

Geodetic Survey Squadron/Group 2012 Reunion, Newsletter #16, 29 August 2012

Greetings, Fellow Veterans of the Geodetic Survey Squadron/Geodetic Survey Group!

Our fourth triennial reunion in Cheyenne is now just a memory, but was a big success!

Bonnie and I have finally returned home to Virginia after several weeks on the road. Summer is nearly over and my fall teaching schedule has already resumed at the local community college. Nevertheless, I want to pause long enough to give everyone a run-down on how the reunion went and what the plans are for the next one.

After the fun in Cheyenne, we took the slow route back home, meandering our way via Northeast Wyoming's Devil's Tower (no ETs or UFOs sighted!), and through colorful old west towns like Sundance, Lead, Spearfish and Deadwood in the Black Hills. We even stumbled into Sturgis during the big annual motorcycle event and managed to get out alive! We pressed onward to visit Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt at Mount Rushmore (or as it's known in the profession, "three surveyors and one other guy"), then on through the vast open expanse of South Dakota and North Dakota, where we saw the remnants of several now defunct Minuteman sites that I used to visit decades ago for annual check surveys. We visited old friends in the Grand Forks area and Minnesota, then wandered around the Great Lakes states (except Michigan) and ended up at Niagara Falls to celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary by getting soaked in the mist thrown up by the thundering waters! Good to be back---*only three years until the next reunion!*

Reunion Summary

The turnout for this reunion was just slightly lighter than previous reunions, but it was, nonetheless, a highly enthusiastic group. We ended up with 101 attendees, including six additional folks who arrived without prior reservations and paid at the door. Not everyone attended all three events.

Here's the final tally on attendance:

Total attending: 101
Friday social: 82
Saturday lunch: 89
Sunday brunch: 84

The three catered events went off as planned and the Holiday Inn did a fine job taking care of us. However, the real hit of the reunion was a new event--- **Anita Rakestraw's** Wine and Cheese Social in the Rawhide Hospitality Suite on Saturday evening. Anita, with the able assistance of her husband Mike, went over the top providing several cases of wine and a splendid variety of cheeses. Others also pitched in with additional snacks and alternative drinks. As the glasses filled and refilled, the voluble din of jovial merry-making grew increasingly louder. All attendees had a great time.

Displays

Several veterans brought in displays to share with the group.

Hank Miller, (Logistics Chief, 1981-89), brought in a display board mounted with orders, organization charts and photos providing a snapshot in time of GSS people and missions during the 1980s.

Obie Chambers, (Field Survey, 1961-64), brought in a photo and inspiring article written by the first 1381st commander, **Lt Col Harry Peterson**, in which he charged his troops with the importance of the missions that they and the new Squadron were about to carry out.

Brenda Schilinski, (Survey, 1975-80), added to the display with a fragile plaster plaque depicting the emblem of the original DMA Topographic Center *before* it became the Hydrographic/Topographic Center. That means the seal is 38-40 years old and miraculously survived its several journeys cross country, even though made of plaster! (She must have stuffed it in husband Paul's carry-on baggage!) The Squadron later became part of DMAHTC.

Awards

As master of ceremonies, I thought it appropriate to recognize a few outstanding volunteers who had helped to make the reunion a success. Four veterans received certificates of appreciation for their services.

Fritz Friehauf, (Commander, 1982-86 plus other assignments), was recognized for his ill-fated effort to organize a golf outing at the FEW Golf course. Despite Fritz's considerable investment of time, effort, and personal funds, there just was not sufficient interest among attendees to make a go of it. Which reminds me---Fritz still has a few dozen GSS-logo golf balls he'd like to sell you! To get your souvenir sleeve of GSS logo golf balls at cost, contact him at effrieauf@aol.com or 307-638-0240.

Second, **Merilou Miller** (Admin, 1969-77 & 1980-88) lent her service and talents on numerous occasions and on many levels by rounding up missing veterans, taking care of publicity in the Cheyenne news media, and even by hand making all the beautiful centerpieces at each table. She even put her good-looking visiting grandsons to work by inflating the numerous patriotic helium balloons floating around the Laramie/Shoshone Room, where we held our catered events.

Our third awardee was **Anita Rakestraw** (Personnel, 1978-87). When I was the lone voice crying in the wilderness for volunteers, Anita was the first to step forward. Her inspired idea to host a wine and cheese social on Saturday evening was, as noted above, the hit of the reunion and an event we are likely to repeat in future reunions.

Finally, **Ron Nesti**, (Det 3, Grand Forks, 1964-68) was recognized for being an invaluable asset to the GSS/GSG veterans as the manager of our website, not only for the three years leading up to *this* reunion, but also for the three years leading up to the 2009 reunion. He has funded significant upgrades to our website out of his own pocket, mostly because he cares so much about all of us and the legacy of our special Squadron.

On behalf of all of us, I extend our enduring gratitude to these four good citizens of GSS/GSG and to all others who pitched in to make this reunion a success.

