

Swift Current

The official publication of the
Swift Boat Sailors Association

Third Qtr 2010

Comments & suggestions to-
editor@swiftboats.org



2010 Gig Harbor Swift Boat Reunion

Front Row - Rob Rhodes, Rich O'Mara, Ed Barth, Stephen Morrison, Kevin Pursifull, Greg Hodges

Second Row - Jim Hoffman, Robert Withee, Mike Dohrmann, Dave Stevenson, Gary Carpenter, Chuck Rabel, Monty Mantonya, Joe La Voie, Mike Lohnes, Ken Tryon, Dan Bohnet

Standing - Bill Rogers, Dave Paul, Pat Sheedy, Mike Brown, Jim Miller, Ron Durham, George Rekow, Peter Draper, Bob Hunt, O. P. Lent, Paul Johnson, Gary Smith, Drew Mantonya, Bill Lannom

Not Pictured - Dave Prodehl, Jay Gruenfeld, Rick Engley, Fred Barnes

On the last Saturday in July the largest Swift Boat sailors' reunion in the country (this year) was held. For the ninth year in a row Bill and Jan Rogers had as many Swifties and their families as they could fit into their house, deck, garage and lawn in Gig Harbor, Washinton. There was no program or agenda, just a day-long gathering to eat, drink and share old memories. This event continues to get better every year with a mix of old friends every year and several newbees who have never before attended a reunion.

Call For Award Recommendations

By Joe LaVoie

I've been given the assignment to solicit recommendations from our membership for our two major reunion banquet awards - The Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., Humanitarian Award and The Ralph Singleton Patriot Award.

The Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr. Humanitarian award was created to recognize an outstanding individual who has dedicated his time to serving the needs of our war veterans and, or the community where he lives. The Ralph Singleton Patriot Award salutes an individual for his unselfish commitment to special SBSA Projects and, or dedication to the Association. Standing SBSA Officers and Board Directors are not eligible for these awards.

Send recommendations, along with details that support your nomination, to me by email at JLavoie101@aol.com or by snail mail to 29025 168th Ave. SE, Kent, WA 98042; or call me at Home at (253) 631-0997; Cell (253) 261-0110.

Special announcement

Nominations needed for the SBSA Board of Directors. This is a great opportunity to serve your shipmates in the SBSA.

We need nominations for the upcoming SBSA Board of Directors election at the SBSA 2011 San Antonio Reunion.

A Director is a member in good standing in the SBSA, and is elected by SBSA Active Membership at the reunion. Directors serve for a 4 year term, must have a personal computer with 24 hour internet access for communication purposes, and attend the Board of Directors annual meeting.

If you are personally interested, want to nominate someone in the SBSA, or have further questions, contact Mike Solhaug, solhaumj@evms.edu

From Viet refugee to Commander US Navy

A US military officer who fled Vietnam as a boy and was picked up by an American ship has visited the country in command of a destroyer. Born in the Vietnamese city of Hue, Commander Hung Ba Le and his family were picked up at sea in 1975 by a US naval ship in the closing days of the Vietnam war. His family settled in Virginia and he later became a US citizen, graduating in 1992 from the US Naval Academy. He returned to Vietnam in November with his ship, the guided missile destroyer USS Lassen, on a goodwill visit. 'This will be an incredible experience for me personally, to return to the land of my birth for the first time since I was a child,' Commander Le said in a Navy report. Commander Le called the visit 'a symbol of the friendship between our two nations.' The first Vietnamese-American to command a US naval ship, Commander Le took over the helm last year of the USS Lassen, which is part of the US 7th Fleet based in Yokosuka, Japan.

President's Corner

Shipmates:

Eight months and a wake-up, troops! By now, you should have received the 2011 SBSA Reunion Registration Package. Gene Hart sent the last batch out at the end of August. If you have not received the registration package, please contact him by email (ghart@unf.edu) and provide him your correct mailing address. He'll get a package in the mail to you right away.

Excitement about the May 2011 gathering in San Antonio is high. So much so that in less than a month after the hotel reservation desk began accepting reservations for our reunion, the initial SBSA room block surpassed the 80% mark.

I urge you to call in your room reservation as soon as possible. In this newsletter you will find a Reunion Information sheet containing all the details. The SBSA web site will also have downloadable PDF versions of the registration package. My personal recommendation is to make time to review the expanded version of the 2011 SBSA Reunion – San Antonio Info Sheet, available on our web site. Use this data to help you make the most of your San Antonio visit. Also....be sure to consider Dr. Sherwood's call for Oral History Interviews (see Reunion Information this newsletter).

