



## FAC Association's Fini Reunion Debrief

Ft Walton Beach, FL

23-27 Oct. 2024

By Claude Newland, Rustic 19

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It's official. The last FACA reunion is in the books. The members of the Forward Air Controller Association enjoyed one heck of a big blowout "last reunion" in Ft Walton Beach, FL, 23-27 Oct 2024. And what a reunion it was! Approximately 330 FACs, friends, and family members attended a packed house final banquet on Saturday evening, 26 Oct.

**Wednesday, 23 Oct.** Things kicked off with a bang on 23 Oct. Throughout the weekend the weather was prefect with nary a cloud in the sky. Daytime temperatures were in the low 80s, and nighttime temperatures were in the mid-60s with low humidity. The beaches were pristine, and excitement was in the air as old friends gathered together to reminisce and get caught up with one another.

# FORWARD AIR CONTROLLERS



Hooch Banner

**Getting Started.** Over half of the reunion attendees arrived a day early on Wednesday, 24 Oct. After checking in at The Island Resort hotel, they registered, picked up their reunion packets, shirts and ball caps, and name tags, and headed to the well-stocked Hooch adjacent to the Grotto

pool to see which of their buds had found the target. That evening everyone enjoyed a great BBQ dinner at the Hooch that was catered by Kin Folks BBQ.

Comradery, storytelling, and getting reacquainted with long lost buds was the order of the day. That evening, our president, **Brad Wright**, welcomed everyone and **Claude Newland**, our reunion coordinator, reviewed the upcoming reunion events.

**Witness to War Interviews.** Over the course of three days, the Director of the Vietnam Archives Oral History Project, **Mr. Grant Rampy**, interviewed 27 FACs, capturing their personal stories of their experiences in the Southeast Asia War. Each person will receive a copy of their interview as a family keepsake.

If you would like to be interviewed, contact Mr. Rampy at [grantrampy64@gmail.com](mailto:grantrampy64@gmail.com) or call him at 325-660-8690.

## **Thursday, 24 Oct.**

**Why did so many arrive a day early?** Because 10 FAC aircraft arrived on Wednesday at the Destin Executive Airport so they would be ready to offer short courtesy flights on Thursday.

What an incentive to come early. Two Marine OV-10 Broncos from California provided 18 backseat OV-10 flights on Thursday, and eight O-1/L-19 Birddogs from throughout the U.S. provided 21 Birddog courtesy flights. Unfortunately, the two O-2s that has planned to attend, had to cancel the week prior due to mechanical issues.

**Flight Profile.** FACs, some wives, and even some guests were treated to a short fight over Destin and along the scenic Emerald Coast's sugar white Gulf beaches. Some even made a low approach or touch and go at Hurlburt Field.

Ah...to slip the surly white bonds once more. What a thrill!

**Our sincere thanks go to Ken Fiedler** who orchestrated the weekend's historic fly-in and Memorial Remembrance Service Fly-by, and to all his pilots and volunteer Ramp Rats who put a lot of smiles on folk's faces this weekend.

**The remaining reunion attendees** arrived Thursday, registered, and most everyone went next door to the Crab Trap restaurant for a delicious seafood dinner and a raucous good time. It turned out that every local restaurant where we took meals during the reunion enthusiastically welcomed us "home" and offered discounts for our meals.

## **Friday, 25 Oct.**

**Eglin Mission Briefing.** While the FAC aircraft practiced in the morning for the next day's Memorial Remembrance Service fly-by, everyone else headed to the Eglin Armament Museum for two briefings and a tour of the museum. After a welcome by the museum's director, **Mr. David Fitzpatrick**, we were provided a fascinating and thorough intel briefing on the current threats that face our nation by Eglin's Chief of Public Affairs, **Mr. Gabe Myers**. After chronicling the threats posed by China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran, he went on to give a detailed briefing on the myriads of Eglin unit's that are working to counter these threats.

One of Eglin's biggest assets is that it is the USAF'S largest base worldwide. It has both land and sea ranges which allow it to carry out significant weapons test and development functions.

**Texas Tech University's Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive.** Next came a fascinating briefing by **Dr. Kelly Crager** who explained the significant role Texas Tech Univ.'s Vietnam Archives program is playing in preserving, and most importantly cataloguing, everything having to do with the Southeast Asia War. If you send something to this program, it will be catalogued and digitized and can then be easily researched or accessed by others. Check it out at: [www.vietnam.ttu.edu/general](http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/general)

Dr. Crager is head of the Oral History Project and would love to interview you. Give him a call at 806-834-4834.

