28, 2019. The hotel is set with a signed contract and Jim & Sandy Lewis are putting together a good itinerary for our stay. Room rates are \$115.00 per night with rate guaranteed 2 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 is 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

Gardner Blizzard HHC, C Co 89-91	Leonard Fox HHC, C Co 67-68	Bill Seidler A Co 69-70
Pete Kristensen HHC 67-68	David Speigel C Co 70-71	Lucian Townsell HHC 71
William Turner Ft Dix 74-75		

#### LIFETIME MEMBERS

Gardner Blizzard HHC, C Co 89-91	David Speigel C Co 70-71
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We held our first Memorial Service for all members who have passed at the Tucson reunion this year and we hope to be able to include the members we lost during our time in Vietnam at the upcoming reunion. If you have a member that you would like to have recognized, please send me an e-mail with the member's name, unit and dates served and their date of passing.

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

**BROTHERS THEN, BROTHERS NOW, BROTHERS FOREVER**

Bill Ray  
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## VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

### FINDING HARRY

While serving in Vietnam I was privileged to meet many fine individuals. Approaching fifty years later, several of us still maintain a friendship. And we tend to think about our comrades who were not fortunate enough to have returned home safely – those we will never see again.

Among my friends from that period was fellow Lieutenant, Harry Gordon Prince, Jr. Harry was from Salem, AL, and a graduate of Auburn University. He was a very unassuming gentleman and preferred working in the field rather than base camp in Chu Lai. He was a pretty good volleyball player. Being somewhat tall and lanky, he covered the net very well, and one you wanted on your team.

For a period of time, I was our company's "Class A Agent" – pay officer. In the States, it was the responsibility of the men to get to the pay officer for pay each month; in Vietnam, it was the responsibility of the pay officer to get to the men. We had several platoons and individual men on loan to other units, e.g., demolition men, heavy equipment operators, etc. Each month I did a lot of helicopter hopping from location-to-location. Frequently, it involved spending the night in the field to await a helicopter ride back to base camp

the next day. On some of those occasions I ended up sharing Harry's tent.

I was a relative newlywed, as was Harry, and I wrote letters home. But I was always amazed at how much Harry would write. We would take turns at his little field desk using a kerosene lamp for light. He wrote many, many pages home, and it became a bit of a joke between us. It was obvious that he cared deeply for his wife and family.

A very large operation, Lam Son 719, was being conducted related to Laos. I was not directly affiliated with the campaign but did provide several of my men and equipment. I was scheduled to come home for two weeks leave – which, by the time you took off two days travel time each way, ended up being a ten-day visit. A short, but a much-appreciated break. I had a new daughter I had not yet seen and was anxious to get home, if only for that brief period.

The morning I was preparing to leave our field compound and head to base camp in Chu Lai – and then depart for Saigon and on to the U.S. – I received a radio call from our Battalion Chaplain, Capt. Billy Ingram. Chaplain Billy, as he was called, said he was in the Battalion Commander's helicopter (the honorable Lt. Col. William Munn) and heading to our compound. He asked that I meet him at our small helipad. That was unusual, as he had never used Colonel Munn's helicopter to visit us.

When I picked him up, he informed me that the afternoon before, March 14, 1971, about 8 or 9 of our men had been killed, including Harry. Chaplain Billy wanted to hold a brief memorial for them with us before heading North to where this happened. I never saw Harry again...

Several years ago, I attended a unit reunion where I met two of Harry's men who were with him that day. One was missing his leg and lost it the same time as Harry's death. He said that it was late afternoon, and everyone was eating. He was with several fellows when the supply helicopter arrived. This gentleman had just finished eating and headed to the copter to see if there was any mail. The next thing he remembered was being in the hospital and told that he had lost his leg. He was somewhat fortunate in that two others where he had been were killed, and had he not left for the helicopter, he too probably would have lost his life as well. Fate and timing are funny things.

The unit was hit by North Vietnamese artillery fired from Laos. Harry and his comrades died instantly.

I felt guilty that I was going home for a leave to see my family and Harry was going home in a coffin. What a tragedy and horrible loss of life – as were they all.

I live in Georgia, and knowing Harry was an Alabama boy, I wanted to seek out his grave and pay my respects to him. One event that rekindled my desire to find Harry was a call from a nice lady affiliated with Auburn University. The university was preparing to offer a scholarship in Harry's name and requested information pertaining to him.

