

TIGER TRACKS

Spring 2009

The Newsletter of the Steel Tigers 77th Armor Association

REUNION 2009: SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA JUNE 24—28, 2009



The 2009 Reunion will be held in San Diego, California from June 24-28. San Diego, "the Birthplace of California," is a city of many guises. Once known mainly as home to a large Navy base, San Diego has grown into a major center for culture and recreation in California's southwest. A nondescript town until the 1940s, San Diego now has more than 1.3 million residents and is California's second largest city. San Diego is also home to the United States Navy's Pacific Fleet. San Diego's phenomenal growth has brought it well-deserved national attention. The city keeps this growth balanced by careful preservation of history and a strong emphasis on art culture, and recreation.

In San Diego's East County, the terrain varies from gentle foothills to mile-high mountains and the historic mining town, Julian, down to the 600,000-acre Anza Borrego Desert State Park, offering nature-conscious visitors endless opportunities to hike, camp, fish, observe wildlife and much more. In San Diego's North County, the agricultural community produces quantities of flowers and magnificent produce. Wine growers are also making a mark by growing and harvesting quality grapes that become excellent wines, which are served at some of the most elegant restaurants

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and resorts in the region. Along the west, 70 miles of Pacific Ocean coastline not only supports year-round outdoor recreation, such as surfing, boating, sailing and swimming, but also important scientific research at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. To the south, it's a whole different country, Mexico, featuring its own cultural offerings in various towns along the border and coastline, including Tijuana, Rosarito, and Ensenada.

One of the nation's oldest cities, San Diego was first visited by Europeans in the mid-1500s. Mission San Diego de Alcalá, founded in 1769, was the first of 21 missions to be established by the Spanish Missionaries in California. The Mission can still be visited today. Victorian and Mediterranean architecture are on display in Old

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REUNION 2009



Town and the Gaslamp Quarter, recalling San Diego's storied past. The unique aesthetic character of the city can also be found in Balboa Park, among the largest urban parks in the nation and filled with museums and pleasant landscaping, and in the smaller neighboring communities like Julian, Carlsbad, and Del Mar.

Golf Digest named San Diego "One of the Top 50 Golf Destinations in the World." San Diego has over 90 courses located throughout the San Diego region, from seaside settings to desert mountains to inland valleys. With a wide range of courses, there is a course for every type of golfer and a range of greens fees that will fit every budget.

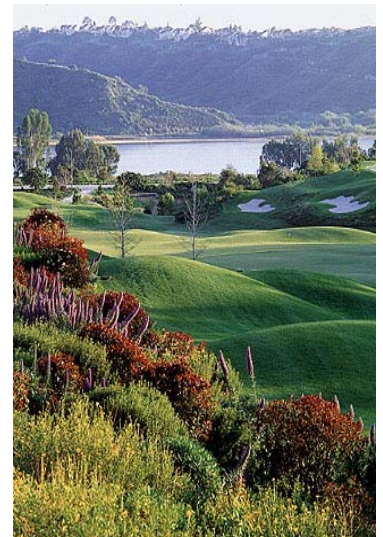
The City is also home to three major animal parks, including Sea World, the San Diego Zoo, and the renowned San Diego Wild Animal Park, exhibiting an astonishingly broad collection of wildlife. Marine life can be enjoyed in its natural habitat by snorkeling or scuba diving at La Jolla Cove, or watching for whales migrating along the coast. Wildlife of a different sort can be observed on the boardwalks and beaches that are the area's major recreation spots, as skaters, surfers, and sunbathers work on their tans. In San Diego, the beach is a way of life, a source of pride and joy, a defining influence in people's lives. Whether you're a first-time visitor or life-long resident, you are encouraged to visit and enjoy some of the beaches that make San Diego famous.

Getting There: San Diego International Airport (SAN) is less than 10 minutes from downtown San Diego. For a list of airlines that serve the airport refer to <http://www.san.org/airport/flights/airlines.asp> San Diego is also easily accessible by car using any one of the three major interstate roadways, the 5, 8, and 15 Freeways.

