



Reunion 2014

Goooooooooooood Morning San Diego



Volume 2

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2014 AFVN Reunion -San Diego



By Ken Kalish

Inside this issue:

Banquet & "Newbie"	2
Friday—MCRD	4
Pictorial	5
Saturday_Midway	6
Veteran Tribute	8
Raffle Winners	9

I never drink water because of the disgusting things that fish do in it..
W. C. Fields

Maybe it's true that life begins at fifty... But everything else starts to wear out, fall out, or spread out.
- Phyllis Diller

In the beginning was the 2013 site conversation, and a majority of members chose to select a west coast location, in part because of our 2012 meeting in the Memphis area. After **Bill** and **Scooter** did some preliminary scouting, it turned out that our best bet for a combination of affordability and attractions was going to be **San Diego**. Fortunately for us, **Joe Cikon** lives there and spends many hours on board the **USS Midway**. He and wife Mary were able to bring their knowledge and kindness to bear in the arts of lining up activities for us and making us feel welcome.

Knowing my own limitations for the 2013-2014 time frame, I asked for more help this time around. **Ken Kalish** may have been the titular "organizer," but I was more of a coordinator than anything else. **Jim** jumped in expecting a smaller task than he found to be the case. He and I executed a lateral transfer, and he wound up creating (re-

creating?) an **AFVN** website while I resumed point of contact duties.

The generosity of our members resulted in an assistance fund that helped several of us participate in ways large and small. The carry-over of our fund exceeds \$600 for the 2016 gathering.

Joe made it possible for some of us to revisit **MCRD San Diego** and remember why it was that leaving recruit training was one of the most valuable memories they hold. Many of us visited the **Midway**, compliments of **Joe** and his do-

ciously provided us by the **Holiday Inn Bayside**.

We had a great meal, some wonderful commentaries from individuals, and some interesting results stemming from our raffles. The income from the raffles helped us in two ways. It provided the funds that covered expenses on the **Midway**, and it made sure that no one was personally responsible for the refreshments in the hospitality room. Thanks to everyone who donated items.

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Our wrap up was a bit disorganized, primarily because I forgot that the hospitality room was open to us through the morning of our departure. However, we are a flexible group and were able to iron out the speed bumps there.

(Continued on page 9)

AFVN'ers gather once again, this time in San Diego

Our AFVN-“convention” wrapped up on Saturday night with an official banquet.

By Saturday night, everyone had t-shirts, badges and pins from the famous *San Diego Zoo* and the *Midway* and several even sported ties!!



Joe Ciokon interviewed by KGTV's Bob Lawrence

A couple of guest speakers rounded out the evening and it started with our own **Joe C. Joe** was a wonderful host in the great city of *San Diego* and wandered back into his military career for an enjoyable few minutes.

Joe taught Judo the Seal team #1 way back at the start of the Seal Program. One of the Navy's senior newsmen, **Joe** has enjoyed many interesting assignments around the world, including *AFVN* in *Saigon*!

Also present was **Rich “Brother” Robin** who is a local legend on the *San Diego* radio. He too is a veteran of our network.

Very Special Guests

Jean LeRoy invited two special people from *Vietnam* to share with us their story of freedom. **Ty and Diamond** were *Vietnamese “Boat People”* who came to the US in 1978. They spoke of coming to the land of true freedom and now live in *California*.

Our banquet also included a “*P. O. W.* table for one”, that many of us are familiar with. A proper ceremony was held and we were all reminded not to forsake their

Cries of “rigged” were heard from the crowd as they claimed prize after prize. The raffle was a great success.

memories.

Great Raffle

A raffle concluded the evening and included everything from 50-caliber bottle openers to a wonderful *AFVN* quilt done by **Ron Hesketh** and his wife **Joyce**. I think everyone won



The bar was open. Just ask me or Ron

By Dick Ellis



something, especially every member of the **Ciokon** family.

Cries of “rigged” were heard from the crowd as they claimed prize after prize. The raffle was a great success.

Our Next Reunion

To close the evening, a proposal of holding our next gathering on the east coast and in *Raleigh, North Carolina* was presented on the floor and received a rousing “yes” vote from everyone. In two years we will gather in *Raleigh* and plan to include a day-trip by bus to *Ft. Bragg* and the *Special Forces Museum* in *Fayetteville*.

Other plans include a Southern Pig Pick'n with plenty of hush-puppies and BBQ for everyone. We will also be very sensitive to physical needs such as walking tours and transportation.