As somewhat of a gag, **Dana "Phred" Hannon** also received an award for his previous service as "our guy in Cheyenne" for three previous reunions. The award was a large bag of his favorite Gibbles potato chips---picked up and hand-delivered by me directly from Pennsylvania---where they are still made the old fashioned way.

I also got an award of sorts---in fact a whole box-load of them! **Col Lyn Sheldon**, GSS Commander, 1976-80, gave me one of his coffee mugs with the word 'Commander' on it. (Wow! I feel like I just got promoted!) He also gave me a sweatshirt from the 1989 30th anniversary reunion that took place while the Squadron was still active and had just become the Geodetic Survey Group. He also bequeathed to me a small box of several bronze surveying disks from various agencies, including USAF, Corps of Engineers, DMA, USGS, and several more. (It's time to get out the *Brasso* polish!) He also gave me a copy of a February 1980 *Airman* magazine article, *A Call to Adventure*, describing the exploits and missions of the Geodetic Survey Squadron when Lyn was still commander. I am going to ask Ron to add this nifty article to our website so everyone can read it. ***Many thanks from me to Lyn for his generosity!!***

Two other veterans will be recognized in absentia and certificates of appreciation will be mailed to them.

The first to be recognized in absentia is **Col Gordon Barnes**, Acting Commander/Deputy for Operations, 1975-78, who was the real spark plug and designer behind our very first commemorative coin. He started talking up the idea three years ago right after the 2009 reunion! His help, guidance enthusiasm and previous experience with the Photomapper coin were invaluable in bringing our coin to fruition, and I think all who purchased our limited edition GSS/GSG commemorative coin will agree that it is indeed a beauty!

Our second awardee in absentia is the GSS veteran I have called the Godfather, or better yet, the *nearly invisible* guiding spirit behind *all* our reunions, **Mike DaRonco**, Stellar Camera, 1966-70.

More than thirty years after leaving the Squadron in 1970, Mike became *obsessed* with tracking down all of his old Squadron friends, their Squadron friends, and Squadron friends of their friends! Almost single-handedly, he eventually built a contact list of several hundred GSS veterans. In collaboration with Dana Hannon, they both put together the first of these triennial reunions in 2003, and the rest, as they say, is history. I say Mike is the 'nearly invisible guiding spirit' because we haven't seen Mike *since* 2003. Mike has been unable to attend the last three reunions due to bad luck, most recently due to a broken hip, but I want him to know that we are all thinking about him and we all remain grateful for his early initiative and inspired effort to get us all together after so many decades. Your work and dedication is still making it happen, Mike. *Please join us in 2015!*

Poll Results

As in previous reunions, I polled the attendees to ask a few relevant questions:

- Do we want to continue meeting every three years?
- Do we want to meet some other place; e.g., Orlando, St Louis, Las Vegas, where?
- Should we turn the reunion planning and execution over to a professional organizer who would make all arrangements in a package deal and charge accordingly, or do we continue to rely on volunteers?
- What other activities do we want to include; e.g., dinner/dance; live band/DJ; visit to a Minuteman site; guest speaker from NGA; what else?

Attendees overwhelmingly voted to continue meeting every three years in Cheyenne and to use volunteers. There appeared to be some general enthusiasm for a dinner/dance on one night of the reunion, and also for the possibility of visiting the Minuteman training site on FE Warren AFB. However, there was little interest in having a guest speaker provide an update on the status of NGA's geodetic operations.

Other Suggestions

A number of other suggestions came from attendees, but in the interest of fairness, I want to open up the suggestion box to everyone reading this e-mail, whether you attended this reunion or not. If you have ideas that you believe would make the next reunion even better, please reply to this newsletter and let me know. I'll share them with the general audience and planning committee.

Issues Resolved

With the majority wanting to continue holding the reunion every three years in Cheyenne using volunteers, I raised the issue of the *lack of volunteers* in Cheyenne, the unseemly incongruity of trying to manage details of a Cheyenne reunion from somewhere else across the country, and the absolute need to establish a core committee of *Cheyenne-resident* veterans before *this* reunion was over. Three gracious ladies answered the call and rose to the occasion. We now have three co-chairs for the 2015 reunion: **Anita Rakestraw, Merilou Miller and Liz Starr**, each a civilian veteran of the GSS/GSG. (Shame on you non-volunteering military veterans!) I am confident that the next reunion will be in good hands. I will continue to put out the e-mail newsletters and will assist the ladies as best I can from 1800 miles away. There will be additional volunteer opportunities and calls for assistance later on for reunion-related activities, most important of which is searching for and expanding our roll of missing GSS veterans. I'm absolutely certain that there are *hundreds* more out there who have fallen off our radar. ***In fact, we still have retired GSS/GSG veterans, who live right in Cheyenne and don't come to the reunions, because they don't know about them!!*** We will need someone to pick up the responsibility to inform those on the snail-mail roster about upcoming reunions. Sending snail-mail to the hundred or so veterans without e-mail is an expensive and tedious process, so we will probably do it only once or twice after the details of the next reunion are settled. Even so, we need *everyone's* help to identify veterans still missing from our rosters and inform them about future reunions by all available means---e-mail, phone call, social media, and yes, even snail-mail. Let's strive to get *all GSS/GSG veterans* back into our big tent!