For the more adventurous among you, Amtrak operates from the historic Santa Fe Depot, located in downtown San Diego and also stops at the Old Town San Diego Station. The Santa Fe Depot is the southern terminus of Amtrak's frequent *Pacific Surfliner* route, which runs north to Los Angeles and San Luis Obispo.

Reunion 2009 promises to continue a budding tradition of Steel Tigers Reunions that provide opportunities to renew friendships and experience great American cities. Please review the Reunion Agenda and the Reunion Registration Form included in this newsletter.

Additional information is also available at www.77armor2009reunion.com.



CHAPLAIN'S PULPIT

“Brace yourself for impact” is not the words you ever want to hear while flying in an airplane, yet that is what 150 passengers on a US Airways flight out of New York heard as their airplane headed for a crash landing in the Hudson River. Captain Chelsey B. Sullenberger III was asked if he prayed as he was fighting to land the aircraft and he said that they were doing that for him in the rear of the aircraft. Jeff Kolodjay, a passenger stated, when passengers heard the Captain say Brace yourself for impact, they put their heads in their laps and started praying.

Forty one years ago, as young men, ”Contact-Ambush” were not words we wanted to hear. Usually these words were preceded with a mine blowing up or and RPG being fired at a tank. Our training took over automatically and we aggressively engaged the enemy with fire and maneuver.

Many of us lifted up a plea for God to give us courage, strength, and wisdom to carry out our duties in those desperate struggles. However, just as Captain Sullenberger had many praying for him in the rear, we likewise had many praying for us in the rear. Prayers are not eloquent words, they are usually simple every day words saying to God what is on our heart.

Even if you do not believe in God, everyone appreciates another person caring enough to pray for them. I have never had a person turn down a prayer on their behalf. Remember and thank those who prayed for your safety those many years ago, your parents, wife, children, family, friends, and church members. We will not know until we are in heaven how their faithful prayers were answered.

In the very near future, our outfit, the 77th Armor will be returning to combat and once again, young soldiers will be engaged in a desperate struggle to help a people become free. We fought against an ideology that wanted to enslave the people of Vietnam and the soldiers of the 77th Armor continue that noble cause by freeing the people of Iraq from the tyranny of Sadam Hussein and now they fight to protect the people of Iraq from radical Islamism.

We, the 77th Armor veterans of WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Panama, Bosnia, and Iraq, now find ourselves in the supporting role. Although, we still have a fighting spirit, I am afraid that our bodies will not cooperate. We might be too old to fight the physical war today, but we can give them physical support through letters, cards, emails, and care packages of encouragement and gratitude for their service.

More importantly and much more critical, we can take the battle to the enemy in the spiritual war. Just as our loved ones prayed for our protection and mission accomplishment 41 years ago, we can now pray for the soldiers of the 77th Armor.

Ephesians 6: 10-12 states ¹⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

In the rear, we can fight for the troops on the front lines by being a voice for them to our government so that our government does not forget their commitments. If our soldiers are wounded and if they come to the US Army Walter Reed Hospital, we 77th Armor Band of Brothers will assist them and their families in whatever way we can.

There is much for you to do, so limber up those old muscles and bones and get them moving. We still have a lot of fight in us, physically and spiritually.

God Bless Our Soldiers and their Families,

Jerry A. Brown
Chaplain, 77th Armor Association

**STEEL TIGERS 77th ARMOR ASSOCIATION
JUNE 24—28, 2009
CROWNE PLAZA (SAN DIEGO, CA)**

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2009

4:00 pm – 12:00 pm Hospitality Suite and Registration

4:00 pm – 6:00 pm Welcome Reception

-- Dinner on your own

THURSDAY, JUNE 25, 2009

7:00 am – 8:30 am Continental Breakfast in Hospitality Suite

9:30 am - 1:00 pm USS Midway

1:00 pm – 1:30 pm Lunch at the Fantail Café (on your own)