I will be glad to answer any questions that you may have regarding San Antonio and our reunion plans. Team SATX is working hard to insure that everyone will have a memorable visit. San Antonio has a lot to offer...take advantage of a Wednesday hotel check-in and partake of a Complimentary Fiesta Reception on the hotel patio that overlooks the beautiful San Antonio River.

Gene Hart deserves a BRAVO ZULU for maintaining the Swift-L Swiftie chat platform. It serves our Swift Boat veteran community well in that it allows us to stay in touch. I enjoy reading threads, okay – some can be classified as sea-stories, of our days gone by in a distant land. Recently, a great number of you answered my call for information relative to VA covered prescription drug benefits. The Swift-L is a great networking platform. Contact Gene Hart if you'd like to give it a try.

As special thanks to Director Robert "Tuck" Brant who continues the tradition of Remembering our Honor Crew, whose names are on The Wall in Washington, D.C. The Memorial Day Wreath tradition is on its ninth year. ...We Remember.

A "Welcome Aboard" salute goes out to Bartlett, Cannode, Hoffmaster, Kovanen, Mann, Mayes, and Terfehr – new SBSA members. We hope to see you at the 2011 SBSA Reunion in San Antonio next May. We bid Fare Winds and Following Seas to eleven of our brothers since 2008 and we keep our fellow shipmates in mind who are battling illness and personal struggle....you are in our prayers.



On 7 September, 1984, one of the worst peacetime tragedies occurred in Malta. This was the huge explosion on board the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM) patrol boat C-23 off Comino. The tragedy was the worst in the AFM's history, leaving five uniformed army personnel and two policemen dead. The explosion occurred while the soldiers were on duty dumping illegally manufactured fireworks, which had been seized only the day before, into the sea. It was a routine operation, and as was the custom, police officials were also in attendance. Such fireworks were usually dumped off Comino, or alternatively, off Filfla, near the limits of Dingli Cliffs. Warrant Officer Magro remembers the day of the tragedy as if it were yesterday. "I was a standing army officer at the time. On the day, I had been doing some maintenance work on one of our boats that was undergoing refurbishment. I was in the canteen having my lunch break, when at around 11.30am, someone made contact with the military saying that there had been a huge explosion on one of our boats somewhere off Comino. A helicopter which was patrolling the area at the time also confirmed this. It is difficult to describe all the emotions and feelings that rushed through my mind. Upon hearing the news, a number of us quickly set off on one of our standard boats to check the situation." Pausing to recall what exactly happened next, Warrant Officer Magro, years after the tragedy, still struggles for words. "From afar we could immediately tell that the situation was bad. However, the negative effects of the explosion hit us when we were in close proximity to the vessel. Parts of the sea were covered all over with gun powder. With heavy hearts we could do nothing but begin our search for the victims. To make matters worse, a few days before the accident, someone was caught illegally dumping large chunks of frozen meat. Try and imagine our discomfort, for every time we met a chunk of meat, we thought it was part of a dismembered body." It did not take long for the nightmare to become reality. "The first corpse we came across was burnt so badly by the blast that we struggled to identify who exactly it was." . The tragedy was the worst in the AFM's history, leaving five uniformed army personnel and two policemen dead. Bombardier Joseph Pace, 36, Gunner William Simpson, 36, Private Anthony Vella, 20, Police Sergeant Saviour Muscat, 30 and Police Constable Joseph Hare, 24, perished in the violent explosion, together with Bombardier Francis Borg, 36 and 27-year old Private Anthony Farrugia of Zejtun, whose remains were never found. Only Private Emmanuel Montesin, 21 at the time, survived the explosion. Article by Scott Grech (edited for Swift Current), photos by Major Ivan Consiglio.

