

# Huntsville, Alabama Reunion After Action Report

## 50<sup>th</sup> Company OC 24-69

October 5-7, 2024 (with an option for an extra day)



### **Our 6th Reunion Was in Huntsville, Alabama (AKA Rocket City).**

This was at the suggestion of classmate Mike Eberhardt and his spouse Robin who retired to Alabama in 2013 and have fallen in love with Huntsville, a charming little city (but getting bigger every year.) It also happens to be the home of the Redstone Arsenal and the U.S. Space and Rocket Center, now a world class museum which documents the history of the nation's space exploration program, including the successful race against the Soviet Russia to put Americans on the moon first. A major focus was on the moon landing on July 20, 1969. Remember Neil and Buzz bouncing around up there, the first humans who achieved this remarkable feat. 50<sup>th</sup> Company spent a whole day at the Space and Rocket Center. As the Eberhardts had told us, this would be the high point (pun intended) of our visit to Huntsville.

**Attendance:** This was the 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Graduation from OCS, which makes the very youngest of us "spring chickens" already in our extremely late seventies and closing in on our eighties. Nonetheless, twenty-two classmates and sixteen spouses participated, as did three of the Hummel family offspring. This is a truly amazing number, based on turnouts at other Vietnam era OCS reunions, if they

even still happen at all. (Note: Three Reunion Planning Group stalwarts who had intended to, and very much wanted to come, had to cancel out: Bob Hines because of long-term COVID issues, Peter Nowlan because the Government shut-down cancelled flights from Vermont, and Bill Thoroughgood, who went into seven hours of back surgery on the day the reunion started.) My point is, we're a very special bunch of old fogies who still like to get together and hang out. We did. Here's what happened.

### **50<sup>th</sup> Company Infantry OCS (OC 24-68) came into Formation in Huntsville.**

The Huntsville Hilton Garden Inn dedicated its first-floor multi-functional Park Place Ballroom exclusively to us for the duration of our visit. We used it to check in our classmates as they arrived, to hang out in during the reunion, and enjoyed it as the gathering point for our tasty "Huntsville (warm buffet) Breakfasts" each morning (with mandatory grits and cheese.)

We also used the space for hosting our two happy hours and dinners, the first following welcoming remarks from Lou and "Sweet Home Alabama" comments by Mike and Robin Eberhardt (our native Alabamans), and the second being the Reunion Banquet and Program. In short, the space was 50<sup>th</sup> Company space, and we used it well.

### **Sunday, October 5: Arrival and Registration**

The 50<sup>th</sup> Company reunion's welcome table was open from 4:00 to 8:00 PM in the Park Place Ball Room. Members of the Reunion Planning group greeted classmates as they arrived and handed out ID badges, schedules, a list of attendees, street maps and a Huntsville Visitors Guide. Almost everyone hung out in the Ball Room, greeted new arrivals, and caught up on each other's news.

There was no organized reunion dinner, and the hotel's Garden Grill and Bar had just closed for renovations, but 50<sup>th</sup> Company recon teams located a few open eateries in the AO, and as the evening progressed groups formed up and headed out to forage for vittles (as they call victuals in Alabama) and, of course, imbibables (moonshine and the like). Nobody went to bed hungry or thirsty. As we talked, we remembered the invariably friendly welcome we had received from the locals as we arrived.

### **Monday, October 6: Space and Rocket Center and Planetarium**

We spent the entire day at the five-star rated Huntsville Space and Rocket Center which included a Planetarium program featuring extraordinary views of the universe that our earth inhabits through photos taken by the hyper-powerful James Webb Space Telescope.

**Michael Stallcup**, a retired Aerospace Engineer for NASA's George C. Marshall Space Flight Center (whom Brian Flora had recruited as our Reunion Banquet dinner speaker) met us at the door of the Space and Rocket Center, purportedly just to welcome us briefly, introduce us to the offerings of the Center, and then point us off in the right direction. He didn't. We couldn't get rid of him! He stayed with us the entire

day, as docent and mentor, providing commentary and answering questions about the exhibits. What a wonderful commitment he made to us! Thank you, Michael Stallcup.

