

2005 Oflag 64 Reunion Report

Irv Solotoff wrote:

To all the members of OFLAG 64, I would like to thank you for having the confidence and faith in me by allowing me to host YOUR 2005 reunion. I realize that this annual event is very important to all of you as it gives you a chance to meet, greet, and reminisce with old friends and “KRIEGIES” with whom you all have so much in common. While I admit that it was a lot of hard work, time consuming, and often frustrating, it was truly a labor of love.

I enjoyed doing it and being a part of it. My thanks and all the thanks that I will ever ask for are the many letters, emails, and phone calls that I got from those who attended, telling me what a wonderful time they all had. It was very gratifying to hear from many of you telling me how wonderful everything was, it made me very proud to be part of OFLAG 64. To those who could not attend for the many reasons that crop up as we get older, you missed a great time. I am sure that PAT WATERS is already busy with plotting and planning of the “06” reunion, and I hope that many of you who could not make it this year will be able to meet with us at our next reunion, wherever it may be.

Once again, thanks to all of you and GOD BLESS.

Excerpts from Lucy Lussenden report:

I am happy to recount all that I remember of the wonderful days of the Reunion last week. Irv Solotoff, this year’s host, handled all the arrangements for this year’s Reunion! Rosa had volunteered to help Irv, and was contacted by phone for her input.

As you know, we all stayed at the Embassy suites hotel in Ft. Lauderdale. If you’ve every stayed at an Embassy Suites, you know that they include a FULL breakfast (anything you want—eggs, omelets, pancakes, cold cereal, hot oatmeal, grits, fresh fruit, juices, etc.), AND a cocktail party every night including anything you want to drink (soft drinks, juices, beer, wine, hard liquor, etc.) and popcorn, etc. Plus the whole center of the hotel was like an Italian or Spanish center courtyard with a meandering pond, large and colorful plants, wood ducks swimming around (in Ft. Lauderdale, at least), lots of garden tables and chairs, and more. The whole courtyard is open to all the floors, so everyone can look over the railing and enjoy the activity from above. Plus, every room looks out to the city scenery. Oh my, there was so much atmosphere and it was really wonderful.

We had a fun time visiting with each other twice every day, plus in the hospitality room. There was a wonderful big outdoor pool and a pond with a big goldfish—just the works! At the cocktail party (2 hours from 5:30-7:30 PM) we would pull together several tables and all sit around and laugh and just have a lot of fun. There was an Italian restaurant in the hotel with really good food, albeit a little pricey. The hotel stay was just wonderful and everyone enjoyed themselves very much.

Wednesday was a free day. Thursday, some folks took a tour to the Everglades where they saw alligators while flying across the grassy water on an airboat. The boat pilot would stop the boat where the alligators usually “hang out” so everyone could take pictures. In the evening we all had dinner t the hotel in a private room. The food was wonderful. Some had fish, some had sliced beef and others had chicken. The salads were nice and fresh! A kind of strawberry shortcake tort was dessert, and very good.

The business meeting was held after breakfast on Friday. Pat Waters talked about where we would have next year's meeting. He still hopes it can be held in New Orleans, but is keeping Charleston in his hip pocket, too, just in case things go bad in N. O. Apparently the D-Day Museum did not sustain much damage, except that which was caused by some no-goodnick looters! Pat passed around an email he had received which was an account by one of the volunteers who spent the night at the museum so he could "take care of it". After they lost power, he stayed hidden as some people appeared outside and began to break in. Not knowing what would happen, he did not reveal his presence. The looters took a few small things and tried to break into the ATM machine. The museum was not flooded.

Bob Thompson asked if the group wanted to continue having Reunions after next year. Later he spoke with individuals on a one-on-one basis. The general feeling was that people still want to have Reunions. But, everyone realizes that our group is getting more and more frail each year. Bob O'Neill (from Arizona) said that maybe we could take a cruise boat out of San Diego. Joe Seringer gave an update on the group's finances, which are in good shape. There was a discussion of whether we should "do something" with the extra funds, and a number of suggestions were made as to good groups who could use the money. But Bob pointed out how much it costs to mail out the ITEM, which is about \$6,000 per year. With about \$14,000 in the account, we couldn't mail out the ITEM for many years at that rate, unless voluntary contributions continued at a good rate. Right now, each reunion contributes a nice sum to the account, which makes it possible to function on the kind of voluntary contributions made by the group so far.

Bob Thompson asked me to come up and say a few words about the binder of photographs that I brought with me of the trip I took to Germany this year. I kept the book in the hospitality room for everyone to enjoy. Irv had white T-shirts printed with the Bickers' sketch of Oflag 64 and words about the Reunion, etc. The first T-shirt was free to each, extras were \$10. Very nice. Also, he had black zippered briefcases printed with the camp and Oflag 64 on them. Plus, a mug with Oflag 64 on it was available for each person. Representatives from the American Red Cross came and passed out sample MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) to the ex-POWs only.

In the evening we were bussed to a boat that took us on a tour through the canals and waterways of Ft. Lauderdale, the "Venice" of Florida. Wow! Such fantastic and beautiful homes and yachts—all selling in the millions! Our destination was an island where we had a BBQ dinner of ribs and chicken, cole slaw, really good baked beans, steak-fried style potatoes, prawns, and a piece of cake for dessert. Then we all walked a short distance and enjoyed a good live show. First was a ventriloquist, followed by a juggler, then a comedian. It was a good show. We arrived back at our hotel about ten o'clock. It was a fun, but long and tiring trip.

Saturday most folks participated in individual activities. In the evening we had dinner together again at the hotel. We were served prime rib, cooked just right and very tasty and a beautiful chocolate cake for dessert. Names were pulled from a box and some folks took home prizes, like bottles of booze. Irv hired a disk jockey to play music from the 40s.

After breakfast in the atrium on Sunday morning, we gathered in a private conference room for the Memorial Service. Unfortunately, the list of our group members who had passed on over the past year had been misplaced. Irv introduced a Rabbi, who gave a short homily on life and how we should not sweat the small stuff. He talked about the ordeal that our POWs had gone through, as well as the folks who lost so much as a result of Hurricane Katrina. He said a prayer for all our lost folks and sang the prayer in Hebrew. The service lasted about 20 minutes, after which everyone began leaving for the airport and home.