President's Corner by Brad Wright

As I compose this article for the newsletter and start my third term as your president, I am very pleased to give you a brief update on where the FACA is now and where it is headed in the next couple of years.

First of all, we had a very successful reunion last fall in Seattle and many thanks and kudos go out to Joe Sowa and his crew for an outstanding gathering. I am not sure where Joe got the inside track for ordering up the weather but as a native of the Pacific Northwest, I was thrilled to see great blue skies both during the gathering and the week following while I was visiting my family and friends in Portland.

Secondly, I want to thank the two folks who stepped up to fill two very important positions in our group. Harry Pearce has taken on the position of Web Guru and is working very closely with Bob Gorman to learn the tricks of our website and all its parts. Don Davie stepped forward to take on the task of publishing our newsletter and is also working hand in glove with Gene Rossel to learn the quirks and foibles of that job. I was thrilled to have these two folks volunteer to take on these two very important jobs. My most heartfelt thanks to Bob and Gene for their many years of service and support of the association.

I would be remiss if I didn't add my thanks to our two outgoing members of the leadership of the FACA. Both Denny Crouch and Jay Barnes dedicated many years to the service of our organization and were recognized at the grand banquet with association plaques.
My appreciation also goes out to Tom Harnden for stepping forward to be our new secretary and to Phil Litts for being willing to serve as a director to replace Denny.

With Dale Hill, Trey Moran and Big Al Matheson as officers and Cal Anderson, Darrel Whitcomb Tom Kemp, and Gary McDaniel as our other directors, I am certain that our organization will be well served. My thanks to each of these folks for providing help.

Third, thanks to Mike Lyons and his ‘gang’ in Colorado who have been investigating the feasibility of a 2020 reunion that would be done in conjunction with The Wings Over the Rockies Museum dedication of an O-2 aircraft to all those who flew the FAC mission. Their investigation is still ongoing and I have received input from Mike that will be forwarded to the board for review. So, standby for right now since the final decision has not been made on location for FR2020.

Enough of the business. It is December 31 and as 2018 prepares to be relegated to the history books, I look back and see all the things that have shaped this past year for the FACA. The most prominent thing that strikes me is the increasing numbers of final flight notices. We all know that we cannot escape Father Time, but it doesn’t make it any easier to say goodbye to our brother warriors. It seems that the rendering of a Slow Hand Salute is happening much too often nowadays.

I often think of the unrest that beset our nation during the SEA war timeframe and the similarities in today’s world. I see it in the news and on our FACNET. Occasionally I am struck by the undercurrent of harsh words that rear their heads amongst some in our group. I am encouraged that while occasionally tempers flare, we seemed to be able to rise above it all and return to more civil communication methods in the end.

As this calendar year closes and the new one opens up presenting all of us with opportunities and challenges, I can only offer my best wishes to each and every member of the Forward Air Controllers Association for a Happy and Prosperous New Year ahead. Take to heart the words often attributed to what has been called The Raven’s Lament: ‘I would have been a better friend, but I trusted time’. Time can be fleeting and as we all age that becomes more and more apparent. I have seen this somewhere in an email, but it struck me as very meaningful: The past is history; the future is unknown but today is the present.

I wish each and every one of you the best in 2019. Brad Wright, Covey 251

**TREASURER'S REPORT by Trey Moran**

As of the end of December, 2018,
Financial worth: $135,337:
Checking Balance*: $10,314
*(includes $806 remaining in the reunion account and $801 in our historian account)
Savings Balance: $24,293
CD Balance: $65,190
Investment Balance: $36,341

During 2018, we made our annual contribution of $2,000 to the FAC Museum, and the previously approved donations of $1,000 to the Homes for Our Troops Foundation and the Fisher House Foundation. We also made a one-time $1,000 contribution to the Hilliard A. Wilbanks MOH Scholarship Foundation (approved at the general membership meeting).