Locating the gravesite became a bit more of a challenge than expected as he was buried in a rural location with incomplete records. However, with diligence and the help of individuals in the area, I believe I have located the site. Soon, my wife and I will make the trip to visit Harry and share thoughts and photos with those who knew him and introduce this fine individual to others who didn't.

Sincerely,  
Mike Shaw

## MEETING MINUTES

October 2, 2018

Desert Diamond Hotel

Start time 1600 hrs.

Opening prayer: Fr. Billy Bassakyros

Pledge of Allegiance: Bill Ray and Moment of Silence for all deceased members and MIA's.

Officers present: Bill Ray, President; Jim Lewis, Secretary; Jim Shamblen, Treas.; Fr. Billy Bassakyros, Chaplain; Mike Male, Sgt at Arms; Member-at-Large, Oly Guerra. Excused: Mike Shaw, VP

Minutes from the last meeting and the Executive Board meetings were read and approved.

Treasurer reported cash on hand of \$13,810.41. Expenses for this reunion are still being compiled. All previous reunion expenses have been met. Treasurer's report approved as read.

### Old Business:

Jim Shamblen reported on efforts to obtain a Limited Liability and 501(C) 19 status for the organization. He is attempting to get an attorney for legal advice and suggested that no scholarships be considered until the LLC and 501(C) 19 status is established.

**New Business:**

Budget for the reunion planner is now set at \$2,000 maximum due to the raise in travel expenses. The group accepted the Milwaukee location for the 2019 reunion. The Ambassador Hotel was selected for the dates Sept. 25 – 28, 2019 at \$115/per night.

2020 Reunion will be East. Suggested sites were Dayton, OH and Charleston, SC. The east coast sites were usually in the middle of hurricanes, so dates may need to be adjusted.

President Ray announced that we are in need of an at-large member to the board and offered the position to John Lewis who accepted. Approved by the group.

Dick Walker's daughter Dawn wanted to show her "Minnesota Proud" by donating a lamp with the Blue Bull insignia on it. Our profound thanks to Dawn for her generosity.

Mike Male reported that the Moving Wall will be in Canada on Oct 7-14th. He reminded the group that 40,000 Canadians, including himself, proudly served in Vietnam.

Fr. Billy read the closing prayer.

Meeting adjourned at 1640 hrs.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Lewis, Secretary

**SECRETARY'S REPORT****Beyond Inflammatory Headlines & Into the Data**

Reporters from the Boston globe and USA Today claimed that 60 of 133 VA nursing homes received the lowest ratings. However, VA data shows the only 11 or 8% of VA nursing homes received a one star rating. In fact, compared to private nursing homes, the VA scored similarly as follows:

**VA Nursing Homes**

29% have a 4-star rating

26% have a 5-star rating

**Private Nursing Homes**

22% have a 4-star rating

29% have a 5-star rating

The single most important measure on which experts judge nursing home quality – nurse staffing. This includes RN's, LPN's and certified nursing assistants.

The VA has traditionally had better staffing than private sector nursing homes and less turnover and more stable staff to care for resident. Indeed, private

sector nursing homes score far worse on staffing and deficiencies. Less the 80% of private sector nursing homes have adequate RN staffing and 20% cause harm and jeopardy to residents each year.

Private sector nursing homes are for far less complex patients because most facilities rigorously screen applicants before accepting them. Some even evict complex patients. Even nursing homes with whom the VA contracts may refuse complex veterans or patients with behavioral problems due to dementia and PTSD. The VA must take all patients that meet the eligibility criteria and are not able to screen or refuse those who would have more complex mental and/or physical problems. Private nursing homes screen patients and can refuse patients with issues such as private pay ability, Medicaid, etc.

Source: Veterans Healthcare, VA reports

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Lewis, Secretary

Co A; 39th ENGR(CBT)

Veteran's Service Officer (VSO)

Vietnam Veterans of America

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*In God We Trust*

**EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING**

Sept 30, 2018

Board Members Present: Bill Ray, Jim Shamblen, Oly Guerra, Mike Male, Jim Lewis, Fr. Billy and spouses and Diane Helser.

A lot of the discussion was based upon creating an LLC for the group, forming as a 501(C) 19 tax exempt status and insurance issues. Jim Shamblen is contacting an attorney regarding these items. He will report next year on results.