A personal note or two:

When we checked into the hotel in *San Diego* everyone is required to sign a pledge saying, swearing or promising not to smoke in our hotel rooms. Only in *California*!

Once back home in *North Carolina*, I of course had to check the phone messages. Maybe I am one of the few people in the country that still has a “land-line.” On my message box was the voice of **Joe Ciokon**, recorded as we were departing the *Midway*.

(Continued on page 3)

A "Newbie's Perspective"

I was one of the 5 or so early arrivals. I don't trust "the best laid plans of mice and men" to always work out, so I allow myself plenty of time.

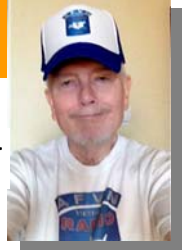
I arrived at the *Holiday Inn* on Wednesday, 15 Oct, at around 1:15 PM and checked in. BTW, they were courteous, cheerful and eager to welcome all *AFVN* veterans for our reunion. Their complex was complex so I decided to explore it and found the *Point Loma Restaurant*, the fitness center, and our soon-to-be HQ, the *Point Loma* meeting room.

As I strolled and explored, I noticed some folks my age and wondered if they were *AFVN* guys settling in

ahead of time as I was. (This was my first *AFVN* reunion as I worked until I was 68 and earlier reunions were a luxury beyond my grasp.)

So since random asking was not proving productive I decided I needed an identifier to advertise my association with *AFVN*, because someone who looked my age was not necessarily at that Inn for the same reason I was.

I retired to my room and pulled out my *AFVN* T-shirt (Thanks, **Robert Morecook** - what year did that come into being?) and my *AFVN* cap which was bought just a few months ago, upon info shared on *FaceBook*, also by **Bob Morecook**.



By Michael Goucher

It wasn't long before I started connecting up with *AFVN* brethren.

So my advice to all who attend and who may not know the current image of folks in our great group is to have an *AFVN* identifier so we can meet up, re-introduce ourselves and begin the party early if you arrive early.

Many thanks to **Ken & Lila Kalish & Joe Ciokon** for picking up a stray *AFVN* broadcaster on Oct 15th and getting our party off to a good start!!



What's with the left-handed salute?

once again (cont'd)

(Continued from page 2)

"Dickie, this is Joe, I assume everyone is on the bus, I will see you back at the hotel!" Joe had dialed my home phone on the East Coast thinking he had my cell number. What a wonderful surprise and memory to keep on that answer machine. "Yes, Chief....we are all on the bus ready to go and will see you in *North Carolina* in just 2-short years!"

Wal Mart Humor

A few days ago my best friend from high school sent me a 'Viet Nam Veteran' cap. I never had one of these before, and I was pretty hyped about it, especially because my friend was considerate enough to take the time to send it to me. Yesterday, I wore it when I went to *Wal-Mart*. There was nothing in particular that I needed at the world's largest retailer; but, since I retired, trips to Wally World to look at the Walmartians is always good for some comic relief. Besides, I always feel pretty normal after seeing some of the people that frequent the establishment. But, I digress... enough of my psychological fixations.

While standing in line to check out, the guy in front of me, probably in his early thirties, asked, "Are you a Viet Nam Vet?" "No," I replied. "Then why are you wearing that cap?" "Because I couldn't find the one from the *War of 1812*." I thought it was a snappy retort.

"The War of 1812, huh?" the Walmar-

tian queried, "When was that?"

God forgive me, but I couldn't pass up such an opportunity. "1936," I answered as straight-faced as possible.

He pondered my response for a moment and responded, "Why do they call it the *War of 1812* if it was in 1936?" "It was a Black Op. No one is supposed to know about it." This was beginning to be way fun!

"Dude! Really?" he exclaimed. "How did you get to do something that COOOOL?" I glanced furtively around me for effect, leaned toward the guy and in a low voice said, "I'm not sure. I was the only Caucasian on the mission."

"Dude," he was really getting excited about what he was hearing, "that is seriously awesome! But, didn't you kind of stand out?"

"Not really. The other guys were wearing white camouflage."

The moron nodded knowingly.

"Listen man," I said in a very serious tone,

(Continued on page 8)

Friday...MCRD (An inside perspective)



By Pfc Jean LeRoy,
Platoon 183, 1954

It was 60 years since I had set foot on the parade field at *San Diego Marine Corp Recruit Depot*. In 1954 I was one of the recruits on the field waiting to receive the title Marine. Then I was one of about 300 on the parade field moving and breathing as one.

