

Swift Current

The official publication of the
Swift Boat Sailors Association

Third Qtr 2012

Comments & suggestions to-
dc.current2@gmail.com

WISCONSIN SWIFT BOAT SAILORS 1ST ANNUAL REUNION



The Wisconsin Swift Boat Sailors held their first annual reunion on June 12, 2012. The reunion was held at the beautiful Heidel House Resort, at Green Lake, Wisconsin. The evening began with a dinner cruise on Green Lake. The main menu was Beef tips & Walleye with buttered noodles, garlic mashed potatoes, Glazed carrots, salad bar and desert bar, served buffet style. The food was outstanding!! It was a very peaceful boat ride and all of the participants were thankful that we did not get involved in any fire fights or serious

rough weather!

Those participating were all Swiftie's from Wisconsin. Jim and Monica Hoffman, Larry and Sue Gilbertson, Marv and Sue Sedlachek, Jim and Patti Marohn, Dennis and Chris Carroll, Bob Mcreedie, Mike Demske, Mike and Peggy Hoks (Mobile Riverine Force, Tango Boat), Mike and Joan Will (mobile Riverine Force PBR's).



After the cruise everyone sat outside on an absolutely beautiful evening and told stories while enjoying some adult beverages. A great time was had by all and we can't wait until 2014 for our 2nd bi-annual reunion.

The Eleventh Annual Gig Harbor Reunion !

My wife, Jan, and I invite you to join us on the last Saturday in July for the largest Swift Boat sailors' reunion in the country (this year). For the eleventh year in a row we are looking for as many Swifties and their families as we can fit into our house, deck, garage and lawn in Gig Harbor, Washington. There is 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 we see every year and several newbies who have never before attended a reunion. We have had over 70 people attend but there is always room for more. So please help us spread the word to those who don't use email or who are otherwise out of touch.

Where: The home of Jan and Bill Rogers, 10909 Sea View Court NW, Gig Harbor, Washington, 98332. Phone: 253-858-3080. Email: willrogers@swiftharbor.com GPS: 47°21'26.75"N 122°33'25.08"W

Gig Harbor is a scenic community located on the Puget Sound just west of Tacoma. It's across the Tacoma Narrows Bridge approximately 30 miles south of Seattle. I'll send you driving directions if you need them. For information on Gig Harbor and accommodations go to <http://www.gigharbor.com>.

When: Saturday, July 28, 2012 from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

The last weekend in July is almost guaranteed to be warm and sunny. It's also the start of the big Seafair week in Seattle with the Blue Angels and the hydroplane races on Lake Washington. So it's a great time of year to visit the Pacific Northwest. The Olympic Peninsula is just a short drive away.

Who: This is for all former Swift Boat sailors and their wives and families. Be sure to bring the wife (or significant other) - they'll have a great time too.

Program: None planned although we're open to suggestions. Just lots of fellowship and eating. There will be a group photo taken at 4:00 p.m.

Cost: \$10 per head at the door to help offset the cost of food and drink.

Transportation: Easy access from Interstate 5. Seatac airport is 20 miles north with a good connecting shuttle service. We also have a boat dock in our neighborhood and several more in Gig Harbor.

Lodging: There are lots of motels and hotels in Gig Harbor and Tacoma. There are several places to park your RV. Gig Harbor has several marinas if you're coming by boat. If you plan to stay in a motel be sure to book your room early. This is Seafair week and rooms may be hard to get by July.

RSVP: Please let us know who's coming (including first names) so that we can accurately buy the food and prepare name tags. And please give me your email address if you have one.

Please note that our email address has changed. It is now willrogers@swiftharbor.com.

Bill & Jan Rogers

President's Corner

We're about ten months away from another great gathering of Swifties. Early hotel registration has gone through the roof. As of 15 July 2012, Virg Erwin reports that we have already exceeded our room night commitment. The Holiday Inn On The Bay will continue to accept room reservations at the \$119 room night reunion rate until 4 August. So, if you haven't yet called in your room reservation, do so **NOW**. Call Reservations at 1(888) 233-9527 or, their Front Desk at (619) 232-3861 to make your reservations.

The SBSA, in concert with the Maritime Museum San Diego, has succeeded in bringing an operational Swift Boat to San Diego. P 24 will be in transit from Malta sometime in August and will be arriving in the Norfolk area. Mike Solhaug is our Point Man on arrival plans. PLEASE keep your ears on full alert, we will pass details of P 24's arrival as soon as they are available. Virgil Erwin has been designated as the SBSA representative and will be participating in the transfer ceremony that will take place in Malta next month. Hats off to all those Swifties and MMSD staff that spent long hours working on this project...BRAVO ZULU shipmates!! News on upcoming P 24 events will be posted to the Swift-L, MyFamily and SBSA web sites.