We have new FACA challenge coins. They are available from our historian, Al Matheson, for $5 ($10 for non-members), plus shipping of $5 regardless of the number of items purchased. He also has “Hit My Smoke” key chains and decals at two for $5.

To help the association save money, if you haven’t already done so, consider switching your newsletter option to delivery by email. We pay about $500 each year to mail the
newsletter. Just let me know you want to receive the newsletter electronically and I’ll make it happen.

You can also help by keeping track of your membership by noting your status on the first line of your address on this newsletter. The first number is the last year of your membership. If you get the newsletter by email notice, you can email me or Fred Pumroy to check your membership status. If your membership is due for renewal, consider becoming a life member. In either case, make your check to FACA, Inc and send to me at PO Box 222, Polson, MT 59860.

Thanks for your support. Trey Moran, Nail 13

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Joe Sowa organized and pulled off a wonderful reunion. The weather cooperated to allow people to enjoy the daily outings and see some of the beauty offered by the Pacific Northwest. The Hooch was well stocked and large enough to hold multiple subgroups that gather together within the larger reunion. As shown in Harry’s report, the reunions draw FACS and those that supported and enabled the FAC mission. Attendees included maintainers, intelligence staff members, photographers, and allied force members. Board members met to formally review the association business items (see below for highlights) and established plans to keep the organization viable for the foreseeable future.

Darrell Whitcomb’s guest Nguyen Van Kiet was honored for his heroics as a SVN Sea Commando. He supported the BAT 21 SAR which rescued 1 LT Mark Clark (Nail 38B) and LTC Gene Hambleton (BAT 21B).

Bill Royce (Nail Fac and Boeing Test Pilot) presentation provided insights on his vast experience and the care that goes into building safe, mission capable weapon systems. Bill’s resume and accomplishments illustrate the level of achievement FACs attained after gaining the rapid-paced, confidence building experience unique to being a FAC. Saturday’s memorial service included a roll call to remember each of FACs lost in Southeast Asia. The FACA has 850 active members with 147 members and guests attending the reunion. Thanks again to Joe Sowa and his Seattle team.

The general membership meeting included the Board of Director’s Reports, elections to fill leadership positions, and discussions of business issues. As discussed, there are several ongoing efforts to define our strategic plan and design formats to help document your individual wishes for your FAC memorabilia.

2018 Seattle Reunion: Harry Pearce has posted a Reunion 2018 Seattle Report on the FAC website (http://fac-assoc.org/reunion/2018Seattle/2018SEA_Rpt.html). The report includes a summary of each day’s activities, pictures of a few attendees including a group of radio operators and Australian FACs. Harry also highlights and thanks the people who made the reunion possible including the reunion committee, day trip coordinators, and the worrywarts.

2020 Mid-Continent Reunion: A location central to the CONUS was selected for the 2020 reunion. The location should reduce the travel time/costs to permit increased reunion
participation. Potential exists to coordinate our reunion with the Wings over the Rockies Museum. The museum is working plans to dedicate an O-2 for those that flew the FAC mission. Details on the reunion will be updated in future newsletters and posted to the FACA web site. Mike Lyons has volunteered to organize the 2020 reunion. If you live in the Colorado area and can provide help to Mike, please contact him at (719) 233-2347 or mikepeglyons@gmail.com.

News from the FACA Board of Directors and General Membership Meeting (21 September 2018): In conjunction with the Seattle Reunion, the FACA Board held a board meeting and participated in a general membership meeting. The news includes the following items.

Darrel Whitcomb presented the strategic plan for the FACA. The plan is a living document that will be updated as details are added to refine the plan. Of primary importance, the FACA will continue to operate in its current status for the foreseeable future. This includes supporting the FACA mission of remembering those left behind, preserving the FAC history, and hosting reunions. The plan will contain the steps and legal actions required to eventually dissolve the organizations. For the foreseeable future, the association will operate as a “last man standing” organization.

