

REPORT & MINUTES OF THE 2016 10TH ANNUAL 3973RD CDS LOS TOROS REUNION IN COLORADO SPRINGS

Hello Los Toros! The 10th annual reunion of the 3973rd Combat Defense Squadron-Los Toros began on Monday, August 22nd at the Embassy Suites in Colorado Springs, Colorado with the traditional and fun 'Meet & Greet' session in Dianne Hughes' suite. Goody bags containing t-shirts, name tags and agendas were distributed. Warm hellos and discussions were shared with attendees who we have not seen since our last reunion in Nashville; or even longer, Meet & Greet was great fun and established a positive attitude for the balance of our reunion. The group then retired to the Embassy Suites atrium bar to continue visiting during the complimentary happy hour. This is our fourth reunion with Embassy Suites again providing us with an excellent meeting venue. Dianne negotiated a \$119.00/room group rate (vs. \$169.00 standard room rate), which afforded each attendee a \$200.00 savings over a four night stay. The complimentary buffet breakfast and happy hour afforded our group the opportunity to gather together at the beginning and end of each day!

On Tuesday morning, August 23rd our group met in the hotel lobby to board two 15-person vans rented from Enterprise and driven by our two volunteer drivers, Billy Bowers and Tony Santos, some attendees drove personal or rented cars and also assisted in transportation during the next few days. This was the first time Dianne has arranged for our group to have access to our own rented vans, it allowed us to set our own pace, chose tourist-interest sites and was much more economical than a bus with driver service.

Our first site to visit was the focus and centerpiece of the Colorado Springs reunion--The United States Air Force Academy, the youngest of the U.S. Service academies was established in 1954 at Lowry AFB and relocated to it's current location in 1958. Dennis arranged for us to be met by Mr. Frank Perez at the heart of the Academy; The Barry Goldwater Visitor Center which houses the gift shop and many displays of historical USAF memorabilia, aeronautical displays, exhibits on cadet life, a mock up of a typical cadet room and a display of Falcons, the mascot & team name of the Air Force football team. Frank provided us with information of the Academy and directed us through the driving tour of the campus and invited us to watch a very inspiring 15 minute documentary about the academy and life as a cadet, There are approximately 4,400 cadets enrolled at the Academy, upon graduating they are commissioned as Second Lieutenants in the United States Air Force. The film presentation left me with pride that our country produces such fine young men & women from various cultural backgrounds and faiths; however, it also caused me some envy at their youthful energy and very promising futures.

We also visited the famous Cadet Chapel which provides religious services to cadets of all faiths. The Chapel's modern design of 17 spires with it's organ of 4,000 pipes is a campus landmark, the chapel is featured on this year's reunion t-shirt. In the Chapel area there are displays of aircraft and from it's heightened location above the parade ground, groups of cadets can be seen walking to various classrooms on campus. We completed our visit by enjoying an excellent buffet lunch at the 'Falcon Club' on the Academy grounds. After a brief visit to The Old Colorado Springs Historical District we returned to The Embassy Suites for a relaxing group gathering of snacks & drinks at the Atrium Bar and discussions of the day's activities.

On Wednesday, August 24th we met in the hotel lobby for departure to our days' excursions to The Garden of the Gods, Historic Manitou Springs and The Manitou Cliff Dwellings. Our first stop was at the attractive and informative Garden of the Gods visitor & nature center displaying animal and natural history displays. The area is located at the base of Pike's peak 'where the plains meet the Rockies' and is known for its towering red limestone formations. Many bike and walking trails are available, (however our group wisely chose and enjoyed the comfortable air conditioned driving option).

We drove to nearby Manitou Springs known for its naturally carbonated mineral springs some of which still flow in the historical district. Historic Manitou Springs offers a unique, artsy downtown area with unique galleries, shops and restaurants. After lunch we drove to the nearby Manitou Cliff Dwellings where we explored cliffside dwellings built by Native Americans during the great Pueblo Period 1100-1300 A.D. The dwellings and a combined museum/gift shop depicts the lives, culture and architectural achievements of early Southwestern Native Americans. After returning to the hotel we later met in the lobby for a wonderful & fun group dinner, arranged by Dennis, at the Saltgrass Restaurant, although we were the largest group in the restaurant we were reasonably well behaved.