**Dolphin/Sunset Cruise and Dinner at the Destin Harbor.** After some libations back at the hooch, about 240 attendees carpooled over to the beautiful Destin Harbor and hopped aboard the Southern Star and Boogies vessels for a Dolphin/Sunset Cruise. The dolphins didn't disappoint. They were in the harbor and in the Gulf in droves. Afterwards, many opted for dinner at either Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville restaurant or AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar. Then, time for more Hooch comradery.

## **Saturday, 26 Oct. - A Full Day.**

**AFSOC Mission Briefing.** Everybody had to get up early Saturday to get to Hurlburt Field's Soundside Club for two briefings. **Maj. Timothy Richard**, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) Deputy Chief of Staff, gave a detailed briefing on the capabilities of the AFSOC command which now includes both Hurlburt Field and Cannon AFB, New Mexico. Most notably, AFSOC personnel are deployed across the globe.

**Special Tactics Training (JTAC) Briefing.** **MSgt Jose Cruz-Richardson**, the superintendent of the Joint Terminal Attack Controllers school, updated us on how the Air Force now controls airstrikes from the ground.

**Forward Air Controller Remembrance Service.** Clearly, one of the highlights of the entire weekend was the opportunity to remember and honor our FAC brothers who “gave all” while answering their nation’s call to duty in Southeast Asia.

The service was attended by several dignitaries include our Florida State District 4 Representative, **Mr. Patt Maney**, and his wife, Caroline. Representing U.S. Congressman, Mr. Matt Gaetz, was his Director of Military Affairs, **Mr. Austin Bury**. The AFSOC Commander, **Lt Gen Michael Conley**, was in attendance, as well as numerous other base senior officers and command chiefs.

The master of ceremony, **Claude Newland**, offered some Hurlburt Reflections and explained that it was the Raven FACs who established the first FAC memorial here at Hurlburt Field’s Air Park to honor their 23 fallen brothers. This was in the early 1970s. It was the Raven’s small memorial pedestal that made the FAC community come to the realization that it would be an injustice not to properly recognize all of our FAC brothers lost during that fateful period in our nation’s history.

The FAC Association’s Chaplain, **Col Ret. Dale Hill**, then gave the Memorial address which focused on how FACs were 1. viewed by their peers, 2. how they may be remembered by historians; -- and, finally, 3. how we FACs regard ourselves. **To read the text, [CLICK HERE.](#)**



To conclude the Remembrance Service, the Honor Guard came forward to solemnly reposition the memorial flower wreath to the FAC Memorial while being escorted by our two Gold Star family members, Ms. Debbie Harrell and Mr. Gary Smith. As they escorted the Memorial flower wreath, the Emerald Coast Pipes and Drums played “Going Home.

Almost simultaneously, the FAC aircraft fly-by came overhead. One OV-10 was followed by a four ship of O-1s, with the lead aircraft emitting a trail of smoke.

**Ghost Pilot Presentation.** A buffet lunch at the Soundside immediately followed the Remembrance Service. There was no program, but Covey FAC **Evan Quiros** presented a copy of his bronze Ghost Pilot statue to the AFSOC Commander, **Lt Gen Michael Conley**. The Ghost Pilot symbolizes our brethren who were lost in Southeast Asia.



**Business meeting and FINAL Banquet.** An afternoon business meeting was held at the hotel and the final FAC Banquet happy hour began at 6 PM. **Brad Wright** served as the banquet's Master of ceremony which was of epic proportion. Brad thanked the entire board of Directors and staff members for their faithful service and presented them with a plaque.

**Darrel Whitcomb** then gave a concise summary of the Southeast Asia War and the futility of our efforts to win the war due to our government not allowing us to put troops on the ground to permanently shut down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Lesson Learned -- Airpower alone can't get the job done without boots on the ground.

The evening concluded with each past association president recapping their tenure as president. Brad Wright then closed the banquet thanking those who helped make this reunion such a big success.

**What's Next?** There is still much to be done by our Board and Staff to close out the FAC Association. I'm sure we will be hearing more from them. You can stay abreast of the latest happening by periodically checking the FAC Website: [www.fac-assoc.org](http://www.fac-assoc.org) or keep your ear to the FACNET. Allen Dyer can help you get on the FACNET if you contact him at: [aldyer@lawlab.com](mailto:aldyer@lawlab.com).

**Request for Reunion Photos.** Our reunion photographer **Dan Swiger**, request you send him your best three or four reunion photos for inclusion in a reunion photo collection. Please indicate who is in each photo, etc. I

It's been a great ride. Take time to stay in touch with your buds.

***Cleared Hot***