

TIGER TRACKS

Spring 2006

The Newsletter of the Steel Tigers 77th Armor Association

A Meeting of Platoons. Oh, How I Want To Go Home

Reunion 2006 will be held in El Paso, Texas from October, 11-15. El Paso is also a 400-year-old community with roots that reach back to Native Americans, Spanish conquistadores, Mexican immigrants and American pioneers. This unique blend of cultures and customs makes a city of 700,000 feel like a small town. Friendly people, sunny weather and a range of outdoor recreation add to the quality of life. Ranked as the second safest city in the United States, El Paso also offers a world-class symphony orchestra, nationally recognized museum of art and a vibrant cultural scene.

Back when Texas was still *Tejas*, El Paso, the second oldest settlement in the United States, was the main crossing on the Rio Grande. It still plays that role today, its 700,000 residents joining with another 1.7 million across the river in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, to form the largest binational (and bilingual) megalopolis in North America. The northern reaches are taken up by the giant Fort Bliss military base, where two museums trace the military history of the city from adobe Spanish outpost to largest air defense center in the western world. Its dramatic setting, however, where the Franklin Mountains meet the Chihuahu desert, gives it a certain bold, rough pioneer edge.

In addition to reminiscing with old friends, and meeting a few new ones, take this opportunity to enjoy a unique and beautiful city. Check out the tentative Reunion Agenda on page 5.

Let us take the time to meet again with old friends and warriors, and to make new friends among those we may have missed over the years. We have a strong and proud tradition and we welcome everyone to join our ranks. See you at the reunion. Have a safe trip.

CSM Joe D

Farewell Message from Max Pickharts

Comrades in Arms of the First Tank Battalion, 77th Armor:

You fine men of the 77th Armor Association selected me to be the first Honorary Colonel of the Regiment (HCOR) a couple of years ago. We have all experienced moments which made us both proud and honored, and during my 33 years of service, this was one of the events I cherished most. It was the cap stone of my experience being a member of the battalion. I hoped to do the job right.

But that didn't happen. I was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2004, received external radiation treatment, and radio active seeds planted in the prostate. Although a bit difficult, those procedures destroyed the cancer. I hoped for better days ahead, instead I developed chronic radiation proctitis. This has caused me to be unable to perform as your HCOR. Thus, I requested early retirement from my three year term as HCOR. My request was approved, pending a replacement, which turns out to be my dear friend Colonel (Ret) Carm Milia. He will do a fine job.

I certainly appreciate your confidence in me. I was both honored and humbled by your selection of me as HCOR. I'm disappointed that I couldn't perform better. We intend to attend our reunion in El Paso. See you there.

Blood on the Ax !! Max

LZ Nancy. August 1969. Explosions in the Mortar Platoon area!

Was it incoming mortars or rockets? Fire! What was a road building water tanker doing there? What was the Mortar Platoon doing? What was the reaction? Were the mortars still firing a support mission? Were there any casualties? How about heroes?

A report on the incident has been posted in the History Section of the Steel Tigers website:

www.steeltigers.org

The report includes first hand accounts from several people, and more than a dozen photos taken at the time.

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77TH ARMOR ASSOCIATION BOARD MEMBERS

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COL Carmen P. Milia (Ret.)

**HONORARY COMMAND SERGEANT
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CSM Joe D. Offutt (Ret.)

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Pre-Reunion 77TH ARMOR ASSOCIATION UPDATE

It's Reunion Time! This is the best time for crews and squads, platoons and sections, special task forces, companies, all of the old buddies to get together in our own special groups. The Association of the 1/77 Armor is really an association of a whole bunch of small groups of comrades who became friends by working, eating and living together, some were wounded and some gave their life to help others stay alive. This is a very special time to meet again, face to face, talk about how we survived together, and how we have carried on since we were together, to share what was and what is important to each of us. We need each other. Welcome home. Welcome to Reunion 2006.

Help To The Brothers. There is a small amount of support available for those who need some assistance to attend the Reunion. We will have some fellows who will be willing to share a room, and split the costs. We have some free miles on airlines to help with transportation. Some may be willing to car pool. And, we have some pledges for monetary support to help with gasoline or registration fees. It will all be on a case by case basis. If you can offer help, please let me know what kind of help you can offer, and how much. If having some help makes the difference between your being able to come or not, please let me know, and we will try to match you with a donor. Be assured that no Association funds will be used; all donations will come directly from those who have the ability to help others.