Related to the plan, individuals are working on standard forms that may be used by FACA members to provide guidance to their families on management of FAC memorabilia. Information will include organizations that will accept the items and use the items or proceeds from the items to preserve FAC history.

The election of officers retained most of the FACA leadership with several changes being made to the board. Names of the board are shown in the newsletter contact list.

Members are asked to notify Fred Pumroy with changes to contact information (address, phone, email). In addition, members are asked to notify Fred Pumroy when you become aware of the passing of a FACA member, former member, or any former FAC.

Folks are working on guidance for distribution of FAC/flying memorabilia when a member passes. Obvious options include the FAC Museum and Texas Tech FAC library. More information will be forth coming.

Different FAC groups have been working formally and informally to gather pictures. The association has asked for volunteers for each TASS. Hopefully, these individuals will be able to gather pictures for a common repository. While we are getting organized, you are asked to retrieve the photos you would like to place into the repository. For each picture, please note the time frame, location, activity, aircraft, and people in the picture. If you have time, please add notes to provide insights.

2020 Reunion – The Wings over the Rockies organization has invited the FACA to hold its 2020 reunion in Colorado (Denver area). Mike Lyons has agreed to be the POC for the 2020 reunion but he needs assistance from other Colorado/Denver area FACs or any other FACs. It was discussed that the FACA may hire an outside organization to assist with putting on this and future reunions. If the Colorado site falls through, the fall back location will be Kansas City.

New Business – Tom Kemp gave an update on the FAC Museum (FACM). The FACM is increasing its membership. The Marine OV-10 is being prepped for painting. They have obtained some equipment; focusing on education and outreach. The collection is growing – they have acquired a cobra; are looking at an F-16 acquisition; working on a Huey donation. They have expansion plans which include moving to a new location within the next 5 years.
Gary Beard discussed the River Rats organization’s efforts to educate high school students about Vietnam and the role of the FAC.

Darrel Whitcomb discussed the FACNET and the intent to use it more for administrative information.

Charity Donations – The Association will continue to donate $1000/year to both the Fisher House and Home for the Troops.

**Remembering Those We Left Behind:** In early December, I was trying to determine what to include in the January 2019 issue. Because December 12, 2018 was the 48th anniversary of the first loss of a night O-2 Nail, I was remembering the two lost FACs. Truly, these incredible people were left behind. Because internet search information about these two people is incomplete and some information is incorrect or inaccurate, I thought I would add details based upon first-hand knowledge gained from FACs who were involved in the SAR and/or had knowledge from monitoring the POW/MIA issues.

1st Lt Tommy Duckett (Nail 84) was the pilot of the O-2. Tommy was an athletic, fun, and skilled aviator. He was an aggressive FAC that worked hard preparing for and flying missions. He was calm and in total control in the most exciting situations available for night fliers in Laos.

Major “Pete” Skinner (Nail 224) was the navigator FAC flying in Tommy’s right seat. Pete was an experienced weapon system operator with multiple ejections from F-101 aircraft. He was funny, loved to cook marinated steaks, and a dedicated husband and father. Pete was extremely effective finding targets, running air strikes, and passing knowledge to young aviators.

Anyone that wants to formally remember a lost FACs may submit the remembrance to the newsletter.

Nail 84 was working the sector that included Tchepone, Ban Karai Pass, Route 9, Delta 12, and the “L in the river.” At some time during the mission, Nail 84 gave permission to a B-57G crew to come into the area and work Route 9. Knowing how Pete and Tommy operated, I believe they gave permission to recon the road and strike trucks so long as the B-57 stayed below a defined altitude. This would permit Nail 84 to work the sector at the normal altitude for a night O-2 mission and having vertical separation from the B-57G.