1:30 pm Depart USS Midway for Leatherneck Museum

2:00 pm - 3:30 pm Leatherneck Museum

3:30 pm Return to Hotel

-- Dinner on your own

4:00 pm – 12:00 pm Hospitality Suite and Registration

FRIDAY, JUNE 26, 2009

7:00 am – 8:00 am Continental Breakfast in Hospitality Suite

8:30 am - 11:00 am Naval Base Coronado

11:00 am - 12:30 pm Lunch at Veterans Museum – Balboa Park (provided)

12:30 pm - 1:30 pm Guest Speaker Rod McLean

1:30 pm - 2:30 pm Memorial Service

2:30 pm - 3:00 pm Return to Hotel

-- Dinner on your own

4:00 pm – 12:00 pm Hospitality Suite and Registration

SATURDAY, JUNE 27, 2009

7:00 am – 9:00 am Continental Breakfast in Hospitality Suite

Varies Ladies Day in Old Town San Diego

9:00 am – 10:00 am Association Officers' meeting

10:00 am – 12:00 pm General Membership Meeting

-- Lunch on your own

TBD Active Duty Update

6:00 pm – 11:00 pm Banquet

SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 2009

TBD Religious Services

Farewell

Register online at www.steeltigers.org

REUNION ACTIVITY DESCRIPTIONS

USS Midway Museum. “Midway Magic” is a historical fact. It was a term known throughout the Navy as the USS Midway steamed through a 47-year career of service to country. Imagine a carrier that was commissioned in 1945 and served as a flagship in Desert Storm in 1991. No other carrier served as long as the USS Midway. When others came home, the USS Midway remained at the “tip of the sword” on an odyssey shared by 225,000 Americans that spanned the surrender of Japan in WWII, the Cold War, Vietnam, the era of détente and Desert Storm. Self-guided audio tours are included with every admission featuring Midway veterans who share their stories of living and working aboard a massive aircraft carrier. Lunch at the Fantail Café (on your own).

Leatherneck Museum. The Leatherneck Museum is the only museum in the world dedicated to preserving the incredible contributions made by Marine Corps Aviators and their ground support personnel. The museum is comprised of an outdoor area, displaying an average of at least twenty five vintage aircraft and an indoor display of memorabilia and artifacts dating to the earliest days of Marine Corps Aviation. Many items are one of a kind and range from fine art portraits to military clothing and weapons used during specific campaigns.

Naval Base Coronado. Naval Base Coronado (NBC) is a consolidated Navy installation compassing seven military facilities stretching from San Clemente Island to the La Posta Mountain Warfare Training Facility. These seven facilities encompass more than 57,000 acres and make NBC the largest command in the southwest region of the U.S. Employing over 36,000 military and civilian personnel, NBC accounts for over 30% of the Region's total workforce, and has the largest workforce in San Diego County.

Veterans Museum and Memorial – Balboa Park. Located in the historic Old Navy Chapel, the museum preserves and honors the memory of men and women of the Armed Forces, Coast Guard, and Wartime Merchant Marine. The collection contains artifacts, documents, photographs, memorabilia, and artwork from the Civil War to the present. Changing exhibitions highlight San Diego veterans' experiences and contributions throughout history. Lunch will be provided at the Museum.

Guest Speaker Rod McLean. Thousands of American military personnel who fought overseas are missing. Approximately 78,000 are missing from World War II, 8,000 are missing in North Korea and the Korean War, and 2,000 in Vietnam. The Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) is a joint task force within the United States Department of Defense (DOD) whose mission is to account for all United States prisoners of war (POW) and missing in action (MIA) from all past wars. In the 1970s the DOD established the Central Identification Laboratory (Lab) at Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii. It is the world’s largest forensic lab. Joint Task Force Full Accounting was established in 1997 to focus on the identification and recovery of remains in Vietnam. At that time, all archaeologists working for the federal government could apply to work on the program and direct recovery missions. While forensic science addresses legal issues, including forensic settings such as crime scenes, archaeological methodologies are employed in the identification and recovery of physical evidence and human remains. This presentation will discuss the search for a Navy pilot shot down over North Vietnam in 1967.