New SBSA Members in 2010

Rand I. Bartlett	Marblehead, MA	USCGC Campbell & Owasco	1966-1970
S, Daniel Cannode	Waterville, OH	Cat Lo (USCG)	1969-1970
Larry W. Hoffmaster	Sugar Land, TX	Cat Lo	1968-1969
Michael Kovanen	Green Valley, AZ	Cat Lo	1968-1969
William S. Mann, Jr.	Chocowinity, NC	Cat Lo	1967-1968
Gerald L. Mayes	Boise, ID	Cat Lo	1967-1968
Thomas R. Terfehr	Minneapolis, MN	Sea Float	1969

Veterans' Medallion Available for Order

New Option for Marking Veterans' Graves in Private Cemeteries

WASHINGTON (June 29, 2010) - Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki announced today that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is offering bronze medallions to attach to existing, privately purchased headstones or markers, signifying a deceased's status as a Veteran.

"For Veterans not buried in a national or state Veterans cemetery, or those without a government grave marker, VA is pleased to offer this option that highlights their service and sacrifices for our country," said Secretary Shinseki.

The new item can be furnished instead of a traditional government headstone or marker for Veterans whose death occurred on or after Nov. 1, 1990, and whose grave in a private cemetery is marked with a privately purchased headstone or



New Medallion

Under federal law, eligible Veterans buried in a private cemetery are entitled to either a government-furnished grave marker or the new medallion, but not both. Veterans buried in a national or state Veterans cemetery will receive a government headstone or marker of the standard design authorized at that cemetery. The medallion is available in three sizes: 5 inches, 3 inches and 1 ½ inches in width. Each bronze medallion features the image of a folded burial flag adorned with laurels and is inscribed with the word "Veteran" at the top and the branch of service at the bottom. Next of kin will receive the medallion, along with a kit that will allow the family or the staff of a private cemetery to affix the medallion to a headstone, grave marker, mausoleum or columbarium niche cover. More information about VA-furnished headstones, markers and medallions can be found at <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm/hmtype.asp>. VA is currently developing an application form for ordering the medallion. Until it is available, applicants may use the form for ordering government headstones and markers, VA Form 40-1330. Instructions on how to apply for a medallion are found on the VA Web site at www.cem.va.gov/hm_hm.asp. Veterans with a discharge issued under conditions other than dishonorable, their spouses and eligible dependent children can be buried in a VA national cemetery. Other burial benefits available for all eligible Veterans, regardless of whether they are buried in a national cemetery or a private cemetery, include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate and a government headstone or grave marker.

The new medallions will be available only to Veterans buried in private cemeteries without a government headstone or marker. Families of eligible decedents may also order a memorial headstone or marker when remains are not available for interment.

VA operates 131 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. More than 3 million Americans, including Veterans of every war and conflict -- from the Revolutionary War to the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan -- are buried in VA's national cemeteries on more than 19,000 acres. Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the VA Web site on the Internet at www.cem.va.gov or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 1-800-827-1000.

Deceased Swifties 2008 forward

Edward M. Lammons III	Tampa, FL	2008
Donald H. Patterson	Virginia Beach, VA	2008
James D. Sarver	Walkerton, IN	2008
Don A. Voss	Townsend, MT	2008
Vincent J. Feuerborn	Galveston, TX	2009
Fred Cooper		2009
Larry Kuentzel	Virginia Beach, VA	2009
Ron Henderson	Sioux City, IA	2009
Edwin B. West		2009
Ronald M. "Porky" Rinehart	Dayton, Texas	2010
Ronald B. Gagnon	Cape Coral, FL	2010
Albert W. Porter	Port Hadlock, WA	2010
Virgil E. Tayler	Lynn, MA	2010

Change of Address? Need new membership card?

Stay in touch with your shipmates!

Membership card replacement fee \$5.00.



New Swift Challenge Coin (at right)

The SBSA Ship's Store is open and now takes credit cards at:

<http://swiftboats.org/shipstore/catalog.html>

The Return of a Long Lost Navy Sword

March 26, 2010

This month three Navy Swift Boat veterans arranged for the return of a long lost family treasure, a U.S. Navy officer's sword, to the descendants of its original owner. Retired Navy Captain Stephen Morrison found the sword in a Seattle pawn shop in 1982. He had recently been promoted to Commander and as an Executive Officer he needed a sword for ceremonial purposes. The sword was obviously a U.S. Navy design but with a slightly curved blade indicating that it was much older than the current straight-bladed model. The quality of the workmanship was very high on both the sword and its scabbard with only minor wear to show for many years of service. The only clue to its original owner was the name "T.A. Stareck" engraved on the blade.