The B-57G crew reported that they had a mid-air with the FAC. Both aircraft lost contact with Moonbeam at the same time. Early morning SAR efforts sanitized the area and rescued both of the B-57G crewmembers. Nails were supporting the SAR as well as Sandy A-1s and helicopters from NKP. Nails were shocked when the SAR force left the SAR area immediately after the B-57G crewmembers were rescued. Joker called off the SAR for the downed Nails because they did not have any “positive signs of life” from either Nail. Joker made the call even though multiple beepers came up and a voice contact was made with a person claiming to be “Nail Bravo.” They rejected to voice contact because the person could not answer the SAR identification questions. Knowing that Pete was added to the mission as a replacement crewmember, I believe Joker was not asking Pete’s questions.

Staying on the SAR site, Nails were able to locate the downed O-2 and one good chute several hundred meters from the O-2. Photo analysis determined that the right boom had separated from the horizontal stabilizer. This would put the O-2 into a flat pancake spin with a reasonable rate of decent. (NOTE: About three months after Nail 84 was lost, ARVN troops participating in Lam Son 719 inspected the aircraft and reported no sign of loss of life or injury in the O-2.

After the O-2 was located virtually in-tact and the chute was located, Joker would not return the SAR forces to help locate and rescue the Nails. Needless to say, everyone at NKP was upset and
committed to do everything possible to rescue our friends. The commitment to fellow combatants was best illustrated by the Special Forces unit at NKP that were commanded by Major Bill Sheldon. Bill's green berets and the crews designated as the day's Prairie Fire resources volunteered to generate an NKP based SAR. The Knives (helicopters) and Hobos (A-1s) squadron leadership supported this effort. Bill was at the Nail squadron building “dressed for the bush” with his team ready to go into Laos to rescue Pete and Tommy.

The general officers at 7th Air Force ordered the Air Force personnel to “stand down.” I listened to the conversations between the 23 TASS and 7th Air Force “leadership.” Both groups used language not appropriate for print. Direct threats of court martial were made to the Nail squadron leadership. With great reservation, the NKP assets stood down from the SAR, but continued to search for Pete and Tommy.

Early the next morning, John Hall (Nail 22) saw and reported his sighting of Tommy Duckett. John said, “Tommy was being escorted north close to the Laotian – North Vietnam border. Tommy was seen as a live POW headed into captivity in North Vietnam.”

Between 1971 and 1975, there were numerous “intelligence reports” bantered about when people talked about POW and MIAs. Both Pete and Tommy were subjects in these discussions.

Bob Wolfe (Nail 211) worked in operations at MAC HQ during Operation Homecoming. Bob has told other Nails that he personally saw both Pete and Tommy listed on the planned passenger lists for Operation Homecoming. Unfortunately, Secretary Kissinger made the decision to not negotiate with the Pathet Lao for the return of POWs held by the Laotians.

I believe we all share knowledge that most of the reported MIAs were actually KIAs when their aircraft were lost. These people were lost with extensive efforts being made to obtain their remains for burial in the United States. However, not all of the MIAs were KIAs and these surviving warriors were POWs. In the case of Pete and Tommy, it appears that they are POWs that are yet to be returned.

I urge each of you to remember these individuals and contact your representatives to urge them to resolve the “POWs lost in Laos” issue.

**Agent Orange:** Gary Knight (Issue 10X/Chirp 71) posted a Call to Action for C-123 Vets to take action for Agent Orange health problems. Agent Orange is an important issue for all FACs including those that flew only from Thailand. Type2 diabetes, prostate cancer, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, and ischemic heart disease are some of the most common health problems that are presumed to be caused by exposure to Agent Orange. The full list of presumptive conditions and diseases are listed on the Agent Orange: [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/publications/index.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/publications/index.asp).

From personal discussions, I am know that many FACs have the Agent Orange presumptive health problems and have not applies to the VA for benefits. I encourage all of you to contact the VA and take the following steps: 1) register for the Agent Orange registry, 2) Submit a disability application, and 3) take an Agent Orange physical. With recent improvements in VA staffing for disability processing, applying for VA benefits has been simplified. If you cannot apply at a VA facility, apply through [https://www.ebenefits.va.gov](https://www.ebenefits.va.gov). The compensation from VA may be received without offsets to retirement benefits. VA disability ratings may be used to reduce or eliminate property taxes. In Texas, a 100% VA disability makes
a veteran exempt from property tax. Receipt of VA benefits does not require medical treatment by the VA.

