



# AFTER REUNION REPORT

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October 12, 2015

Last week we all participated in a historic event – **the largest gathering of Military Birddog Unit members since the Vietnam War ended**. We also were there to witness and support the ceremony of dedication for the Birddog Unit Memorial erected to honor all those Birddog Unit members lost in service to our country. This ceremony alone might have been powerful enough to serve as the sole reason for all of us to gather together because it offered everything we revere about honor, duty and service. However, the opportunity to rekindle old friendships and make new ones was also there, too. So, we partied, told stories, shared memories and learned more about each other in a timeframe that perhaps looking back was all too short.

Here's a quick summary of what we did.

- **Welcome Reception** – over 300 people attended our reception. It was crowded but based on reports back to me everyone had a great time. The Dothan Country Club went all out. Yes, there was a shortage of seats but this was a reception not a dinner. We could have used more chairs and fewer tables. The band was great but not good for talking. (the #1 criticism). Next time, no band, just a cello, piano or Tony Martin singing “I left my Heart in San Francisco”. The food was great! I managed to get some shrimp and they were a whole meal. Overall, the atmosphere could not have been better. For the future, this needs to be part of every reunion.
- **Dedication Ceremony** – what can I say! The dedication ceremony was as good as any I have ever attended. No one made an exact headcount but a good guess placed the number at about 500 people in attendance. Based on accounts back to me, this ceremony could not have been better. The weather was warm but it was dry. LTG Kevin Mangum could not have given a better speech and I am sure everyone agrees it was from his heart. His Dad, who sat in the front row, flew Birddogs in Vietnam in 1961. Having family members in attendance joining together to ring a special bell brought by Don Ricks (220<sup>th</sup>) was true closure for many in attendance. The Ft. Rucker Public Affairs Office (PAO) did a wonderful job setting up everything to full military protocol. Special thanks to Ray Borza for bringing the 219<sup>th</sup> Jeep and to the other folks who added memorabilia around the monument. We have to give a huge thanks to the three Birddog crews that flew their aircraft overhead. A lot more should be said about this ceremony but I will leave it for another place and time, however, there are two individuals who need to be recognized here, without whom we would not have had this great ceremony. The two are Dick Baker (219<sup>th</sup>) and Charlie Mingus (183<sup>rd</sup>). Each worked tirelessly going back and forth to Ft. Rucker in meetings to make sure this ceremony met everyone's expectations and more. It was Charlie Mingus who approached LTG Mangum and from that came the effort we all witnessed. I think there is no disputing the fact that this total ceremony in combination with the family members of those we lost in Vietnam being present made this something none of us will ever forget. It is only

fitting that this was the occasion to honor all those we lost in Vietnam and likewise to honor all of us who so honorably served.