Stephen retired from the Navy in 1992 and he retired the sword to the wall of his home office. It remained there until 2009 when he donated it to retired CWO2 Boatswain Joe La Voie. Joe had recently retired from his civilian job as a surveyor and was volunteering his services at the Tahoma National Veterans Cemetery in Auburn, Washington. Each day in full dress Navy uniform Joe was conducting up to twenty veteran funerals. Stephen's sword was the perfect complement to Joe's full dress uniform.

Although Joe greatly valued the sword he couldn't help thinking of its original owner and the possibility of returning it to one of his descendants. He searched for information on T. A. Stareck but could only find one reference on the Internet. That was for a warrant officer who had served on the USS Panther, AD-6 an auxiliary ship that sailed around the world with the Great White Fleet in 1907-09. Beyond that one reference the history of the sword remained a mystery - until last month.

Stephen and Joe have lunch once a month with Bill Rogers, Monty Mantonya and other Swift Boat veterans. By coincidence Bill had been searching for the owner of a civil war saber using special genealogy software. He offered to search for the owner of Joe's sword. Using census records and other military records Bill discovered a nine-year-old boy, Thomas Anthony Stareck, who had immigrated to the US in 1886 and lived in Petersburg, Michigan. Census records from 1900, 1910, 1920 and 1930 traced Thomas' career in the US Navy from Hospitalman, Pharmacist and Chief Pharmacist to Lieutenant Commander. The 1910 census records revealed a wife, Harriett and later, in 1930, an adopted son, Anthony E. Unfortunately, social security records showed that the son died in California in 1993 and the trail went cold. That is until February 13th when Thomas E's wife, Anna died in Waukeshaw, Wisconsin. Her obituary notice listed a son, Thomas R. Stareck and a daughter Kathryn. A telephone directory search soon led Bill to Thomas R. living in New Berlin, Wisconsin.

Joe called Tom Stareck and explained the situation with the sword. Tom was amazed and delighted. Apparently his father had fallen on hard times in California and had sold the sword. The family was distressed to lose it and had tried to find it and recover it but without success. They assumed that it was gone forever.

This week Joe, Stephen and Bill took a final photo of the sword and shipped it overnight to Tom and Kathryn in Wisconsin. They soon received a photo of the Stareck grandchildren and great grandchildren holding the treasured family heirloom. This week Joe was rewarded for his efforts with his own brand new Navy officer's sword complete with gold plated scabbard and sword knot compliments of Bill, Stephen and Monty. This one he will never have to return. On its shiny new blade is the inscription "Bos'n J.R. La Voie".