### **A Short Bio of Michael Stallcup, Our Docent and Dinner Speaker:**

In 1983 Michael moved to Huntsville and began a 33-year career as an Aerospace Engineer for NASA's George C Marshall Space Flight Center. Mike provided structural analysis for a number of NASA programs, including the Space Shuttle, Spacelab, International Space Station, Chandra X-ray Observatory, James Webb Space Telescope, Constellation, and the Artemis Space Launch System which is being developed to get us back on the moon as a possible way to launch a manned Mars probe. He retired in 2016, but as we experienced during our visit, for a retirement hobby he serves as a senior docent at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center. He and wife Jill joined us for dinner, and Mike gave us our after-dinner address. Brian and Kay and many others were delighted to get to know them.

### **Monday Evening: Cocktails and Conversation, Dinner and Program**

- Classmates and spouses gathered for cocktails in the Ball Room.
- Lou Lallo offered his "Words of Welcome and Wisdom," including a toast to Reunion Committeeman Bill Thoroughgood who stood us up at the reunion and instead opted for six hours of back surgery in Pennsylvania.
- Mike Eberhardt, our Alabaman "host," offered a welcome to "Sweet Home Alabama." His spouse, Robin Eberhardt, introduced our visit the following morning to Huntsville's "Burritt on the Mountain."

We then enjoyed a wonderful Sampler Buffet Dinner with three different entrees, sides and salads, desserts and beverages (with a bottle of red and white wine at each table).

### **After Dinner Program:**

50<sup>th</sup> Company Videographer, Ken Scott Burns, presented another award-winning video, entitled "A Random Look at Fiftieth Company." We really all looked random.

### **TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7:**

The Reunion Committee suggested a morning group visit to "Burritt on the Mountain" and a self-guided afternoon visit to Downtown Huntsville and/or the Huntsville Art Museum.

**Burritt on the Mountain**, a Huntsville historical cultural center and event venue, welcomed us on Tuesday morning. Burritt features an elegant (but eccentric) historical mansion) and an open-air museum perched on Round Top Mountain, overlooking the city. The property was willed to the city by Physician William Burritt who wanted to establish a space to save endangered structures from the 1800s. It began purchasing rural log houses and barns and other buildings that were in danger of demolition. Twelve historic structures from the 1800s, including a primitive slave cabin, have been fully restored and relocated to the grounds. The "upstairs/downstairs" contrast

between the Doctor's mansion and the log structures that stand beside it was fascinating. Our Burritt on the Mountain historical interpreters were great.

**Huntsville Art Museum:** The Reunion Committee recommended checking out the Huntsville Art Museum. The permanent collection has a strong focus on 19th and 20th-century American art, particularly from Alabama and the Southeast. It also celebrates American women artists with works from 1850 to 1940. It was well worth a visit, and, for lunch, we were able to enjoy a meal at a great trattoria in the lower floor of the museum building.

**Downtown Huntsville/Big Spring International Park:** Some chose to spend Tuesday afternoon exploring downtown Huntsville. Big Spring International Park is a quiet space featuring a limestone spring and a water feature, cherry trees, and colorful koi fish, which the Visitors Center recommends for a "peaceful stroll through paths with statues and water features and to capture an Instagram-worthy moment in front of the iconic red Friendship Bridge." It was.

## **Tuesday Evening: the Reunion Banquet and Program**

The evening began with cocktails and conversation in the Ball Room, followed by Company Photos. The first group photo was of classmates only. The second was photo of classmates plus spouses and guests.

The Pre-Dinner Program consisted of:

- **A Hearty Welcome from Lou Lallo**, Reunion Planning Group Chair, who introduced the "Missing Man Table."
- **"Missing Man Table" Video**, provided by Scott Davis, helped us remember and honor classmates who are no longer with us.
- **"A Tribute,"** a Poem by 50<sup>th</sup> Company Poet Laureate, Brian Walrath.
- **Invocation/Blessing** by our 50<sup>th</sup> Company Padre, Mike Eberhardt.
- **A 50<sup>th</sup> Company Banquet Toast** offered by Bob Arnold.

### **The Plated Banquet Dinner followed. Bon appétit!**

Entrée Choices were a BBQ Platter, Pasta Primavera (the vegetarian option), and Grilled New York Strip Steak. A bottle of Merlot and Chardonnay were provided at each table.