- **BBQ** – Coming after the dedication, with approximately 350-375 people attending, the BBQ had a unique atmosphere around it. The Friends of Army Aviation (FAA-O) hangar, the aircraft operating outside, the tremendous BBQ, and an atmosphere of excitement all contributed to making this event very memorable. We all owe a huge collective “thanks” to FAA-O and the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation (AAHF) for not only hosting this event but for all the volunteers they brought in to help, including a special thank you to the City of Ozark for contributing the tables and chairs. Special recognition must go to Mike Medlin (184<sup>th</sup>) who took on this task and made it possible. Mike also was the one giving O-1 rides. So again, to Mike, all the volunteers from FAA-O and AAHF, and the City of Ozark, we must stand and give them all a hearty applause. Overall, even though no “adult beverages were allowed” due to Alabama and city regulations, the day was almost perfect. It was warm dry weather, great company, excellent food and an atmosphere filled with memories and thoughts from years gone by.
- **Octoberfest** – we must thank VFW Post 6020 in Daleville for letting us use their facilities, which I was told is the largest post in the United States. The room was just right for the almost 225 people who attended. Finally, we had a chance for different unit members to speak and talk about their unit, future reunions and ideas for the memorial Birddog replica. We had tables for individual and unit memorabilia. Again, we must acknowledge several people for contributing to this event. Arturo Rodriguez (183<sup>rd</sup> & 219<sup>th</sup>) who donated six (6) of his special photos for the raffle; Artist Dave Watling (219<sup>th</sup>) who contributed a framed print of his painting “The Landing” for donation with our reunion attendee signatures to the Army Aviation Museum; plus, the raffle for the Birddog Model and special framed print of the Birddog with John Gillespie Magee, Jr’s “High Flight” poem. We ate delicious German food and had plenty of drink. In summary, Octoberfest was a good ending to three busy days
- **Events Summary** – according to Chris Glennon, USAA Military Affairs Coordinator, who represented USAA at our reunion, he had never attended an event like ours in his decades of being around the military and likewise the comments from Ted & Molly Dey of Armed Forces Reunions Inc. who have organized military reunions for 25 years were similar. However, we can always do things better. We need to allow more time for visiting and reminiscing. All the events served their purpose to bring us together. We need to allow units “their own space” or what we could not provide in this reunion – individual hospitality rooms for setting out memorabilia and room to talk and visit. The entertainment was good but we need less or at least entertainment that is “background” not overwhelming. The food was great all the way around. No need to change there. Some want a reunion dinner Saturday night for closure, which is certainly worth discussing. The original plans in Panama City offered all of the above but the needed change of location greatly limited available facilities with adequate space. Bringing all eleven Army Birddog units together, plus the invitation for other military service Birddog units to join us can be done successfully with the right purpose (a dedication) and location (a place with meaning to everyone). The competition from individual unit reunions is very real without a good reason for all units to jointly meet. However, many units cannot organize or support a separate unit reunion so they are either left without a reunion or can participate in an All Birddog Unit event. Age of unit members, individual health and economics are all major considerations for any future reunion plans. We are starting to lose people just like we have watched World War II and Korean veterans pass on. Our turn has come and we need to evaluate the best way forward for us to

preserve our comradeship while keeping the door open for the many, many others who have yet to participate in any reunion event.

### **Important things that were discussed**

- **Birddog Memorial Replica Airplane** – the overwhelming consensus is that the memorial monument requires a Birddog Replica that accurately depicts the aircraft. Further, based on conversations, financial considerations is not an issue with the right production in bronze or brass. Ft Rucker has a BIG say in whatever we choose or elect to do. There are several people who have invested considerable time investigating the best direction for a proper replica. I won't identify these people here but they have the "ear" of people at Ft Rucker and a promise that if done right a replacement Birddog replica will be approved. The recommendation is to establish a small planning committee who will identify a replica plan, find a manufacturer, work up cost estimates and present it to all to us for our approval before presenting it to Ft Rucker. A special website will be setup for this function.
- **Organizing another all unit reunion** - prior to this reunion ending on Saturday, plans were already being presented for another All Birddog Unit Reunion in Washington DC as well as plans by individual units for their next reunion. Per a discussion elsewhere in this After Reunion Report, there is a need to openly look at the pros and cons of doing either or both – All Birddog Unit or Individual Unit reunions. Again, this will require that each unit have representation in the discussion and that whatever the decision, it is based on a consensus of the units. I have been asked to be an "Advisor", which I accept but it will take a strong committee organized for this purpose to reach the right conclusion. Again, I emphasize that calendar time is our enemy not our friend in all of this. We are a dwindling group and our strength will be in how we elect to go forward as units and as individuals. Several of you are already taking the initiative. Good!

### **Things for you to do -**

**REUNION PICTURES** - Our official photographer for the reunion was Tim Skipper. Tim has edited all the pictures taken throughout the reunion and has posted them on a special website. **IMPORTANT!** Read this carefully....**This website allows you to download all the pictures you want for FREE. There is no license or copyright restriction.** In addition, for additional costs, you can create a printed & bound reunion book that can be sent to your home or given as a gift. Tim placed an INSTRUCTION BOX ON THE WEBSITE TOP LEFT SIDE for helping you download one, two, three, etc. or all photos. Here is the website link - <http://timskipperphotography.zenfolio.com/birddog> I just downloaded all the pictures to my computer in a simple two-step process for posting on the L19Birddog.com website. Look for that happening sometime next week.