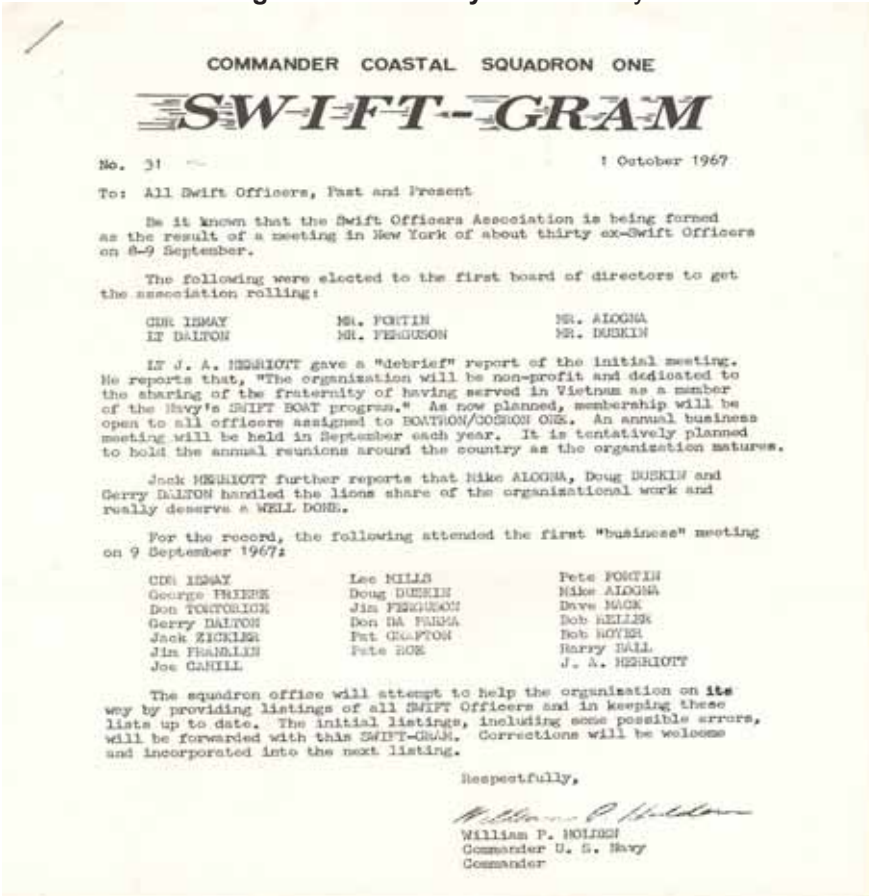




R/V Matthew Maury of Tidewater Community College gets a new paint job.
Was PCF-2, now R/V Matthew F. Maury, Norfolk, VA



A Piece of Swift Organization History Submitted by Bruce Johnson



Attention all Swift Motorcyclists!! **A note from Tony Snesko, BM2, 67/68**

Five years ago I resigned as president of the Swift Boat Veteran's Motorcycle Club. No one responded to my request for someone to take my place, so I just stopped all communication. I still paid the monthly fee to keep the website up and going so the club would survive in my absence. So, with time comes healing and I'd like to give this another shot. If anyone wants to become a member, e-mail me at snesko@aol.com. My e-mail on the website is now corrected.

<http://swiftboatveterans.com>



VUMM Website

The Vietnam Unit Memorial Monument at the Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, CA has upgraded the website at www.vummf.org. Of particular interest may be the "locate a name section" where you can connect with the actual entry on the Memorial Wall. The link is: http://www.vummf.org/locate_name.aspx

Some inaccuracies have been found through visitors looking up a name. Lt. Don Droz is one such case where his name was found to be spelled Droze vs. Droz on the Memorial Wall stainless steel panel. The VUMMF, the SBSA and a private donor rallied around and collected the money to have the panel replaced with the correct spelling of Don Droz name. From Ken McGhee.

Return to Vietnam Tour

Once again Military Historical Tours, Inc. is trying to engender interest in a Swift Boat tour of Vietnam. The tentative dates are 7-20 March, 2011. The itinerary includes Saigon, Cu Chi, Phu Quoc, Cua Viet, Cat Lo, Nha Trang, Dong Ha, Vung Tau, Hue City, Pha Thuan An, Cam Ranh Bay, Da Nang, Hoa An, China Beach, the Hai Van Pass, and many, many more. Pricing at \$3,495 based on double occupancy (\$595 for a single supplement) may differ but only slightly especially if they can line up a group of 20 plus. MHT is very flexible in planning itineraries and can adapt them to fit the specific requirements of the group. Please contact David Wall at dfw Irish@metrocast.net

2011 SBSA Reunion News

The 2011 SBSA Reunion will be held in San Antonio, Texas. The reunion dates are as follows: Check-in on Wednesday, May 4th and check-out on Sunday, May 8th. The Crowne Plaza Riverwalk will be our host hotel. Follow up mail outs will include tour information, San Antonio attractions, as well as a Reunion Registration Form.

In an effort to encourage more membership reunion participation, we are offering a special reduced room rate of \$107 for all SBSA members in good standing. There are two conditions: **You must register with Military Reunions To Remember AND make hotel reservations at the Crowne Plaza Riverwalk in San Antonio, both not later than 4 April 2011.**

Hotel reservations can be made now by calling 1-888-233-9527. You must announce that your reservation is for the Swift Boat Sailors Association 2011 Reunion. The MRTR Reunion Registration Form will be available soon, via our web site.

San Antonio is a vacation destination draw on its own. We expect that the rooms are going to be booked at record pace. Therefore, due to the number of rooms reserved for our members, you don't want to be caught calling in your reservation and sending in your registration late....you may find yourself scrambling for accommodations, or paying the high regular hotel room rates at other hotels with no discount available from the SBSA.

Therefore, call in your hotel reservation now! All it takes is a credit card and you requesting the SBSA Reunion Room Rate reserved for SBSA members. Your credit card WILL NOT be charged a single cent until you check out. You can also register via the Internet at the Crowne Plaza Riverwalk's special SBSA web link at:
<http://resweb.passkey.com/go/SwiftBoat>.