Improving The Business Of The Association. A recurring problem in prior meetings was the lack of time to fully develop issues before the Association, and to consider solutions. To help solve this problem, I am going to appoint several committees before the Reunion. To make this work, we need your help. Bring to my attention now any items you believe need to be decided, and your suggestion for action. Also, if you want to run for any Elected Office of the Association, or nominate someone for an Office, please bring it to my attention now. And, now is the time to start thinking about when the next Reunion should take place, where, and who will agree to head the effort. The Committees identified so far are: Nominations, Constitution, Reunion, Financial Review, and Awards. More can be formed based upon your recommendations.

Roster. We will distribute a roster with the best contact information we have, for use ONLY by our members. Please confirm your contact information ASAP, and tell us if you do not want us to include your contact information on the roster.

Remember The Reunion! Start your planning now. There are only so many rooms reserved for us. If we need more, the motel needs your information early. Remember to call or write all of your friends to make arrangements to be together in El Paso. And remember, CSM Joe D. has promised us the best meeting of buddies ever.

I remain in your service,
Tom Miller
President 2004-2006
703.476.1798
HQ66Tom@schach.org

COL (Ret.) Carmen Milia assigned by the US Army Chief of Armor as our Steel Tigers Honorary Colonel

COL Milia served in tank and reconnaissance units, and as an armored vehicle and ammunition development specialist in the US Army. He was a tank unit commander in combat during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. During his career, he was assigned to the 44th, 714th, 64th, 30th, 29th and 77th Tank Battalions, as well as the 83rd Reconnaissance Battalion and the 2nd Training Regiment. At the Armor School, COL Milia served as the Chief of armored equipment development, and Director of the Departments of Training, Weapons, and Doctrine. In his last duties, and after retirement from the Army, COL Milia worked on development of the M60A3 and M1 tanks, other armored vehicles, and ammunition for them. He is a Master Tanker and Distinguished Faculty Member of the US Army Armor School. Awards include the Silver Star, Legion of Merit with 2 Oak Leaf Clusters, Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters and Purple Heart.



COL. Carmen Milia, 1973

With minimum training and experience, newly commissioned Lieutenant Milia was assigned to tank units in Korea during an early stage of that war. He earned his Silver Star during intense combat in Korea while proving there was a role for tanks in that mountainous country. After assignment to 1/77th Tank Battalion in Vietnam, then Lieutenant Colonel Milia led the first armored task force back to Khe Sahn and the Laos border after the Marine Corps had moved out of that area. This combined arms team operation was used at the Armor School as a teaching example that tank units could fight insurgents as well as organized units, in jungle, brush covered rolling hills, and on sandy beaches. Back at Fort Knox, he made sure that our training matched where and how we were fighting. COL Milia frequently states that his most important assignment was being with the scouts, mortarmen, tankers, medics, mechanics, cooks supply men and all the other specialties of the 1/77 Tank Battalion in Vietnam.

COL Milia is a true Steel Tiger, and will represent all of us with pride and distinction during his duty as Honorary Colonel of the 77th Armor Regiment.



Update your Contact Information

We have learned by trial and error that about one third of the Veterans for whom we had one or more forms of contact cannot be sent e-mail and/or ground mail any more. In other words, you have moved or changed e-mail providers, and forgot to send us the updated information. Thus, it takes many, many hours to find you again.

Please, please, when you have a change in street address, e-mail address, or phone number, let us know. Our search for additional and new prospective members is limited by the huge amount of time it takes to find you again. And, you become concerned because you haven't heard from us for too long. To update your email address or postal address, use the form on the back of Tiger Tracks or contact Bob Basner at:

Robert Basner
Steel Tigers 77th Armor Association
7966 Maple, P.O. Box 38
Birch Run, MI 48415

Or by email at: bobnconnie2@aol.com



The Steel Tigers Yahoo Group is an informal way to keep in touch with others in the Steel Tigers family. This email group is open to all of the valiant tankers from the 77th Armor Regiment who served so willingly and bravely in WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Kosovo, and who continue to serve in Iraq. Any MOS that served or serves with the 77th may join. The group is also open to the family of those who served or serve in the 77th.

To join go to:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/steeltigers/>

Active Duty Update: Combat-ready Tank Battalion

On 28 January 2006, 1-77 AR deployed to Grafenwohr to participate in a Mission Rehearsal Exercise in order become a combat-ready tank battalion.

The MRX was conducted over a 45-day period, during which each tank conducted all tank tables through Table 8. Following the successful completion of TT VIII, each platoon then conducted Platoon Battle Runs, which integrated Tank Table XII with the coordination and integration of close air support. Unique to the entire gunnery sequence was the fact that the Battalion occupied a Brigade Forward Operating Base for the duration of the exercise, simulating the combat environment currently presented in Iraq. Additionally, during the gunnery sequence, C/1-77 "House of Pain" drew up-armored HMMWVs to conduct "Motorized Platoon Gunnery," which consists of machine gun engagements from the vehicle-mounted platforms.