Old Town San Diego (Ladies Day). Old Town San Diego is considered the "birthplace" of California. San Diego is the site of the first permanent Spanish settlement in California. Today the site is home to many historic buildings, shopping, and fabulous cafes and restaurants. Just up the hill from Old Town San Diego Historic State Park, you’ll find Heritage Park where several of San Diego’s most notable Victorian homes have been relocated and authentically restored to their original splendor.

Driver and guide gratuities are not included in the tour prices.

Please plan to be at the bus boarding area at least five minutes prior to the scheduled time.

All tours require a minimum of forty people, unless otherwise stated

ACTIVE DUTY UPDATE

Operation Claymore Forge: Highlander Soldiers demonstrate capabilities in exercise

Sgt. Mark Miranda

4th BCT, 1st AD Public Affairs

Inside a small room in a town nicknamed “Little Chicago,” Spc. Ryan McGonigal kept an eye to the meeting taking place and an ear to his headset.

He was listening to chatter radioed in from the other Soldiers in Lt. Col. William Walski’s personal security detachment keeping watch on the street outside. Three feet away from McGonigal, the commander of 2nd Battalion, 13th Cavalry Regiment, was sitting down for a meal with the town’s mayor, a doctor and an Iraqi parliament representative to discuss local issues with the help of a translator. Talks were interrupted as a rocket-propelled grenade impacted the building across the street.

Quick to react, the PSD began firing personal and Humvee crew-served weapons in the direction of the attack. Moving carefully through the street, the PSD moved to aid the wounded and to apprehend a suspect seen leaving the Ministry of Energy building, from where the attack had come. Good training for the PSD, and for all Soldiers of 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division “Highlanders,” who ran through training lanes throughout Claymore Forge, a field training exercise Nov. 14 through Monday.

Scenarios at training sites like Little Chicago were daily events as 4-1 AD loaded up equipment and moved out to their designated positions to train in the sand and dirt at McGregor Range, N.M., and Doña Ana, N.M. Training covered tasks including search and cordon, mounted and dismounted patrols and reactions to enemy contact for the combined arms battalions such as 4th Battalion, 6th Infantry.

Table drills for 1st Battalion 77th Armor Regiment’s fighting vehicles and 2nd Bn., 29th Field Artillery Regt., were conducted to validate training on weapon systems, warrior tasks, and many other individual and group field duties. Units conducted multiple convoys, set up facilities and equipment and conducted sustainment operations. Qualified Soldiers of 121st Brigade Support Battalion’s supply distribution company performed sling load operations, preparing heavy parts and supplies for helicopter airlift.

“All of us doing this have undergone the 40-hour block of train up on slingload, and each of us is required to be Pathfinder or Air Assault certified,” said 121st BSB’s Staff Sgt. James Springstube. Scouts of 2-13’s C Troop practiced an air assault landing and a soft extraction of a person considered a high-value target from a site at Doña Ana made up to look like a small town.

“The mission is to search and secure the man they’re after, and then exfiltrate him to the pickup site,” said Cpl. David Hennigen, a medic who went through the training the day prior.

Adding to the realism of the training lanes for 2-13 were Iraqi men and women role players brought in from cities as far away as Phoenix and Dallas. 121 BSB’s training included a mass-casualty exercise that featured actual amputees with make-up effects applied to simulate bloody wounds.

“Realistic training gets reactions from Soldiers; we see how situations might actually play out in combat – people look to leadership for direction when something chaotic is happening,” said Capt. Jeffrey Witherspoon following 121 BSB’s mass casualty exercise.

Claymore Forge is 4-1 AD’s final field training exercise before the unit deploys to the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California in early 2009.