**REUNION PICTURES YOU TOOK** – if any of you have pictures you want included in an online reunion photo gallery that are different than the ones taken by our reunion photographer, Tim Skipper, please send them clearly identified with names. Send them, to my email at [REUNION@L19BIRDDOG.COM](mailto:REUNION@L19BIRDDOG.COM) I will post them on the website [www.L19Birddog.com](http://www.L19Birddog.com)

**BIRDDOG MEMORIAL BRICK PURCHASES** - Many of you asked about purchasing a Memorial Brick. I spoke to the Army Aviation Museum Foundation (AAMF) and confirmed that they are still handling the brick purchases. There are two ways to order a brick.

1. On the Internet at [www.armyaviationmuseum.org/index.php/get-involved/brick-paver-program](http://www.armyaviationmuseum.org/index.php/get-involved/brick-paver-program)

2. Printed Form (see attached) that is mailed into the museum.

In both cases it will be important to provide instructions that the brick is being purchased for the “Birddog Memorial”

**REUNION T-SHIRTS** - The reunion T-Shirts were very popular and another small order of shirts (M, L XL, 2XL) is being considered. The color will be the off green like the majority of shirts given out at the reunion. (No blue or orange). If you want another or more shirts, email me right away at [REUNION@L19BIRDDOG.COM](mailto:REUNION@L19BIRDDOG.COM) and be sure to title your email “Reunion T-Shirt” The cost will be higher. (Estimate \$12-\$15 each). **Shirt stories** -Andy Anderson (Cat killer) shared that he and his wife Lee stopped at a Cracker Barrel for breakfast and when someone saw their t-shirt, they paid for their breakfast as a thank you. Today, I had a meal at Pollo Tropical while wearing my reunion shirt and a gentleman asked me if I flew Birddogs. We had a great conversation with each other. He was a former Vietnam helicopter pilot who while waiting for a class date at Ft Wolters missed being picked for fixed wing training because he took a one day leave to drive a friend home the same time the unannounced selection was being done in his barracks.

**REUNION MUGS** - these are great mugs! Some of you only received one. Others were able to buy a second one. If you are interested in purchasing another mug or several mugs, please let me know AT [REUNION@L19BIRDDOG.COM](mailto:REUNION@L19BIRDDOG.COM) and make sure to title your email “Reunion Mug”

**MEMORIAL DEDICATION PROGRAMS** - Our program printer offered us a chance to print extra Dedication Programs for a very reasonable cost. This was first-class printing job and since the program highlighted each unit in a first class manner, we ordered 165 more. The cost will be \$5 each, plus \$1.50 postage. If you want another program for yourself or for someone who did not attend, please send an email titled “Dedication Program” to [REUNION@L19BIRDDOG.COM](mailto:REUNION@L19BIRDDOG.COM)

**We must thank USAA for supporting our event with their presence and raffle contributions and the Army Aviation Center Federal Credit Union for the donation of time and personal in their art department developing the Dedication Program.**

**Finally**, the **2015 All Birddog Reunion Committee** went through many ups and downs during the 2-year process of planning this reunion. We had many conference calls and several visits to Panama City, Ft Rucker, Dothan, Ozark and Daleville. This was a true team effort! In the process some committee members had to withdraw due to personal situations. I thank them for what they were able to do. Others were able to stay involved and their ideas and experiences were all part of the process leading the event you all experienced. Several members that I have already highlighted went well beyond the call of duty. So here is “My Salute” to all the reunion committee members and a big “Thank you!” Lastly, I need to give big hugs to my wife Ruth and mom Eva for putting up with me through this entire process. In truth, it was an honor & privilege serving all of you, my fellow Birddog Unit Members.

Submitted by,



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