On Thursday, August 25th we met in The Cripple Creek Room for the reunion business meeting. After the Pledge of Allegiance we recited the name of Dave Nicklas who passed away in Pennsylvania in April. Dave served at Moron with Bill Vickery on 'C' Flight 1961-1962. TAPS, Dave--rest in peace.

We then conducted a group 'hello & good luck' phone call to Nona & Nolan Watson at home; we were unable to conduct a group call to Dave Wells who was hospitalized recovering from a health issue---but our thoughts are also with you Dave!

Fred & Michelle Madden presented a email message sent to them at our reunion by the current Base Commander of Moron Air Base, it was a treat to recite a message & contact directly from Moron---Fred & Michelle apparently were good ambassadors from Los Toros. During Veterans reviews we invite all attendees to speak about their military & civilian careers, their families and their adventures since our time together at Moron AFB, veterans reviews are always entertaining and provide personal insights allowing us to enjoy learning more about our reunion friends. The group then enjoyed an all American Buffet served in the atrium area of the hotel.

The afternoon session of our business meeting began with Fred & Michelle Madden speaking of their recent visits to Moron Air Base and to Sevilla, Spain. They were both welcomed by authorities at Moron and given a base tour, their impressions of the Base appear to be of overall less activity as compared to the Base in the Cold War era, very few Americans were seen, although there is a U.S. Marines unit on base supported by Ospreys military aircraft. They were presented with current Moron Air Base unit T-shirts, (Fred served in the Fire & Rescue/ Fire Dept. Unit), Moron memorabilia may be available through the Madden's contact at Moron, please contact Fred if interested.

The Maddens reported that the city center of 'old Sevilla' remained largely unchanged, I visited Sevilla in 2000, and also found the city center still charming & largely unchanged, but I was disappointed to discover that The Hotel Cristina was no longer in business, nor was the

Bar Julia! The Maddens were there during a busy time when cruise ship visitors who had traveled from the port of Cadiz were visiting the city, their numerous presence was unavoidable.

Dan & Dennis began the next part of the meeting by asking Dianne Hughes to approach the podium for a presentation during our special Tenth Anniversary Reunion. While various members have served on location/venue committees Dianne has selflessly given precious time (and stress) to advising and directing committee members insuring that each reunion is a success. Dianne dedicates her time while still employed and while managing rental units, she works on reunions even when she herself may be 'under the weather.' On behalf of the 3973rd CDS Los Toros, Dan & Dennis presented Dianne with a beautiful plaque engraved with an outline of Spain, mounted with two 3973rd Challenge Coins and an American and Spanish flags pin. Marie Katrancha then approached the podium and presented Dianne with a monetary gift from monies donated by a grateful group of attendees---God Bless you Dianne!

We then began the process of selecting the location of our 2017 reunion. Locations nominated were: Mount Rushmore, Dayton, Tampa, St. Augustine, Albuquerque/Santa Fe, Fredricksburg/Washington D.C., San Antonio and New Orleans. Attendees voted for two locations on the first vote to narrow to three candidate locations; on the final vote Dayton, Ohio was chosen as our next reunion location. Dayton is the home of the Wright Brothers, The National Museum of The United States Air Force with the nearby presence of Wright-Paterson Air Force Base. If any members are available to assist Dianne in the planning of our reunion please contact her, she is currently the only member of the 2017 reunion committee! Late September and early October was chosen as the probable time of the Dayton reunion.

The last order of business was the all-important raffle. Raffle funds are used to pay for various reunion expenses including postage, supplies, meals, meeting rooms, transportation, etc. Raffle prizes are generously donated by members and include many handcrafted items. The raffle committee did a wonderful job of conducting the distribution of tickets and prizes and the collection of monies while making the raffle a fun process! \$500.00 was raised and added to the groups' funds.

The Tenth Annual anniversary of the 3973rd CDS Los Toros reunion was adjourned, the group gathered at the Atrium Bar, and participated in a wine & food tasting event in the hotel atrium area, a nice way to conclude our meeting. We can now look forward to our 2017 reunion. See ya' in Dayton!

This report of the 3973rd Combat Defense Squadron-Los Toros Tenth Reunion is submitted by Dan Foronda assisted by minutes from Marie Katrancha.