This time I was accompanied by my wife and my fellow *AFV-Ners*. We sat in the reviewing stand as VIP's with smiles and laughter as we waited for the



In the VIP Suite

ceremony to begin. We were greeted by the Commanding Officers and welcomed to the event.

Déjà vu all over again?

For me it was Déjà vu in that I could see the full spectrum and remembered my graduation 60 years earlier.

The graduation featured an opening performance by the Marine Band featuring a Jazzy de-



Marine Band performs

parture from the normal march-



Rick Fredricksen & Gen. Lee

ing formation.

The ceremony itself was well choreographed and impressive to all of us. The words of the speakers were designed to congratulate the men on the field as well as to inform the families in attendance what they had accomplished in the previous 12 weeks.

The ceremony ended with the long awaited declaration that they were now entitled to be called Marines.

A great lunch

Following the ceremony we were taken by tram to *The Bayview Restaurant* for a great lunch buffet and a great bit of camaraderie as we anticipated the rest of our reunion events.

Our Vietnamese Guests

Jean LeRoy invited two Vietnamese "Boat People" to the Saturday evening banquet. Our guests **Thai** and **Diamond** called it "a highlight of our life, so inspired and emotional."

Both are former Boat People,

Thai left in 1978 and **Diamond** in 1981. Their full names are **Thai-Nguyen Dang** and **Diamond Bich-Ngoc**. If you wish to contact **Thai** his eMail address is: tai.dbn@gmail.com. Should you want to speak with them you can contact them at 951-870-3909 or at 909-263-4774. They plan to attend our next event in **Raleigh NC**.

Thai asked me to tell you that



Thai & Diamond with Jean & Clarice

they will be in **Duluth** next Memorial Day to attend our ceremonies and honor those who sponsored **Thai** when he came to **Duluth**.

That evening he will sponsor (for the third year) a dinner and dance (with his own **Country Feet Band**). Any **Vietnam** Veteran is welcome to the event. The event is held to honor those who sponsored **Thai** and all Veterans of **Vietnam**. **Thai** calls it a Vietnamese Father's Day event as they consider us all fathers. Anyone wishing to attend is welcome just email **Jean** at macmate@me.com. Spouses are welcome.

Thursday & Friday, a Pictorial



Saturday Dinner, a Pictorial



Saturday, the Midway (An inside perspective)

Name the biggest star of the *San Diego* reunion. **Joe Ciokon** would be an obvious choice, but the correct answer is the *USS Midway Museum*, all 70,000 tons of it.

The ship is more than 3-times longer than *AFVN's Saigon* tower is tall. This vintage vessel is so heavy, that fuel efficiency is measured by gallons per mile, not miles per gallon. It takes 260 gallons of fuel to go one mile. No wonder the carrier fleet went nuclear.

About 30 former broadcasters and spouses gathered on the pier for **Joe's** welcome, which came with a warning: *"There are things that can hurt you if you don't watch out where you're going. Tall guys got to duck low, and step high when you go over the knee-knockers."*



Captain's Quarters

We boarded the *Midway* and quickly separated into smaller groups, to ease our way through the tight compartments and narrow passageways. It was slow going; like many of us, the *Mid-*

way is nearly 70 years old (next year).

It was fascinating to see how they shoe horned an entire community into a floating military installation, including an airport, police and fire departments, clinic, post office, power company, dining facilities, and even a jail, where you can take your picture in the brig. **Mike Goucher** declined the behind-the-bars photo op, saying, "too many people I know would cheer!"

"There are things that can hurt you if you don't watch out where you're going. Tall guys got to duck low, and step high when you go over the knee-knockers."

Has to be OUR ship

If it were possible for a *Vietnam* veterans group like ours to adopt a ship, the *Midway* would be a perfect match. Starting in the early days of the war, her pilots shot down multiple *North Vietnamese Migs*.

When *Saigon* fell, the *Midway* was there again, and evacuated thousands of *South Vietnamese* who helicoptered out from *Ton Son Nhut*. **Ann Kelsey**, who helped in the mass exodus, was impressed: *"It felt strange to know they had landed on the*

By Rick Fredricksen



flight deck I was walking on." The *Midway* was still saving *Vietnamese* 14 years later, when the carrier group rescued 92 "boat people" on two wooden sampans, while crossing the *South China Sea*.*



Engine Room Panel

Naming

The *Navy* selected the ideal class of warship as the namesake for the *1942 Battle of Midway*. Five carriers were sunk, four of them *Japanese*. Nearly 400 planes were destroyed (both sides combined) during four days of fighting. Some of the *Japanese* ships were the same ones that attacked *Pearl Harbor* a few months ear-



Old GPS System

Saturday, the Midway (continued)

(Continued from page 6)

lier. The naval battle at **Midway** was a decisive American victory. A movie on the legendary naval clash will premier in a new theater on the **Midway's** hanger deck in 2015.



Intruder Pilot Presentation

Our Tour

Today, on a good Saturday, as many as 7,000 visitors step back into history, just like we did. We got to see other veterans, some were tourists and some were the docent guides who really knew their topic.

What a thrill it must be for the old **Navy** veterans who live in **San Diego** to have the **Midway** in their backyard. **Ron Hesketh** didn't mince words with his reaction: 'What a tour! Wish we



Private Lunch Aboard Ship

had more time." That's what everyone was saying, except for those in the same boat as **Tim Abney**, who shared this lament on **Facebook**: "I sure wish I could have made it."

Prowling through the **USS Midway Museum** is worthy of anyone's bucket list. Just seeing those enormous anchor chains was impressive enough, each link as wide as a seaman's shoulders. I imagine most of us came away with new respect for the sailors and Marines who deployed off the coast of **Vietnam** enduring such claustrophobic and austere living conditions. I'd say **AFVN** was pretty good duty,



Rick Launching F-18's

although those upcountry TV trailers might compare to the elbow room of the **Midway**.

Imagine what it would be like if our **Saigon** headquarters had been preserved as immaculate as the **Midway**: the news set with **Bobbie's** weather map, the old radio studios, control boards, turntables and cart machines, the film chains, tech room and snack bar. Perhaps a Navy bulletin from the "Five o'clock Follies" on the newsroom copy desk, list-

ing another "kill" by the crew of the **USS Midway**.

A salute to **Joe** for a terrific day, the comp tickets, VIP treatment and an unforgettable experience. Maybe he's the biggest star of the reunion after all.

***On July 3, 1989 CBS News broadcast this radio story on the Midway carrier group's liberty call in Thailand.**

"This beach resort south of Bangkok is like a temporary American colony. Eight US Navy warships are anchored off the coast of Thailand as more than 7,000 sailors are preparing to celebrate the 4th of July. The town of Pattaya is all decked out for the occasion—they don't burn the Stars and Stripes here—it's displayed proudly along with banners that say "Welcome US Navy." An embassy official says simply, Thailand is the favorite port call for the 7th Fleet. And, the Thai tourism industry goes all out to please the US sailors; from the bar owners serving cold beer, to the bar girls with warm smiles. More than 100 US warships will bring more than 100,000 servicemen to Thailand this year, the most since the Vietnam War.

Rick Fredericksen, for CBS News, in Pattaya, Thailand."

**Photos by
Rick Fredricksen & Ron Hesketh**

During the raffle drawing portion of our Saturday evening buffet, I read a poem that I received from a close friend that, in my estimation, was very applicable to our situations in Viet Nam and continues to be very appropriate to our world even today. I have had a few inquiries for a copy, so I am including it in the newsletter so that you all can have access as you wish.

A Veteran Poem

He was getting old and paunchy
And his hair was falling fast,
And he sat around the Legion,
Telling stories of the past.

Of a war that he once fought in
And the deeds that he had done,
In his exploits with his buddies;
They were heroes, every one.

And 'tho sometimes to his neighbors
His tales became a joke,
All his buddies listened quietly
For they knew where of he spoke.

But we'll hear his tales no longer,
For ol' Joe has passed away,
And the world's a little poorer
For a Soldier died today.

He won't be mourned by many,
Just his children and his wife.
For he lived an ordinary,
Very quiet sort of life.

He held a job and raised a family,
Going quietly on his way;
And the world won't note his passing,
'Tho a Soldier died today.

When politicians leave this earth,
Their bodies lie in state,
While thousands note their passing,
And proclaim that they were great.

Papers tell of their life stories
From the time that they were young
But the passing of a Soldier

A Veteran Tribute

Goes unnoticed, and unsung.

Is the greatest contribution
To the welfare of our land,
Some jerk who breaks his promise
And cons his fellow man?