A Welcome Aboard call goes out to new SBSA members: Asa L. Moore, Charles Rorstrom, Roy Smith, Scott Vance, and David Sherrill. We are also pleased to welcome aboard Associate Members: Ray Ashley, President/CEO of Maritime Museum of San Diego (MMSD), Mark Gallant, Operations Director, MMSD, and Robyn Gallant, Marketing Director, MMSD. In addition, we bid Fair Winds and Following Seas to those shipmates that have gone ahead on their Last Patrol.

Ship Store News....as you may be aware, the Ship's Store was temporarily closed while various aspects of our organization was being brought on track as a legitimate 501c19 organization. In addition to that, the Board Directors, at their annual Director's meeting in San Diego last April, voted to reduce the inventory of our Ship's Store and limit the items that the Ship's Store will carry. In brief, the cost of shipping the entire Ship's Store inventory across the U.S. was becoming too expensive, say nothing about the personal effort of one individual to tend to those arrangements – hats off to Ken Briggs. Adding to the mix are the IRS implications that a substantially profitable Ship's Store can present. Bottom line, there **will be** a Ship's Store at the SDGO 2013 Reunion. In an effort to thin out the shelves, Ken Briggs, Ship's Store Manager, will soon be running an Inventory Reduction Sale on all close out items. Be sure to check out the SBSA web site for details.



**Memorial Day Wreath
placed at the Vietnam Wall
in Washington, D.C.
By Friar Tuck.**

Cua Viet Swift Boat Rescue by Tony Snesco

Not long ago I was reminiscing with a friend about our common experiences in Vietnam. He mentioned that he had found some solace and emotional healing through reading a number of the stories in periodicals such as Vietnam Magazine. I asked him to lend me a copy and I was excited to find an interesting article about a member of a Swift Boat crew that I had been stationed with in Da Nang.

A knot rose in my throat as I read the part where Raul Herrera was asked "Did any Swift Boats capsize while you were there?" He recalled that at least one boat had capsized in the mouth of the Cua Viet river in November 1967 and that "miraculously the entire crew was saved." Amazing! It was MY BOAT CREW on PCF-58 that had saved those men on that unfortunate Swift!

A year before, in 1966, I was nearing my discharge date while serving aboard heavy cruiser Newport News. I had been following the Vietnam war closely and had decided that I wanted to do my part in support of America's effort to relieve the suffering there. I wrote to the Navy and volunteered to extend my service for a year if they would allow me to serve with the Swift Boat squadron recently formed to patrol the coastal and river waters there.

Shortly thereafter I received orders to report to the PCF (Patrol Craft Fast) school in Coronado, California. While training with my crew, I was promoted to Boatswain Mate Second Class (E5) and became the leading petty officer for our crew when our senior engineman sustained an injury. We initially were sent to the Swift Boat coastal division in Qui Nhon, but were then transferred north to Da Nang where our boat subsequently was assigned duty at the U. S. Naval Support Activity Detachment located at the mouth of the Cua Viet river, just a few miles south of the Demilitarized Zone.

We were housed in barracks near the river mouth and daily went on patrols along the beaches and adjacent coastal area near the DMZ. Since there was little commercial traffic north of Da Nang, most of our days were spent searching sampans and junks for weapons and checking the identification of everyone we encountered on the waterways.

The most exciting part about operating from the Cua Viet was trying to safely return the boat and our crew to the base via the treacherous channel at the entrance mouth of the river. The channel was about one-quarter mile long and only about 200 feet wide. On a normal day the swells were usually five to ten feet high, and surfing down the channel in a fifty foot Swift Boat required considerable skill. The real problems occurred during the monsoon season when the waves in the channel were much larger. The challenge of surfing then was comparable to long boarding in Hawaii ... but with five other lives depending on you. It was frightening!

On November 30, 1967, while patrolling just south of the DMZ, a suddenly approaching gale force storm surprised us and all three Swift Boats on patrol that day headed back to our Cua Viet base. The waves in the channel entrance were higher than I had ever seen before, and navigating the waves had to be the toughest challenge of my life - to that point. Twice the waves we were surfing tried to turn our Swift sideways and swallow us whole. But by working the twin screws (you can't use the rudders when surfing) we managed to recover and keep the crest of the wave on our stern and the bow pointed straight.

We surfed past families in their sampans as they too retreated from the turbulent ocean. We all sighed with relief as our ride on the wave ended in the safety of the calm Cua Viet river.

As we were securing the Swift to the small wooden dock, the other two boats that had arrived at the base before us, sped past us and headed back up the channel. The crews waved for us to follow, yelling that sampans were sinking in the channel. I jumped behind the wheel as Bob Koger threw off the lines and we headed down the river at full throttle.

As we made it to the river mouth, a chill went through my body as I looked out into the channel, turbulent and strewn with towering dark green white capped waves.