Following the completion of the Platoon Battle Runs, the Battalion transitioned from Grafenwohr to Hohenfels for the mission training. The Battalion was task organized into a Task Force,

maintaining C/1-77 and gaining a company each from 1-18 IN and 1-26 IN. A/1-77 and B/1-77 were attached to 1-18 IN and 1-26, respectively. The focus of the training was on insurgency operations, simulating the current combat environment in Iraq and Afghanistan. During the MRX, TF 1-77 performed superbly, accomplishing all of the outlined goals in fully preparing for an upcoming mission. The detached companies proved their tanking mettle, providing significant combat firepower to the infantry task forces to which they were assigned. The Battalion consolidated on 12 March 06, conducted rail operations, and returned safely to Schweinfurt on 14 March 06.

While the Battalion was conducting the MRX, TM Sentinel (the 1-77 AR Rear Detachment) stood up. TM Sentinel, charged with taking care of the Soldiers and families left behind during the training, was tested when the Brigade received notification that it would be deploying sometime in mid-2006. As there is no current timeline for the deployment, it is anticipated that the Brigade—1-77 AR included—

will be back in Iraq by late June 06.

Adding to the speculation is the implementation of a Stop-Loss/Stop-Movement order that went into effect on 18 March 2006, affecting many Soldiers within the Battalion.

There are some great pictures of all this training on the newly re-designed 1-77 AR webpage, <http://www.schweinfurt.army.mil/sites/177armor/Default.htm>, listed under "News," then "Drumbeats."

Donations are being collected in order to purchase a memorial stone for the Fallen Steel Tigers killed during Operation Iraqi Freedom II. The stone will be decorated with a plaque that is engraved with the Fallen Soldier's names. Furthermore, the memorial will become a part of the Battalion's history and will move with the unit during any future relocation. Donations can be made in the form of a check payable to: "1-77 AR Steel Tiger Memorial Fund." The checks can be mailed to:

CPT Tom McMurtrie
CMR 464 Box 1988
APO AE 09226

Thank you in advance for your donations.

Veterans: Render a Salute?

Dear Friend and Fellow Veteran:

I gathered some 16 of my old military friends who agreed to sponsor a movement for Veterans to salute rather than place their hands over their heart when honoring the flag, fallen comrades, and/or the country. I have some from each of the four principal services. Three of them were former Vice Chiefs or Assistant Commandants of their services, and several were former CINC's.

We refer to saluting when we do the pledge to the flag, when the National Colors pass or are presented, when the National Anthem or honors are played, or when taps are played and firing squads or

guns render honors. There are no regulations telling us veterans what we can and can't do in this matter. If we decide we want to salute, who will dare to tell us no?

It is a matter of personal choice. We've earned the right to render a salute. Now the challenge is to get the word out. I believe the unit and branch associations are the best way. The commanders of the American Legion and VFW never answered my emails, presuming they even got them. If we can get this started it will take on a life of its own. Those who object can continue the hand over the heart thing. Gradually the custom will change, as well it should.

Just imagine thousands of fans saluting at NFL, MBA, and Major League Baseball games when the National Anthem is played. It will telegraph a message to all others of how many have served this country in the Armed Forces — it will be a positive and patriotic message.

You can help by putting the word out in your organizations, which are made up of patriots like you and me.

Thank you,
Retired Army MG Vern Lewis

El Paso will welcome the Steel Tigers this Fall: Reunion 2006, October 11-15

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF EVENTS STEEL TIGERS 77TH ARMOR ASSOCIATION

Wednesday, 11 October

3:00-6:00 p.m. Check in and reunion registration/Hospitality Suite Open

Thursday, 12 October

7:30 a.m. No Host Breakfast at the Hotel

8:00 a.m. Emergency Business Meeting

9:00 a.m. Board tour bus and travel via I-10 to Old Mesilla, New Mexico for shopping and lunch at the Double Eagle or restaurant of your choice. Return through the pecan orchards, enroute will visit Stahmann Pecan Store and La Vina Winery with a tour of the facility by Denise Stark, Owner

4:00 p.m. Arrive back at Hotel, open time with opportunity for dinner at nearby restaurants which include Carino's, Red Lobster, State Line, Olive Garden, dinner at the Casino, or shopping and dinner at the Greenery in the Sunland Park Mall. All within a short distance, shuttle provided by hotel. Please arrange in advance.

