

Dallas Reunion Report

October 7-10, 2010

Perfect weather, informative side trips, fabulous food, attentive hosts, and great camaraderie....these are words that describe the 2010 Oflag 64 Reunion in Dallas. Most of the attendees arrived on Thursday and were greeted by our hosts, Carole and Phil Lester who presided at the Registration Table with Elodie Caldwell and her sister, Janet Ellsworth. We were directed to the Hospitality Room, a spacious area close to the restaurant that was almost continually replenished with heavy appetizers, desserts, and drinks. The staff at the Crowne Plaza Hotel couldn't do enough for us. Our rooms were enormous, quiet, and comfortable. Thursday evening was designated as a "dinner on your own" period, but the food provided by the hotel (shrimp, meatballs, chicken, cheeses, crackers, Chex mix, pretzels, fruits, vegetables, assorted cookies and chocolate brownies) was enough to quell most appetites. As the Kriegies arrived, acquaintances were renewed and newcomers introduced.

Among the Kriegies who attended were: Vincent (Doc) DiFrancesco, Bob O'Neill, Ray Klinkenborg, Herm Littman, George Rosenthal, Bob Thompson, Sid Thal, and George Myron. Most arrived with family members, but no one could top the Littman family who numbered 28 by the end of the weekend and enjoyed a joyous family reunion within the POW community. There were about 80 attendees in all, and several came from outside the United States: Australia and the Netherlands. The widows of Gabriel Serda (Coleta), Vic Kanners (Marcia), Roy Chappell (Helen), and Lewis Lowe (Janet), were also in attendance.

On Friday, October 8th, we were treated to a continental breakfast before the Business Meeting began at 9:00 am. After the treasury report and several announcements came the question, "Who will host next year's reunion?" No one volunteered, but a few hours later, we learned that the Rosentals had come forward. We are so grateful to George and Arlene Rosenthal for continuing this great tradition, and we look forward to the next reunion in St. Petersburg, Florida in October 2011.

After the Business Meeting on Friday, a chartered bus took us to the Dallas Holocaust Museum and Center for Tolerance and Peace where a docent spoke about educating students to be "upstanders." The focus of this museum is on the bystanders, and not the perpetrators. We were provided with headsets, and took an audio tour of the exhibits. Later, we listened as a Holocaust survivor spoke of his experiences in the concentration camps. The museum is currently undergoing a capital campaign to expand its exhibits.

After the Holocaust Museum, our bus headed for the 6th Floor Museum - the Book Depository where Lee Harvey Oswald laid waiting for JFK's motorcade in

November 1963. Again, this was a self-guided tour with photos and video covering John F. Kennedy's campaign, presidency, assassination, funeral, and the conspiracy theories that have prevailed. It left some of us wondering if the truth about JFK's assassination will ever be revealed.

Friday evening's meal was "dinner on your own," and many of us dined together in the hotel's dining room, after which we reconvened in the Hospitality Room where much joking and storytelling occurred as it does each year.

On Saturday, we enjoyed another breakfast provided by the hotel, then embarked on the bus for a tour of the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth. We were met by Amon Carter, Jr.'s widow and daughter, then separated into three groups for docent tours of the museum, which has a great collection of Western American Art. We then headed for the most colorful spot on our tour, the Fort Worth Stockyards. The Stockyard area resembled an Old Western movie set with its rustic architecture, western clothing stores, and steakhouse restaurants. We returned to our hotel too soon, but with time for a short rest before the evening banquet.

Our banquet speaker was Jeffrey Brown, a United States Air Force Academy graduate and expert on cyber-terrorism. He spoke about the kriegy experience and described the war being currently conducted in cyberspace with those who try to steal our identities and assets online. Brown works for Raytheon in their cyber-security division. He ended his speech by thanking the men for their sacrifices and by asking all the children to stand and acknowledge their grandfathers' and great-grandfathers' contributions to their freedom.

Our after-dinner entertainment was a medley of songs from the forties and fifties sung by Marsha Anderson, a friend of Carole Lester, and by Herm Littman's granddaughter, Alicia Sinclair, both opera singers. They were accompanied by pianist Frances Ostenskowski from North Lake College.

After dinner, many gathered in the Hospitality Room. Others returned to their rooms. In one room, families were entertained by Javier Serda, son of Kriegy, Gabriel Serda, who sang and played guitar until midnight.

Javier and Angel Serda, (sons of Gabriel Serda, Kriegy), along with their mother, Coleta, were first time attendees. They live in Pharr, Texas, and were unaware of the reunions until a recent newspaper article about Gabriel Serda alerted Elodie Caldwell who contacted them over a year ago. Gabriel Serda was a mortar gunner for the 81st Armored Reconnaissance Division in Africa and a POW for over 2 years. On April 21, 1945, he was liberated from Luckenwalde, Germany by the Russian Army. The Serdas quickly won the hearts of the reunion attendees. We look forward to next year's reunion where we hope to be further entertained with more music and fraternal antics.

Other newcomers to the 2010 reunion were: Ann and John Sudduth from Watertown, NY, and their nephew, Tony Lumpkin III, from Austin, TX. Ann, the daughter of Tony Lumpkin, traveled to Schubin and Oflag 64 where she met with the

family of the farmer who hid her father after his escape. She also visited the farmer's gravesite where she was shown a plaque written in English that was given by her father in the farmer's memory. Her father had kept 5 diaries of his war accounts, one of which Tony Lumpkin III has transcribed and plans to publish. Ann also visited Auschwitz and spoke about Father Max Kolby, a Polish Catholic priest, who volunteered to be executed in another man's place. Ann has much information to share, and would probably welcome inquiries. Tony displayed some of the artifacts he brought along: a compass made to look like a button, identity papers, and the journals.

Another first timer was Ruhamah Bauman, grand-niece of Sam Gwosden. She found out about the reunions on the Internet, while doing research for a thesis at The University of Wisconsin where she is a graduate student in history. Ruhamah plans to attend the 2011 reunion with her mother.

Sunday's plated breakfast and Memorial Service were the final events of the weekend. Another of Herm's granddaughters, Jacqueline Lommerese, from the Netherlands, read a poem written by Helen Chappell and announced the names of those who had died during the past year.

After the colors were retired by the Tri-County Veterans Color Guard, we said our goodbyes and headed to our respective hometowns. Thank you to all the Littmans, to Jim, who provided tour bus transportation, and especially to Carole and Phil Lester, for hosting a memorable and very enjoyable 2010 Oflag 64 Reunion.

Pat Bender
Daughter of Vincent (Doc) DiFrancesco