My eyes were riveted toward the strange shape of the Swift Boat that had just passed us. It was now upside down in the middle of the channel. A wave had caught it broadside and flipped it over. Around the hull of the sinking Swift was its crew of six, plus dozens of drowning Vietnamese men, women and children. Some were clinging to their swamped sampans and others were disappearing with each violent wave that overtook them.

The remaining Swift in front of us, driven by a boatswain's mate named McDonald, headed toward the capsized boat and started picking up the crew and the Vietnamese civilians. I went to the aft helm and guided the boat to individuals strewn among the waves and watched as my crew began pulling them from the water. After we had taken a few people aboard, I looked up and noticed that the waves were pushing McDonald's Swift dangerously close to the left side of the channel. He too was standing at the aft helm and the deck around him was full of the people his crew had rescued,

including the crew of the Swift Boat that had just sunk. It was obvious that within a wave or two, McDonald's boat would surely get beached. It was time for him to make a decision. Suddenly I could see his left hand thrust both throttles forward and with his other hand he quickly spun the wheel to the right. The events that took place over the next several seconds have replayed in my mind, in slow motion, for the past 35 years.

The waves pounding us were more than 15 feet high and the one that McDonald caught was at least 20 feet. The twin V12s roared as he took the boat full speed into a hard right turn. The 50-foot long Swift Boat looked as small as a bobsled heading high into a banked turn on an Olympic bobsled run. The centrifugal force kept his boat high near the crest of the wave. His crew, plus the crew they rescued, and all of the Vietnamese fishermen and their families fell back into the water as the boat's angle went from 90 to 100 degrees inside the curl. We all thought that he was about to "wipe-out." Miraculously, McDonald was able to stand rigid, gripping the aft helm firmly as the Swift stayed in the curl and exited upright as he reached the right side of the channel.

The joy and thrill of seeing McDonald's boat escape disaster was immediately replaced by the sobering realization that 11 sailors and dozens of Vietnamese now had to be rescued by our lone Swift. Since McDonald was the only man left on his boat he had to abandon the rescue effort and head back to the river mouth. Most of those who were still floating were in a large group. I steered the Swift toward them while my crew went to the bow of the boat to start pulling the survivors aboard.

The huge relentless waves were getting larger and the interval between the waves became shorter. It was now a struggle to keep my bow directed into the oncoming waves. This meant that it was nearly impossible to direct my boat to the people in the water. Just the slightest turn exposed us to the potential of capsizing and losing everyone we'd saved plus my crew and those still in the water. The waves were so steep and our bow so high at times, it felt as though we were standing upright on our stern. As the bow crashed back into the sea with every passing wave, those who were trying to swim close enough to reach an outstretched arm, were pushed away by the wake caused by our falling bow.

As I struggled to keep the Swift pointed into the oncoming waves while trying to navigate it toward those still in the water, an Officer from one of the two crews floated next to my port position at the aft helm. He yelled to me to pull him from the water but with the waves coming as fast as they were, I couldn't chance letting go of the wheel. I yelled and tried to get the attention of anyone on the bow of the boat, but the noise of the waves drowned me out. To my terror I discovered that while being distracted by the officer in the water, the bow of the Swift had drifted to port. The Officer was now a few feet past me and directly above my port screw. In that split second I realized that in order to prevent losing my boat in the next wave, I had to turn my stern toward the Officer, which meant the very real threat of his being sucked into my screws and chopped to pieces. I knew then that I had no choice but to risk his life. I yelled to the Officer to push away from the boat, warning him that I was bringing my stern in his direction. His eyes went wide as he realized what I was telling him. He screamed at me and pleaded with me to pull him out, but I yelled at him one last time, "Push away now!" At that, I turned my head away from him not wanting to watch him being sucked into the screws. My boat was two seconds from being swamped by the next wave as I sent my port throttle full ahead and pulled my starboard throttle into full reverse.

It seemed like an eternity as my bow fought off the next wave and slowly straightened out. Anxiously I quickly looked for the Officer but didn't see him. I stepped to the side and looked down. There he was, alive, flush alongside with his arms stretched out along the waterline as though he had suction cups in his palms. I left the wheel in God's hands, took hold of a nearby stanchion in my left hand, and with my right, quickly reached down, grabbed his wrist, and with strength I have never felt before or since, I heaved him on deck in the blink of an eye. I took the time to whisper a short prayer of thanks as I jumped back to the helm.

As our deck slowly filled with dripping wet survivors, a crewman from the sunken Swift Boat slumped down next to me at the helm and wept. He said, "I was trying to stay afloat with a little girl and boy under each arm but something hard struck me in the back of the head and we went under. I lost them both under the water." I was at a loss for words of comfort for him.