Friday, 13 October

7:30 a.m. No host breakfast at the Hotel

9:00 a.m. Board bus enroute to Fort Bliss for a tour (must have photo ID for entry) of the Fort Bliss Museum, Command Briefing, visit post exchange, no-host luncheon at the Officer's Club, pre selected Mexican Combo Plate at a cost of approximately \$6.00 per person. Enroute to McKelligon Canyon for a spectacular view of the mountains. Travel back cross Scenic Drive to the hotel.

3:00 p.m. Arrive back at hotel, free time for shopping at Sunland Park Mall or personnel desiring to go to Juarez, Mexico should make arrangements at the hotel desk (Photo ID required)

7:00 p.m. BBQ at 4005 Esperanza hosted by the Offutt's (about five minutes from the hotel)

Saturday, 14 October 2006

7:30 a.m. No Host Breakfast at Hotel

10:00 a.m. Business Meeting, Boardroom at Hotel

12:00 Noon Free time

6:00 p.m. Cocktails/Banquet /Entertainment/Dancing

Sunday, 15 October 2006

9:00 a.m. Memorial Service in Hotel Boardroom

10:00 a.m. Depart

**Vietnam: Hard Bed, Lousy Food, Great Friends.
Reunion: Soft Bed, Good Food, Same Great Friends.**



Photo Credit: Bill Rosevear

MAKE YOUR REUNION RESERVATIONS! STEEL TIGERS REUNION

In order to receive the special
1-77 Steel Tigers Armor Association
rate of \$82.00,
reservations must be made on or
before September 27, 2006

**EL PASO, TEXAS/FORT BLISS
OCTOBER 11-15, 2006
HOLIDAY INN SUNLAND PARK
915.833.2900
www.holiday-inn.com**

Thank a Soldier

Many of us have noted the tendency among our active duty military personnel, when in the presence of veterans, to say "Thank you for your service." The sentiment is very much appreciated and well deserved. However, when I'm in the presence of active duty troops, I think we owe them a great debt of thanks as well.

On a recent trip to Germany we stayed for several days in the Armed Forces Retreat Center's beautiful new hotel and conference center, Hotel Edelweiss, located in Garmisch. A young (they all look young nowadays) Army nurse engaged us in conversation one evening. He had said goodbye to his family a few hours before and was returning to duty at the main hospital in Baghdad the next day. He wanted some advice about staying in beyond 20 years or to take his retirement and seek civilian employment. He described his excitement with his job and how gratifying it is to be able to save lives and stabilize horribly wounded warriors. He has several young nurse lieutenants on his staff and told us how their experience and training in Iraq would take them years to receive in a typical stateside hospital. Although he loves his work, he has a family and feels great responsibility toward them. His wife urges him to retire next year. We shared with him our feelings but also had an overwhelming sense of gratitude for his dedicated service. As we parted, we thanked him for his service to our country.

On the trip home, I sat next to a Marine major who shared

some assessments of the situation in Iraq on his return from combat. Again, here was a man who exemplified the "Semper Paratus" spirit and was proud of his fellow Marines and what they were doing. As we parted, we expressed our thanks to him for serving.

Our combat veterans now in Iraq and Afghanistan and those who have rotated through deserve our thanks and praise for their service to our country and its sons and daughters. They are exposed to great danger and many are paying with their lives and with their limbs. Next time you see a military person, tell him "Thanks for what you're doing for our country."

God bless you all. I look forward to seeing many of you in El Paso.

Chaplain Jim

The Reunion Band Wants YOU! Live from El Paso, Texas!

The Steel Tigers Reunion Band needs vocalists, strings, keyboard, horns or whatever you play.

Contact Chuck Winslow at cwin@affirmative.net for more information.

Cut along the dotted line to mail form

2006 Membership/Change of Address Form

- New/Renewal Membership Address/Information Change
 Donation

Select Membership Type

All Association members receive newsletters and a Reunion Registration discount. Membership period: January-December.

Price

- Veteran \$30.00
 Active Duty Army 1/77th (includes free Steel Tiger hat) \$20.00
 Charter Members \$20.00

Total: _____

Email _____

Service Dates & Company (if you remember) _____

Method of Payment

- Check Visa
 Please make your check payable to "Steel Tigers 77th Armor Association."
 MasterCard
 American Express

Credit Card # _____ Exp. date _____

Signature _____

Please mail this completed form to: Robert Basner, Steel Tigers 77th Armor Association, 7966 Maple, P.O. Box 38, Birch Run, MI 48415



TIGER TRACKS
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