

Oflag 64 Reunion Report
New Orleans LA
September 10-23, 2016

Bonjour, mes amis. Our time in New Orleans was *tres* short, but we had *un bon moment* in the city of *gumbo, jambalaya, etoufee, beignets, jazz, and Mardi Gras*. Our hosts, Pat and Martha Waters, worked tirelessly to ensure that everyone had a good time.

It was wonderful to see old friends, and to meet new ones, to share stories about our beloved Kriegies, and to learn about those whom we've never met. Three Kriegies joined us in The Big Easy: Herm Littman, Alan Dunbar, and Jimmie Kanaya.

The Westin Hotel, Canal Place provided a friendly, helpful staff and comfortable beds. It was conveniently located within walking distance of the French Quarter and some of New Orleans' great eateries and music venues.

We were shuttled to the World War II Museum each day. It was amazing to me how much the museum has expanded since our 2006 New Orleans reunion. There are multiple buildings now with more expansion being planned. Three new pavilions: the John E. Kushner Restoration Pavilion, US Freedom Pavilion: The Boeing Center, and Campaigns of Courage: European Pacific Theaters have been built since we last visited. There was talk of a hotel and a parking garage to be added to the complex. Many attendees enjoyed the 4-D film, *Beyond All Boundaries*, narrated by Tom Hanks. Three of the Oflag 64 men are showcased in the museum: John Waters, Abe Baum, and Jimmie Kanaya. We were able to access Jimmie's story by using a "dog tag" on various touch screens throughout the museum.

There were quite a few new reunion attendees this year:

- Susanna Bolten Connaughton (daughter of Seymour Bolten) from Palo Alto, CA.
- Larry Copes (son of James Copes) from Pioneer, LA who attended with his daughter, Marletta Holcomb.
- Kay Godfrey Cruise (daughter of Dr. James Godfrey) from Omaha, Nebraska.
- Warren Jones (son of Charles Lloyd Jones) from Los Angeles, CA. Warren has traveled to Szubin with the Kanayas and brought some books including one that his father wrote called, *The Least of Me Is Hostage*.
- Harold Leigh (nephew of Ray L. Goad) from Clifton, TX, accompanied by his wife, Doris.
- Dennis Lennon (son of Woodrow W. Lennon) from Winston Salem, NC. Woodrow Lennon arrived at Oflag 64 in December 1944, but was not listed on the roster of POWs. He participated in the March to Hammelburg and was liberated from Moosburg.
- Dondino Melchiore, a Las Vegas entertainer, accompanied by Donna Gummelt.
- Kathleen Seringer Stokes (daughter of Joe Seringer) and her husband, Timothy Stokes from New Jersey.

- Ardyn, Paul, Ardyn Peter and Jeannette Thriffiley (wife, son, daughter, son and daughter-in-law of Paul J. Thriffiley, Jr.) from New Orleans (some of whom had attended the 2006 NOLA reunion).
- P.J. Wilcox, from Tennessee, author of the book: *West Point '41: The Class That Went to War and Shaped America*. This book includes information about Lt. Col. James P. ("Diamond Jim") Forsyth of Oflag 64.

Many Kriegies had multiple family members present, including the families of Bob Thompson, Herman Littman, Reid Ellsworth, John Waters, Paul Thriffiley, and Vincent DiFrancesco.

After several days of touring, eating, and learning, and shortly before the banquet on Saturday, we gathered for our business meeting to thank everyone for attending the reunion and to welcome our newcomers. We also discussed new website hosting of the Oflag 64 POW database due to losing our former host, future reunions, postage funds/reunion funds and how to manage them in the future, the future of the Oflag 64 site in Szubin, and how we can support preservation efforts including taking a trip to Szubin in 2016.

Getting together for the banquet on Saturday evening was a highlight of the day, and the 12th floor Grand Ballroom at the Westin Hotel was a beautiful setting.

Our guest speaker, Krystyna Piorkowska, gave a detailed account of the Katyn Massacre of 1940 and the controversy surrounding this war crime. She described the involvement of two Oflag 64 men: Lt. Col. [Donald B. Stewart](#) and Col. [John H. Van Vliet](#) who viewed the gravesite and later testified about what they saw. She ended her presentation with a plea to contact Polish Officials and Congress to work against the destruction of Oflag 64. There was some talk of a trip to Szubin in the near future to show our support for the camp's preservation.

After dinner, entertainment was provided by Donna and Dondino Melchiorre from Las Vegas who accompanied Alan Dunbar and his wife, Evie, to New Orleans. Dondino is a professional singer who performs at various Las Vegas venues.

Special thanks to Elodie and Bill Caldwell for their roles in sharing information, and to Pat and Martha Waters for making this wonderful reunion possible.

Patricia DiFrancesco Bender
daughter of Dr Vincent J DiFrancesco