Theme for 2015 Reunion

By pure happenstance, the 2015 reunion coincides with the 50th anniversary of the 1965 move of the GSS Headquarters from Orlando AFB, FL, to F.E. Warren AFB, Wyoming. That suggests an organizing theme for the next reunion and a special occasion to honor all the surviving early members of the 1381st.

Reunion Photos

Ron Nesti, our able Webmaster, has already posted some reunion photos on the GSS/GSG website, *but we need yours too!*

If you attended the reunion and took photos, please send them to Ron to post on our website.

Ron recommends sending your photos in jpeg format and to reduce them to "Web Large" image size, so they take up less disc space. If you can't do that, just send them as is, and he will edit them. Please include proposed captions and/or the names of the people in your photos, if you know them. **To further save space, just send your best shots and filter out the ones showing people's backs!**

Send to Ron at ronnesti@q.com or by snail-mail to:

Ron Nesti
10180 Oak Knoll Terrace
Colorado Springs, CO 80920

GSS/GSG Coins

As planned, all remaining GSS/GSG commemorative coins were distributed at the reunion. Our very first commemorative coin was an unqualified success and sold out before the end of May. It was minted in a limited edition of 50 and will not be reordered. However, **a poll taken during the reunion indicated an enthusiastic interest in a new coin for the 2015 reunion.** Since there is an apparent pent-up demand for commemorative coins, we will produce the next coin in a somewhat larger lot.

As noted, the 2015 reunion already has a theme---celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Squadron Hq's move from Orlando to Cheyenne---so that suggests some ideas for an interesting new coin design reflecting that theme. **To make it more interesting, we have decided to have a coin-design contest open to all interested GSS/GSG veterans and their families. The winner will receive a nice prize---and a free coin! More details to come...**

Photomapper Coins

Speaking of coins...

For those of you who are participating in the reorder of the Photomapper coin, please know that **Gordon Barnes** has gone ahead with the reorder as of 7 August and plans to start mailing them out shortly after they arrive in late September. He will enclose a note telling how much you owe, including the cost of the coin, the padded mailer and postage.

As you know, the Mint required a minimum order of 50 coins. As of now, 36 of the 50 have already been spoken for, so **there are only 14 more Photomapper coins available.**

GSS veterans who served in the Squadron between July 1959 and July 1972, while it was still an all-Air Force unit under the 1370th Photomapping Group (later, Wing), may want to order one or more Photomapper coins or increase the number you already ordered. If so, please let Gordon know at glbjlb@charter.net as soon as possible.

Check out www.1370th.org/coin.html to see color images of the Photomapper coin and Gordon's story about its history and design.

Another Name Added to Our Online Roster

A hearty welcome to **Karen Meckel**, a civilian geodesist with the Geodetic Survey Group from August 1989 until October 1993, when the unit closed its doors. Karen later served with DMA's Geodesy & Geophysics Office in St Louis, October 1993 – January 1998. Karen sent us her contact information, and she now has her name entered in our "Hall of Fame" of living GSS/GSG veterans on our homepage.

Check out <http://www.1381st-gss.freeservers.com/>.

If you don't see your name in *The List*, it's because you haven't sent us your contact information yet! Take the few simple steps listed below to get on the roster!

Get your name listed among your old friends and colleagues on the GSS/GSG veterans' webpage by sending us your locator information!

Just copy and paste the following little form into a reply e-mail to me and fill it out with your

NAME:

ADDRESS: (Include street or mailbox #, city, state and zip code)

PHONE:

E-MAIL ADDRESS:

MILITARY or CIVILIAN: (Answer "both" if you served the unit in both capacities)

HIGHEST RANK or POSITION in GSS/GSG:

START/END DATES OF SERVICE IN GSS/GSG: (Multiple entries, if you had more than one tour of duty)

ORGS: (i.e., where you worked and what you did in the unit)

OTHER: (Whatever else you want to share here about your time in the Squadron or since then.)

Your information is protected by user name and password, so only other Squadron veterans with IDs and passwords will see it. If there is something you don't want posted, let me know and we'll leave it off the website, but it's important that our locator information is complete and up-to-date for the next reunion.

Send us your digitized photos, "war stories", and TDY adventures from your time in the Squadron, and Ron will add those to our collection. There's also a blog spot for communicating with or searching for old friends and colleagues.

I will continue to send out these newsletters, but less often, until we get closer to the next reunion.

Looking forward to seeing you all in 2015!

Garrett

Field Survey & Astro

GSS/Cheyenne

April 1967 - May 1970 and January - December 1972

Nothing makes the Earth seem so spacious as to have friends at a distance—they make the latitudes and longitudes.

--Henry David Thoreau, Surveyor & Philosopher