ACTIVE DUTY UPDATE

Final Countdown for Iraq

By Chris Roberts

El Paso Times

FORT IRWIN, Calif. -- After meeting with local officials in Medina Jabal, Col. Peter Newell prepared to face the residents of Ghazi province, some of whom were not happy about searches that allegedly resulted in destruction of property and in residents being jarred from their sleep.

Newell is the commander of Fort Bliss' 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, and was at the Army's National Training Center in California, where his brigade was wrapping up a two-week training effort. The National Training Center is the Army's premier training site. Most units spend time at Fort Irwin before deploying overseas. The 4-1 Armored is scheduled to head for Iraq in the spring.



U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Dennis J. Henry, Jr.

Here in Ghazi Province, set in the shifting sands of the Mohave Desert, it is easy to be drawn in. Role players, many of them Iraqis, work in shifts to fill the towns 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They wear traditional garb, and the towns are filled with wood structures and concrete-block buildings. Spires jut into the sky, and you can hear calls to prayer from minarets. The insurgents put up a withering assault on the soldiers. In one 24-hour period, the unit faced 19 attacks including roadside bombs, direct enemy fire and mortar fire.

Friday was the final training day, and the scenario was set up to test the unit commander -- Newell. "If he can handle this, he can handle anything," said Maj. Michael Jazdyk of the Fort Irwin Operations Group Public Affairs. "The crowd will be more aggressive than normal, but that's just to stress the brigade commander. We want to get (him) out of his comfort zone."

Newell stood behind a lectern draped with an Iraqi flag with role players representing Iraqi army and police officials, a provincial reconstruction team official and the governor of Ghazi Province.

"Together we have isolated the insurgents instead of communities," Newell said when his turn came. "We hold terrorists accountable for the destruction they have dealt your people." He finished his speech with a fist pump, shouting "Iraq is alive." eliciting cheers from the crowd of about 60 actors in full dress.



U.S. Army Photo Staff Sgt. Alfred Johnson

But as the questioning went on, it got a little tougher. He was asked if the U.S. withdrawal was a sign the mission has failed. "First, I don't think I've ever failed at anything," Newell said. "Withdrawal from Iraq is outside my role here in Iraq."

He went on to explain that his job was to work with and train Iraqi forces to improve the security and stability in Iraq. Then a man dressed in robes, gesturing with his hands for emphasis, asked why U.S. forces broke his gate down and awakened his family in the middle of the night.

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ACTIVE DUTY UPDATE CONTINUED

"Tell me if you stand in front of al-Qaida and ask them to fix your houses," Newell said. Then he promised that if U.S. troops caused the damage, the house would be repaired. He also spoke about a mock news release from the Iraqi president taking U.S. soldiers to task for civilian deaths in some of the recent operations.

"We regret mistakes that have been made as we continue to partner with the Iraqi security forces to root out the insurgency," Newell said. "We will continue to ensure we learn from our mistakes to strengthen our bond with our partners so we better understand the people of Iraq." His response was well received by the crowd. Again the crowd responded with claps, although not quite as enthusiastically. Although some mistakes were made, the 4-1 Armored leadership said they were satisfied with the unit's performance.

"The pressure of having to do mission after mission taught us how to think," said Maj. Lance Varney, the brigade's operations chief. "It was, we've got this problem. How do we solve it now? And we had to solve it now because we've got other problems lined up. "I feel seasoned and I feel a lot

more ready," he said. Although it was hard to keep up with some of the routine daily tasks, Varney said, his crew worked calmly without "flying off the handle."

After the news conference, Newell said he sometimes has to dial back his approach, which called direct and typically American. But, when asked if he would ask Iraqis in their own country whether they would ask al-Qaida for home repairs, he said, "I've used that line for years."

He said he understands that the Iraqi people are often frustrated, and they sometimes take out those frustrations on the U.S. forces because the Iraqis won't face retribution.

"It's not their fault. They want to be able to raise their children in peace. You can't take that personal," he said. "At the same time, you have to get to the heart of the matter."

Chris Roberts may be reached at chrisr@elpasotimes.com

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