**The Evening Program consisted of:**

- **Keynote Remarks: "NASA's Artemis Program, the Next Chapter in Space Exploration: Back to the Moon"** by Michael Stallcup, retired NASA aeronautical engineer and Senior Docent at the Space and Rocket Center.
- **50<sup>th</sup> Company Retrospective Video:** Scott Davis.
- **The Coveted (not!) 50<sup>th</sup> Company FUBAR Award** by Scott. Since the intended recipient and his alternate (whose names dare not be mentioned) found

excuses that kept them from attending the reunion) Scott dumped the coveted (not!) award on Brian Flora, allegedly for his inability at the Springfield reunion to get the hotel parking garage gate to open reliably. Brian threw himself on the FUBAR grenade, accepted the Black Helmet of Doom, and wore it proudly.

- **Closing Remarks and a Round of Thank-Yous** from Lou Lallo.

## **Wednesday, October 8, 2025**

We gathered for breakfast and said good-bye and Godspeed to those departing. Thanks for coming and safe journeys.

### **Program Suggestions for those who stayed for the extra day.**

There was plenty left to do in Huntsville. The fantastic Huntsville Botanical Garden is rated sixth best in the country. (It was decorated for the Fall in a Halloween theme.) The Bridge Street Town Center has a variety of shops and restaurants. The Lowe Mill ARTS and Entertainment Center, a huge historic cotton factory, now has a focus on visual arts, has been redeveloped into 152 working studios for over 200 artists and creators, a couple of hooch stills, 7 galleries, a theatre, community garden, and performance venues. It claims to be the country's largest privately owned arts facility.

**The Suggested Group Visit was to the US Veterans Museum.** It features lots of neat stuff crammed in a relatively small display area. (Expansion plans are being set in motion.) Despite its current cluttered look, it consistently gets five-star reviews from visitors. The exhibits of memorabilia, artifacts, and military equipment range from the American Revolutionary War to present day. Included in the collection are many rare and important artifacts including the oldest surviving military jeep: the "Ford Pygmy." The outdoor display has more than 30 historical military vehicles from World War I to the present. Fascinating!

### **Wednesday Evening: Farewell Dinner**

Mike and Robin Eberhardt and several others from Huntsville suggested *Rosies Cantina*, a casual place that has told us they could handle a group of 30 or so. It was close to the Garden Inn, so we "Tex-Mez'd" for the evening. Good eats and great company made for a fine finish to our Huntsville Reunion.

**Thursday, Morning, 9 Departure Day:** Final Group Breakfast: Farewell to all. Safe Travels!

## **2025 Huntsville, Alabama - Reunion Attendees**

Bob Arnold (2<sup>nd</sup> PLT) and Judi Adel

Craig Biggs (5<sup>th</sup> PLT) and Jill Carter

Don Cramer (3rd PLT)

Scott Davis (5<sup>th</sup> PLT) and Liz

Jim Durkin (2nd PLT)

Mike Eberhardt (2nd PLT) and Robin

Brian Flora (4th PLT) and Kay Kuhlman

Bob Fullmer (5th PLT) and Judy

Mike Gilpin (3<sup>rd</sup> PLT)

Chuck Granner (3rd PLT) and Sherry

Terry Hummel (6<sup>th</sup> PLT) and Wanda

Bill Knudsen (6th PLT)

Clarence Kugler (2<sup>nd</sup> PLT) and Ali

Louis Lallo (3<sup>rd</sup> PLT) and Suzie Plecas

Tom Lankford (3<sup>rd</sup> PLT) and Carolyn

\*Mike Myers (3rd PLT)

Steve Porter (3rd PLT)

Rodney Shortell (5th PLT) and Kim

Ken Sutton (6th PLT) and Debbie

Brian Walrath (2nd PLT) and Dace

James Zack (2nd PLT) and Yvonne

**Guests of Terry and Wanda Hummel**

Son, Brad Hummel

Son-in-Law, Steve Thomas and Daughter Wendy Thomas

**Guests of 50<sup>th</sup> Company OCS**

NASA Aeronautical Engineer (Ret'd) Michael Stallcup and Spouse Jill