Dr. John Darrell Sherwood of the Naval History & Heritage Command will be our Banquet Keynote Speaker. He will present a talk on Operation Market Time and will include a slide presentation. Sherwood is a military historian and author of five books, including Afterburner: Naval Aviators and the Vietnam War and Nixon's Trident: Naval Power in Southeast Asia, 1968-1972. He's currently working on an official history of Navy coastal and riverine operations in Vietnam. During the reunion, he wishes to conduct Oral History Interviews with Swift Boat Sailors who served in Vietnam from 1967 until the end of the war, especially those involved in major junk and trawler intercepts, the Tet Offensive, and SEALORDS. Those interested in being interviewed should contact him at John.Sherwood@navy.mil and he will schedule a time and place for the interview.

Also, check the SBSA web site soon for 2011 Reunion News. Reunion information will also be released via the Swift-L and through the MyFamily web site. **San Antonio....here we come!!!**



**Alamo
A Piece
of
History**

**San
Antonio
River-
walk**



SBSA Board of Directors Meeting, July 17, 2010 at the Crown Plaza Riverwalk Hotel, San Antonio, Texas

One of the duties of the SBSA Board of Directors is to meet every other year at the site of the next year's reunion. In addition to the regular meeting, a tour of the facilities and discussion of details of the next reunion are completed.

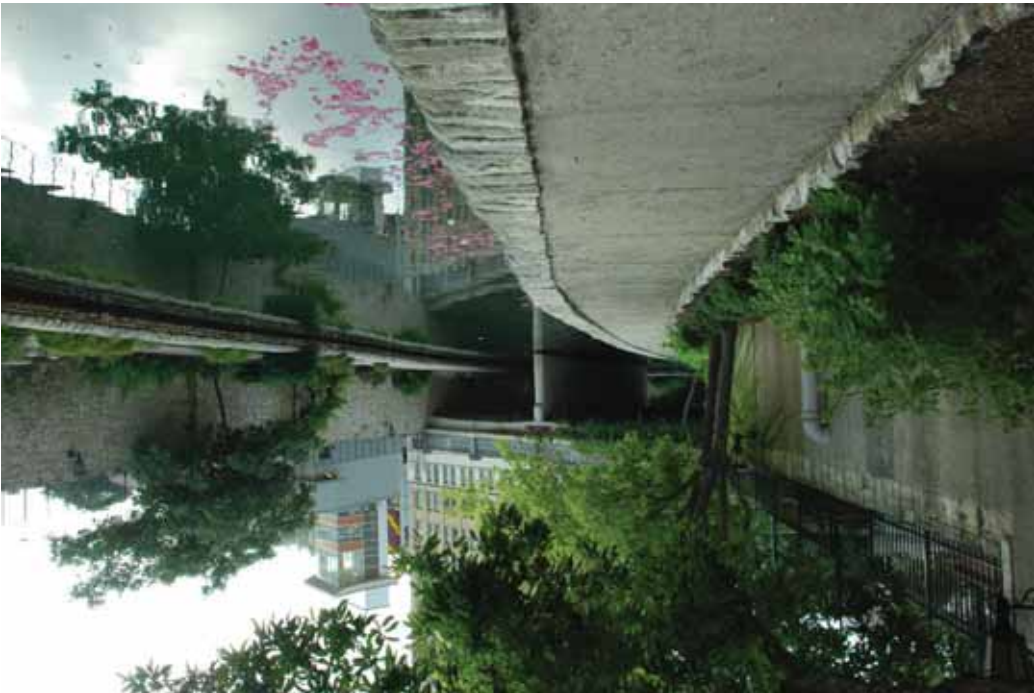
Seated below getting ready to leave for the Airport are from left to right Jim Deal, Joe LaVoie, Mike Solhaug, Gene Hart, DC Current, Virg Erwin, Raul Herrera, Bob Brant, and Dave Wallace. Missing from the picture is Joe Ponder.



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Email - Letter - Telephone - Just DO IT!
Gene Hart - (904) 880-6412 - ghart@unf.edu - 3941 Laurelwood Drive, Jacksonville, FL 32257



**SAN ANTONIO
RIVERWALK**
The San Antonio River
winds through downtown
San Antonio and the city
has created a beautiful
and entertaining environ-
ment for activities that
provide for daytime and
evening enjoyment for
all. We are all looking for-
ward to seeing old
friends and celebrating
another SBSA reunion
May 4-8, 2011