

Portland 2003



Sternwheeler



Oregon Vietnam Veterans Living Memorial

188 people celebrated the ninth reunion of Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry, in Portland, Oregon, from 25-29 June 2003. Bill and Patti Schwindt, along with the men and women of their committee, bent over backward to host a wonderful reunion. The following is a report about that special event.

Superb! Yes, that's what it was. The magic that unfolded in Portland was so enchanting, so overwhelming in interaction and emotion, even the Veterans themselves were mystified by the experience. To say that Portland was wonderful is an understatement. The affair was incredible! Bill and Patti Schwindt made it so. As reunion hosts, they spent months preparing for this wonderful five-day excursion into the great Northwest. All the bases were covered--nothing was left to chance. Even the weather behaved, showering Charlie Company with sunshine and cool breezes.

On Wednesday and Thursday, Charlie Company was fully assembled. They came pouring in from all parts of the country, accompanied by wives, children, and even good friends. Nick and Jennifer Dragon arrived on Monday—two days ahead of schedule—to lend a hand and visit the beautiful sights of Portland and the surrounding area. John and Jackie Meadows were right behind them and the reunion was under way at that point. Shorty and Linda Menendez got in early and Shorty immediately headed out to sea with John Meadows, Vince Anderson and others for a Pacific ocean fishing trip. John reportedly caught a 500-pound fish. Shorty's catch was 400-pounds. Humm...

Mike Balsler came down from Seattle. Mike hasn't been able to attend a reunion since Las Vegas, ten years ago. His battle scars are evident in his stiff-legged gait, but he walked tall and proud among his friends. Maybe it was seeing Dennis Adkins again, his best friend in Viet Nam; maybe it was Danny Alvis his loyal RTO. Whoever or whatever it was, Mike knew he was among men who respected and appreciated him. Sharon Brown, Charlie's widow, came to spend some time with us, too. She knows that when she is among Charlie's friends, he is present also. Charlie's sister Charlotte believes the same thing. Neither of them were disappointed. Mike Pectol, 2/77 Field Artillery, made his first reunion. Mikie reports that his bus ride back to Phoenix is a blur. He was riding on a cloud of love and memories, hardly noticing the passing miles.

Three former army nurses were there: Arlene-Frank Edwards, Mary Kessi, and Jonemarie-Butler Manning. The long, standing ovation they received at the banquet expressed what every Viet Nam Veteran wants to say to them: "Thanks for what you did for us!" Lynn Taylor and his wife Mary, left their farm and summer harvest to come all the way from Moxee, Washington. This was Lynn's first reunion. Lynn said he'd be back. Ruben and Arlene Barkley arrived. He hasn't lost a bit of his whirlwind personality. Spending time with Ruben is always a pleasure. Mike and Susan Root from A Company came. Mike said he wouldn't miss a chance to be among the people he loved and admired the most: Viet Nam Veterans. Mike said he'd have low-crawled to be there. Many veterans

from other units joined us. Jerry Rudisill and Gary Hartt from 2/22 (mech), and Bill Riggs, Dick Miller, and Ron More from 2/12 Inf. shared our dream. In fact, these guys, who live near Portland, had worked behind the scenes with Bill to make sure we had everything we needed for a successful reunion. Thanks guys!

Roland Respass noted their presence and commented that it proves that Viet Nam Veterans and especially Charlie Company, is an "all inclusive" organization—" Yes, everyone was welcome and they felt it. Robert O'Neal drove up from Texas. No small feat considering he was introducing Gina, baby Declain, Patrick and Christian Bustamonte to America. They were a long way from Singapore, and Bob wanted them to meet the men and women of Charlie Company.

For every veteran and family member attending, there is a special story to be told, some magic to be revealed. We'll cover more about these special people in newsletters, telling their story as best we can remember it. Thanks to all of you who came to the reunion, shared yourselves, your families, your memories and your love. For those of you who ached to be there, but could not come this year, we'll see you in Milwaukee, WI in 2005.