As the last person was pulled aboard I was faced with three major problems: First: The waves had moved us to the left side of the channel, dangerously close to the shore; Second: I had to find a way to turn the boat around without losing everyone on board; Third: I now had my Boat Officer and the Officers from the other boats standing behind me.

Each Officer had different directions as to how to turn the boat around. One suggested that I back the boat into the river mouth. But I dismissed that suggestion because, with the waves pushing us to the left, at some point I'd have to angle the Swift and expose her broadside to the waves in order to get into the river mouth. Another suggested that I

take the same action as McDonald did but to start my move on the back of a wave. My Boat Officer suggested that I take her all the way out of the channel, into the ocean, turn her around, and then bring her back in. I pointed out the fact that, if the additional weight and the higher seas didn't swamp us going out of the channel, they would definitely overtake us if we surfed back in. If we didn't do something quickly, the next two or three waves were destined to marry us to the shore. I yelled "Trust me!" and focused on the next wave.

As we climbed up the raging surf and our bow broke the wave's crest, I thrust the port throttle forward. We started down the back of the wave just as I flung my wheel hard right, pulling back full throttle reverse on the starboard engine. Holding our breath, we braced ourselves as the boat pivoted just in time to catch the next wave flush on her stern. Thrusting forward with both engines at maximum throttle, we instantly matched the wave's speed and all hands cheered as the wave picked us up and delivered us safely to the calm of the river's mouth.

Unfortunately, many civilians died that day. But many more would have, had it not been for the actions of the heroic Swift crews. Although no one received medals or commendations, the sailor's reward was knowing that every future generation born to those who were saved that day will be to the credit to the crews of the three Swift Boats that did not hesitate to attempt the rescue in extremely dangerous circumstances.

Special Tribute

A tribute to the SBSA from LCDR Phil Webb, who was the Naval Attache in Malta before going to Afghanistan. He was very instrumental in helping the SBSA and MMSD get P 24. He arranged meetings the Maritime Squadron, with the Commander of the Armed Forces of Malta, with the Secretary of Defense and promoted our quest to Secretary Clinton and Senator McCain.

He sent this tribute with a small American Flag and wrote the following letter: "Greetings from Afghanistan. Enclosed is a US Flag. A very special US Flag that I am presenting to the Swift Boat Sailors Association, in honor of your service. This flag was flown over the skies of Afghanistan during a mission aboard a US Navy Fire Scout unmanned helicopter.

It is a great honor to send it to you as a small token of my admiration and a Thank You for your service to our Nation. I hope this flag will someday fly over Swift Boat P 24.

Very Respectfully,

Phil Web, LCDR, USN"



New SBSA Members in 2012

Asa L Moore	Cat Lo	3/67-1/69
Charles R. Rorstrom	Qui Nhon	5/67-5/68
Scott J. Vance	Cam Ranh Bay	4/68-10/68
David H. Sherrill	CosDiv 17	68-69
Roy C. Smith	Chu Lai	4/68-6/68
Ray Ashley	San Diego, CA	Associate, Maritime Museum of San Diego
Robyn Gallant	San Diego, CA	Associate, Maritime Museum of San Diego
Mark Gallant	San Diego, CA	Associate, Maritime Museum of San Diego

Swift Boat Sailors Reunion

Keeping the Memories Alive

San Diego May 8 – 12, 2013

Holiday Inn On The Bay

1355 North Harbor Drive San Diego, CA 92101

Reservations: (888) 233 9527 (619) 232 3861

The **Holiday Inn** SBSA Room Rate is \$119. Be sure to ask for the Swift Boat Sailors Reunion price. Standard rate is \$220. Every room has a balcony.

Reservations at this rate may be through August 4, 2012. We have a limited number of rooms reserved for the Reunion. Two other conventions are being held this same week. Please make your hotel reservations as soon as possible.

Your credit card ***will not be charged*** until check-out. Hotel Cancellation Policy is 24 hours before arrival.

Airport Shuttle Pick-up is 10 & 40 minutes past the hour all day - *No Charge*

Reunion Registration and Tour information has been mailed to all members in May. Swift Boat rides on the San Diego Bay will depart from the Maritime Museum across the street from the Holiday Inn from Tuesday 7 May to Monday 13 May.

Deceased Swifties 2011 forward

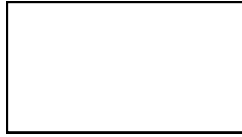
Kenneth F. Tryner	Virginia Beach, VA	2011
Gary Blinn	Norfolk, NE	2011
Franklin Henry Carpenter	Columbus, GA	2012
Clair "Pete" Schrod	Pocatella, ID	2012
Ronald L. Ashey	Searsport, ME	2012

Change of Address? Need new membership card?

Stay in touch with your shipmates!

Membership card replacement fee \$5.00.

Contact Don Farrell, Treasurer
Email– sbsamail@cox.net



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