

237th DMZ Dustoff Reunions and Photo Files

For years, I wondered how the guys that I served with in Viet Nam were doing; a few in particular I wondered about. Over the years, I had kept in touch with a few pilots and one or two guys in the back, but not really that many, No one tried to put together a unit reunion and as such, we were all “scattered to the winds”.

About October of 2005, I get an email from one of those guys that I had been thinking about often. He was one of the crew chiefs that I always looked forward to flying with, it was great to hear from him, Richard “Pancho” Villa. One of the things at the top of his mind was to ask about a unit reunion, did I think there was enough interest in putting one together? Heck, it HAD only been 35 years! I told him I would contact the guys I knew and he should contact the ones that he knew.

Digging out old copies of orders and asking those we knew for other’s addresses, we soon amassed a fairly sizeable list. (Included in that list was a few family members of KIAs, but more on that later.) Social Security numbers on some of those orders were of invaluable aid! It was decided that, Yes, we had enough to party!

A get-together was planned for Las Vegas in 2006 and for the reunion, I thought it would be nice to put my 200 slides and photos on a Power Point Presentation to project on the wall in our Reunion LZ at the Hotel. I put out the call to others to send me their slides and photos to add to mine...the response was excellent. A few here, several there, and before long, I was up to 500+. Before I knew it, I was over 1000 slides on the Power Point! Now, after almost 3 years of begging, promising and arm twisting, our library of photos is now at 2000. Even at only 8 seconds per photo, that’s over 4 hours of presentation, not counting 8mm movies! The photo presentation was VERY well received and was a highlight of our reunions in ‘06 and ‘08. Mike Law was able to select a few photos for inclusion in the 2009 VHPA Calendar.

Two very unexpected benefits came out of this archival collection. First, I was able to enhance most of the photos and careful examination of each brought some questions to mind. Who was this guy? What happened here? On which mission did all these bullet holes appear? Stuff like that, and because of that picture “scrutiny” I was able to glean some war stories that had, up until now, remained untold, or at least unwritten.

The second benefit was connecting with the families of our KIAs. At our first reunion in ‘06, we hesitatingly invited those families we knew of and several attended. I just was not sure how they would react, or even if they would attend. During our Saturday night Banquet, like we do at the National reunions, we honored our fallen comrades with a missing man table and toast. I also projected photos of our KIA crews to honor them. Those family members in attendance each and every one told us how much they appreciated being included and how much they appreciated our honoring their

son/brother/husband. Newspaper obituaries and articles were immeasurable help in finding families. The Directory of The Wall gives home towns.

However, a major problem was that I did not have photos to show of each of those we were honoring. Not acceptable! So Pancho and I decided to double our efforts to at least have a photo of each of our 15 KIA and also try to contact the families of each. Our success is that we now have all 15 photos but there are 2 families we have yet to contact. One will be almost impossible and the other will require more work and a little luck, but we aren't giving up.

To encourage other units to contact these KIA families, I need to relate the following incident. One of medics, the last guy that I was able to identify with a photo, has a brother that I had been in telephone contact with for almost 2 years. At one point there was almost a year gap, but I didn't give up. Finally, he reluctantly sent me his brother's photos and I was able to now ID his brother and also was able to piece together a war story from the pictures. Of course, I extended invitations to attend our reunion at each contact, and surprisingly, at the last minute, he attended.

After meeting us, the guys his brother flew with, and hearing stories about his brother in particular and the medics in general, he now had a real understanding of what his big brother had done in "The War", something he had no idea of before. He told me that he and his brother never really got along that well while growing up and were not particularly close, but now that he understood what his brother did and that he really was a "hero", he now has a deep respect for him and what he did. He sees him in a "whole 'nother light". That alone was well worth our effort!

Bottom line, I encourage you to accumulate those unit photos and 8 mm movies. Contact your KIA families, you will not regret it. I was concerned about opening old wounds; far from it, the family contacts have been VERY well received in every case. Do it now, it's getting late! One mother who attended our first reunion did not have any photos of her son, a pilot, in VN. Knowing that, and scanning other's photos, I was able to find two of them for her, one of him sitting in a helicopter. She died a few months after I was able to send her enlarged prints, but she had her son's that photos she had been missing! One more "well worth the effort!"

Putting the photos on Power Point is easy. If you don't already have one, a decent scanner can be had for about a hundred bucks and will do slides, prints or even negatives and a few hours on Saturday or one evening at a local Community College will teach you all you need to know about Power Point...it is an incredible tool and fun to create with. I will soon be sending a copy of the 2000 photo file to the Smithsonian.

Do it now, you won't regret it.

[Phil Marshall](#)

DMZ Dustoff 711

Camp Evans and Quang Tri, 1969