Rolling Thunder XXXII: Some of my earliest memories involve Memorial Day trips to decorate graves of my veteran ancestors. It was a time to pay tribute to these individuals and understand the sacrifices needed create our country and keep it free. For Vietnam Veterans, the ways to pay tribute has expanded to include motorcycles rally with the largest being “Rolling Thunder” held in Washington DC. Rolling Thunder is a demonstration/protest to bring attention to the POWs and MIAs left behind. Rolling Thunder draws thousands of bikes and nearly a million participants. If you are near DC on Memorial Day, you may want to participate in Rolling Thunder.

If you wish to share a story, please submit the story to Don Davie at Nail218.dd@gmail.com
I’ll try to publish all of the stories (except those that might prove too embarrassing).
If we get a lot of stories, I’ll highlight each story in the printed newsletter and include the full story in the newsletter distributed by email and posted on the web site.

Stories (I’m sure they are true):  Story 1. Applying for a Texas Disabled Vet License Plate. A previous FACA newsletter inspired me to apply for a Texas custom license plate. Because the disabled plates must include the letters “DV,” few letters remain for customization. Being a FAC, I requested “FAC DV.” The following response shows that former residents of our work areas must now be employed by the state of Texas. These individuals determined that “FAC” was vulgar. Here is a copy of the actual text:

From: VTR Special Plates (TxDMV) [VTR_Special_Plates@txdmv.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, February 27, 2018 11:19 AM
To: NAIL218.DD@GMAIL.COM
Cc: VTR Special Plates (TxDMV)
Subject: DV Distinguished Flying Cross - FAC-DV
Importance: High

Good morning. We have received your request for the personalized license plate “FAC-DV” and appreciate your order. Unfortunately, a review of your selection has determined it to be inappropriate for use on a license plate as vulgarity (defined as a curse word); however, we would like to offer you some options.


After celebrating New Years Eve with the enlisted crew, steak, beans and beer, war was tough. Three of us crawled back to the FAC Hootch, as we had missions on New Year’s Day. One of us commented about the lack of fireworks at midnight. So, Idiot #1 {three options: Jerry Kinder, Pete Condom, Ron Slater, and Marshal Harrison) grabbed Idiot #2 (1 LT Thisius) and said, “Let’s get some fireworks. Five minutes later, Idiots #1 and #2 were in the road outside of the FAC Hootch with two AK-47’s. On full automatic, each weapon dispatched 30 rounds with green tracers. It was quite a show.

Then the under attack siren went off, Idiot #1 and #2 ran to the FAC Hootch, hid the AK-47’s and climbed into bed. At 0800 New Year’s Day, 2nd Brigade Commander (O-6) knocking on hootch door. He brought three MP’s. When asked if anyone had over celebrated last night, Idiot #1 and #2 stepped forward as celebrants. Note: we may have been drunk, but we weren't liars.

As the junior Idiot, my recon sortie was changed to an out and back to Phan Rang to deliver two empty AK-47’s to the F-100 unit stationed there. I was able to RON in an air conditioned room and return the next day. Pleased to admit to being Idiot #1. Upon return from the RON, the 2nd Brigade Commander, 1st Infantry, was at the airstrip. He gave me a ride back to the FAC Hootch. 1st Lt. Denny Thisius, Sidewinder/Slugger 25.
Contact specific Association officers or directors by going to our website: http://www.fac-assoc.org/contacts/contacts01.html

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Enclosed is my check # __________________ for $ __________________. Make me a member or continue my membership in the FAC Association. (Note: Your Dues Status can be found in the address block printed above.)

Current Dues Status: Signature: