

2016 OCS at Fort Knox Reunion: After Action Report

The second reunion of the Officer Candidate School classes at Fort Knox, Kentucky during the Vietnam War Era was held August 18-21, 2016 in San Antonio, Texas. Headquarters for the reunion was the Sheraton Gunter Hotel in downtown San Antonio just a few blocks from the popular River Walk. Sixty-eight (68) graduates from twenty-six (26) classes, of the fifty-three (53) classes that completed OCS training at Fort Knox, representing seventeen (17) states were in attendance. They were joined by three non-OCS Tac Officers, and forty-four (44) guests. Class 2-68, E2 with eight individuals present had the largest number of classmates in attendance.

Thursday registration began around 1000 hours. Our reunion planner, Premier Reunion Services, staffed the registration desk throughout the reunion and kept the Hospitality Room stocked with coffee, soft drinks, and snacks. The Hospitality Room opened at 1200 hours with several tables where OCS related memorabilia was organized and displayed. Several months prior to the reunion Walt Todd of Class 31-67, C2 encouraged individuals to send him photos they had taken during OCS as he would put together a continual running presentation of the photos on a large screen TV in the Hospitality Room. John Sawyer of Class 6-67 also brought a CD of photos he had taken during OCS and these were also shown. The photo presentation was a very popular attraction and brought back a lot of memories. Terry Sharp of Class 2-67, B1 displayed a plaque given to him by the Drill & Command Section of the OC Brigade on 3 Aug 66. Wording on the front of the plaque has the words "First Adequate Drill Presentation". Terry had been called on to teach paragraph 81 of FM 22-5 with the topic of "To Form the Platoon".

Some of brochures, booklets and books displayed were *Your Career as an Army Officer*; *The US Army Armor School Armor Mobile Forces Firepower Demonstration and Mounted Tactical Exercise 1967*; *Your Military Career*; *Taking Command*; *The Officers Guide*; *History and Role of Armor*; *Armor Leaders Guide*; *Armored Cavalry Platoon Operations*; *FM 20-22 Vehicle Recovery Operations*; *Mounted Combat in Vietnam* with names of OCS graduates highlighted who commanded a separate cavalry troop attached to an infantry brigade in Vietnam; *The U.S. Army Marksmanship Training Unit M-14: Accurized National Match*; *"Ace: The Story of LTC Alan "Ace" Cozzalio* (Class 4-67, E2), and bound volumes of the book *"When The Nation Called a Third Time: Army Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox, Kentucky: The Vietnam Era"* that were available for purchase.

Other items displayed were a Certificate of Dedication from The National Museum of the U.S. Army in recognition of the OCS at Fort Knox Project's support of their Brick Program with the inscription *"Forge The Thunderbolt - In Memory Of 4321 Graduates - Of Armor OCS - US Army Armor School - Ft Knox KY 1965-1968"*; an "I Am Armor" print; a rendering of Armor School Headquarters at Fort Knox with an M4 Sherman out front; several Finley "army caricature" art work pieces; OCS recruiting sign; Army recruiting poster *"Why Walk, Put a Tiger in Our Tank: Fort Knox Kentucky, Home of Armor/Cavalry"*; a collection of post cards from the OCS era and 2014 photos of most of the same places; a box of Fort Knox Gold embossed stationary; the *Sounds of Armor OCS LP*; OCS grad and Tac Officer Claude Whittle brought a Fort Knox topo map and was able to point out the route ran for Military Stakes; Forge the Thunderbolt unit crest; Fort Knox ash tray; a large F1 guidon that use to hang over the entrance to F1 given to Tac Officer Walt Orth by Class 28-67, F1 when they graduated as there were to be no more F1 classes; reproduction F Troop guidons and reproduction E1 guidon; reproduction basic and intermediate OC helmet liners; original senior OC helmet liner; brief biography of OC Bde. Commander Colonel Bernard E. McKeever, Jr. and his helmet liner which was sent to Doug Burmester by a former OCS HHC supply clerk; the Tac Officer helmet liner of OCS grad Chuck Kimbell; Company G1 Armor gold sweatshirt; a copy of the *Inside the Turret* newspaper article written by Steven Strawbridge of Class 27-67, G1 when the OC Brigade closed at the end of February 1968; binders listing the names of the graduates and company officer cadre who died of their wounds or were killed in Vietnam, and class listings of those graduates who have dismounted at Fiddler's Green since their military service.

Prior to the Thursday Welcome Reception the attendees were individually assigned to four different Rally Rooms where they gathered in small Meet and Greet groups at 1600 hours, giving them the opportunity to meet and converse with those from classes other than their own. The Welcome Reception with cash bar was held from 1700-1830 hours with Doug Burmester of Class 1-68 welcoming the reunion attendees. He announced the number of number of attendees and made special mention of George Hildebrandt, Anthony Rozga and Walt Orth the three non-OCS Tac Officers and Bill Sperry of Class 9-66, A1 and Claude Whittle of Class 25-66, D2 the two graduates in attendance who were retained as Tac Officers. **Dan Leifel of Class 23-67, C1 the leader of the reunion committee announced that a reunion in 2017 would be held October 12-15 in the Washington D.C. area.** He asked for Reunion Planning Committee volunteers. **When more specifics are known that information will be sent via email to all graduates, company officer cadre and brigade staff who have been located.** After light snacks were enjoyed it was “dinner on your own” either in the hotel restaurant or in one of the many River Walk restaurants.

Friday a buffet breakfast was served prior to the Alamo/Fort Sam Houston/Pearl District tour. Those who didn't go on the tour took advantage of the free time to sit and visit in the breakfast room or venture into the Hospitality Room and then head for the River Walk, The Alamo, or other tourist opportunities in San Antonio. Friday's social hour began at 1800 hours with a cash bar prior to the 1900 hours Texas-Style backyard BBQ dinner buffet. The evening's program featured stories from ladies who shared their experiences associated with either their husbands or boyfriends who were in OCS.

Saturday was a busy day. Three tours were offered. The Lyndon B. Johnson National Park and LBJ Ranch tour. The Missions tour which tells the story of European expansion in the New World, and the Fredericksburg, Texas Hill Country and National Museum of the Pacific War tour. All tours were back for the general membership information session which many of the attendees either overlooked or forgot about. Beginning at 1700 hours the photo session began where individuals, couples and groups had photos taken that will be included in the reunion memory book for those who purchased the book. Even though we weren't supposed to be in the banquet room before 1845 hours to reserve a seat, most of the attendees qualified for an FFI (Failure to Follow Instructions).

At 1900 hours banquet emcee Dan Leifel, decked out in his tuxedo, conducted the opening ceremony by leading the group in the Pledge of Allegiance. After a few welcoming remarks he offered a special salute to the lady veterans in attendance and asked them to stand. Three ladies stood to a round of applause. Instead of the usual Missing Man Ceremony Dan shared a very poignant statement made by Charlie Titus of Class 13-67 who was the major editor of the book about OCS at Fort Knox. Dan was visiting Charlie in the hospital where he was recovering from a close call with the final inevitable occurrence in life. As Charlie was in and out of consciousness he looked at Dan and said, “I kept having this thought. About those young men coming home from Vietnam to the welcome they didn't get and to those terribly wounded suffering in Japan so far from their loved ones. I am the lucky one, with Elda (Charlie's lady) and my daughters”. With that sober thought in mind many of us remembered our classmates who did not survive their Vietnam service and of those graduates, company officer cadre and brigade staff who are now at Fiddler's Green. Dan then read the Invocation written for the occasion by Reverend Carl Marshall, Class 23-67, C1 who was unable to attend the reunion. Dinner was then served.

Following a very nice sliced sirloin of beef dinner Dan introduced Doug Burmester of Class 1-68, E1. Doug gave an update on the OCS at Fort Knox Project mentioning that 851 graduates are known to be deceased, 2101 graduates have been located and 2220 are yet to be located. He mentioned that with the publishing of the book about OCS at Fort Knox during the Vietnam Era the original goal of the project started nearly twenty years ago had now been achieved. Complimentary copies of the book have been placed with thirteen army libraries or military organizations as well as the Office of the Chief of Armor, the Armor Branch Historian, and the U.S. Army OCS Alumni Association and Officer Candidate School Battalion at Fort Benning, GA. He further encouraged the individual classes to take advantage of the search results that Elda Ueleke compiled for the classes in 2014, and make contact with those who have not yet been located.

The program theme for the evening was "The Insider's View of OCS". Three individuals had volunteered to briefly speak about what OCS meant to their later careers. Some very interesting leadership points were shared with the group, as were several stories of experiences in the army after OCS. After Dan's closing remarks the group was asked to rise for the playing of the National Anthem.

Sunday the private group breakfast was from 0800 to 0900 hours. Here the comradery of the three previous days continued before warm farewells and "see you in DC" were said before attendees started their return journey to their homes.

Thank you to all who attended the reunion and since there are no plans presently to have more reunions, other than the 2017 reunion in Washington, D.C., you all are strongly encouraged to make plans now to meet in D. C. October 12-15, 2017. When detailed reunion information is known it will be sent out through email and postings on our Facebook group site.