The group is lacking another Member-at-Large. John Lewis has attended a great many reunions and although a former officer, the group felt he was a good fit and active member. Bill Ray will approach him regarding this position.

Discussion was held on raising the reunion planner's budget to \$2,000.00. The idea was passed.

No re-order for challenge coins.

2019 reunion is scheduled for the Ambassador Hotel on Sept. 25-28. The room raffle for the Ambassador cannot be given anywhere in the building but the hospitality room due to gambling laws. Any and all drawings must be held in the hospitality room.

Ideas for 2020 include Dayton, OH, Hershey, PA and Lima, OH.

Attending spouses were asked for their input. No dissenting opinions.

Treasurer reports \$13,810 in accounts.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Lewis, Secretary

## **FROM THE CHAPLAIN**

### **THANKSGIVING DAY!**

I would first like to thank all of you for the honor of being elected Blue Bull of the Year. It is very humbling that you considered me as a recipient and bestowing this award upon me. I have always tried to help in any way I can for the members of the 39th, with my writings and communications with my brother Blue Bulls. Thank you for the award, unworthy though I maybe.

This week we celebrate Thanksgiving. When family and friends gather together to enjoy the culinary delights offered and presented before them in honor of this wonderful occasion. This traditional celebration comes but only once a year and as a child, I can remember how wonderful it was to be all gathered together with the whole family.

Traditions are what hold together families and even a Country. We are all inspired by the remembrance of this special day, and look upon it with reverence for those who participated in the original event.

Likewise, each year we 39er's come together to celebrate our participation in the military and specifically as members of the 39th. It does not matter what years or company you served with. We all come together with respect to our service and to those who gave all to this great country of ours. On the other hand, I know that some who served in the 39th want anything to do with this tradition for one reason or another. However, I have heard from many who attended for the first time and said it was well worth the trip.

As you know, this year we celebrated our Reunion in Tucson, Arizona. It was my first trip there and I really enjoyed everything we did and saw around the area. Moreover, we come together every year to see friends

and meet those we lost contact with over the years. This year, I met Larry and his wife. Larry was in "B" Company the same time I was there. It is always strange when sitting down and talking about what each of us felt and experienced during our tour. Our remembrance of the events differ a little in a small way, but the overall experience was the same.

Furthermore, Larry brought his photo album with him detailing his tour while in the 39th. As we went through his album I came across one that I myself had taken. Well, not the actual same photo, but one I took from the same vantage point. How crazy was that! It was during our move up to Chu Lai on the LST. These are the stories and experiences that each of us has and are implanted in our memory that we will never forget. However, talking about them at Reunions gives us all a chance to bring them to light and for some, it will ease the pain of that experience.

Finally, our time in Vietnam was not a joyful event like past Thanksgivings or any other day of remembrance; nevertheless, it is still engrained in our memories. As a result, it is through the yearly coming together that we open up to others who have experienced what we as members of the 39th have. Have a blessed and Blue Bull Thanksgiving to all and keep the faith, my brothers. God Bless All of You!

Fr. Billy Vasilios

## **MEMORIES WANTED**

If you have any memories you'd like published in our newsletter, please send it to the newsletter editor at: [diane\\_helser@yahoo.com](mailto:diane_helser@yahoo.com) or [bill39th@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bill39th@sbcglobal.net).

We love old photos, stories or events from when you were in the service. Please consider sharing them with the group in a future newsletter.

## **CURRENT ACTIVE 39<sup>TH</sup> BLUE BULL FACEBOOK PAGE**

LT Ricardo Anciola is the current Public Relations Officer for the Active 39th Engineer Battalion.

Would you like to know what they're up to?

Check out their Link: 39th BEB Bull Strike.

<https://www.facebook.com/39thBEB.BullStrike/>



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## **September 25th – 28th, 2019** **Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

Mark your calendars for the next reunion of the 39th Engineer Battalion Alumni. We've got the Ambassador Hotel booked, right in the heart of Milwaukee. The closest airport is General Mitchell Airport right there in Milwaukee.

We will be visiting some great landmarks in the area. And, of course, our great members, spouses and significant others along with a few kids and grandkids will be in attendance with a few new members attending for the first time. Plan now to attend this great event!