Or the ordinary fellow
Who in times of war and strife,
Goes off to serve his country
And offers up his life?

The politician's stipend
And the style in which he lives,
Are often disproportionate,
To the service that he gives.

While the ordinary Soldier,
Who offered up his all,
Is paid off with a medal
And perhaps a pension, small.

It is not the politicians
With their compromise and ploys,
Who won for us the freedom
That our country now enjoys.

Should you find yourself in danger,
With your enemies at hand,
Would you really want some cop-out,
With his ever waffling stand?

Or would you want a Soldier His home, his
country, his kin,
Just a common Soldier,
Who would fight until the end.

He was just a common Soldier,
And his ranks are growing thin,
But his presence should remind us
We may need his likes again.

For when countries are in conflict,
We find the Soldier's part
Is to clean up all the troubles
That the politicians start.

If we cannot do him honor
While he's here to hear the praise,
Then at least let's give him homage
At the ending of his days.

By Ron Hesketh



Perhaps just a simple headline
In the paper that might say:

**"OUR COUNTRY IS IN MOURNING,
A SOLDIER DIED TODAY."**

Source unknown

Wal Mart (cont'd)

(Continued from page 3)

"You can't tell anyone about this. It's still 'top secret' and I shouldn't have said anything."

"Oh yeah?" he gave me the 'don't threaten me look.' *"Like, what's gonna happen if I do?"*

With a really hard look I said, *"You have a family don't you? We wouldn't want anything to happen to them, would we?"*

The guy gulped, left his basket where it was and fled through the door. By this time the lady behind me was about to have a heart attack she was laughing so hard. I just grinned at her. After checking out and going to the parking lot I saw dimwit leaning in a car window talking to a young woman. Upon catching sight of me he started pointing excitedly in my direction. Giving him another 'deadly' serious look, I made the 'I see you' gesture. He turned kind of pale, jumped in the car and sped out of the parking lot.

What a great time! Tomorrow I'm going back with my Homeland Security cap. Then the next day I will go to the license agency and wear my Border Patrol hat, and see how long it takes to empty the place.

Whoever said retirement is boring just needs the right kind of cap
See you guys at Walmart!!

Our Raffle Winners



Aggravation game, Harvey Geminder CD, Lila Kalish KC rice, Mary Ciokon Money clip, Mary Ciokon 50 cal opener, Dick Ellis 50 cal opener, Joe Ciokon III 50 cal opener, Craig Prosser



50 cal opener, Ernie Eulenstein 50 cal opener, Gary Brill 50 cal opener, D. Ellis (to Diamond) M O H stamp, Ramon Ciokon Trolley tour, Michael Goucher Premier magazine, Joe Ciokon Pro darts, Joe Ciokon III



Zippo lighter, Clarice LeRoy Jarhead red wine, Frank Rogers AFRS shirt, J. Ciokon III AFRS shirt, Clarice LeRoy Military quilt, Frank Rogers AFRS/AFVN quilt, Mike Sullivan

Pictures supplied by Ron Hesketh

Reunion (cont'd)

(Continued from page 1)

Although we, as a group, have had no conversations about whether and where the 2016 event will take place, **Dickie** has volunteered to act as host should we accept his invitation to gather in **Raleigh**.

Thanks to everyone for the compliments and assistance that made this gathering a success. I look forward to our next adventure. I will be available to be HMFIC for that event, or one of the assistants as our community desires. I will strive to have a llama visit for wherever we meet again.

Remember, my friends, that we gather not to celebrate our own importance, but to celebrate and renew our friendships.

Last week, I stated this woman was the ugliest woman I had ever seen. I have since been visited by her sister, and now wish to withdraw that statement..
- Mark Twain



Reunion 2014



We are on the Web!

AFVNVETS.NET

Standing: Mike Halloran; Richard (Robin) Werges; Diamond Bich-Ngoc; Rick Fredericksen; Ernie Eulinstein; Rod Carlisle; Dick Ellis; Harvey Germinder; Frank Rogers; Jean LeRoy; Michael Goucher; Joe Huser; Gary Brill; Mike Sullivan; Al Turner; Ron Hesketh

Seated: Thai-Nguyen Dang; Hugh Morgan; Steve Southerland; Craig Prosser; Michael Jackson; Joe Ciokon; Don Dornberg; Jerry Nelson; Jim White

Kneeling: Ken Kalish

