

50th Company OC 24-69 Reunion
Springfield, Illinois
October 6-9, 2024 (with an option for an
extra day)
After Action Report



We held our Fifth Reunion in Springfield, Illinois, of all places. By the way, we also celebrated the 55th anniversary of our

Graduation from OCS, which makes the youngest of us “spring chickens” in our very late seventies. Nonetheless, twenty-four classmates and nineteen spouses participated. Turns out that we’re just a very special bunch of old fogies who still like to get together and hang out.

Our fifth reunion (as were all the others) was very special. But how in the heck did we wind up in Springfield, Illinois, a provincial state capital in the middle of a gigantic field of corn and soybeans. Well, because Brian Flora and his friendly spouse Kay lobbied hard for it. They retired to Illinois because both of their families, with career military fathers, had started out from there and roamed the world. Kay’s family farm is two hours away from Springfield, and, as Civil War reenactors, they had visited Springfield many times, including as participants in the 150th reenactment of Lincoln’s funeral in 2015.

Springfield is Illinois’ state capitol, but it’s not a city, just a big town. Brian told the Reunion Planning Committee that it would be fun to hold our 2024 reunion in small-town USA, just to get the feel of what America used to be like. He and Kay also volunteered to set up an optional reunion program for us. For the Reunion Planning Committee, that sealed the deal. Springfield it was.

The reunion worked out well, and a good time was had by all. The local folks were welcoming. There was minimal Springfield traffic, plenty of parking, and it was an eminently walkable venue. And Springfield is endowed with a remarkably meaningful history. Think “Land of Lincoln,” one of our most important Presidents. We got the full story of his life, death, and legacy. And, at the end, a bit of Frank Lloyd Wright, America’s greatest architect, as he used to tell people. Here’s what happened.

On Sunday, October 6, 2024, 50th Company Infantry OCS (OC 24-69) once again came into formation. The venue was more modest than last year’s elegant Kansas City Intercontinental, but it served us well. The Hotel (a DoubleTree by Hilton) dedicated its first-floor multi-functional Lincoln Room exclusively to us for the duration of our visit. We used it for checking in our attendees as they arrived, hanging out informally during the reunion, as the venue for our tasty “Springfield (warm buffet) Breakfasts,” for hosting our two happy hours, one followed by a special presentation on Lincoln’s funeral, the other followed by group photos and the Reunion Banquet and program. In short, the Lincoln Room

was **our** space, and we used it well. BTW, it was right across the hall from the Hotel's restaurant and tavern ("The Globe"), which got a good workout from 50th Company attendees during the reunion.

Sunday, October 6: Arrival and Registration

The reunion welcome table was open from 2:00 to 8:00 PM. 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 Springfield Visitors Guide. Most everyone hung out in the Lincoln Room and caught up on each other's news.

There was no organized dinner, but as the evening progressed, groups formed up and headed out to forage for food but found out that most dining places were closed. (On Sunday evening in small town America almost everything closes down, and they roll up the sidewalks.) But 50th Company scouting skills located a few open eateries and nobody went hungry.

Monday, October 7: Visits to the Principal Lincoln Sites

Apart from the Tuesday Reunion Banquet, there was no formal program at the reunion. That said, Brian and Kay offered up an optional program that virtually everyone participated in. The main focus was the story of Abraham Lincoln. After the breakfast buffet in the Lincoln Room the Company fell into formation. With 50th Company Cadet Company Commander (Emeritus) Clarence Kugler shouting out cadence, we quick-stepped (sorta) three blocks to the five-star rated Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum. They welcomed us as a group, gave an overview of the museum layout, and turned us loose. We found a wonderful array of displays, artifacts, historical films, and talking holograms who posed as museum guides. We spent the entire morning there, and all of us, if asked, will add our five-star reviews to the list of reviews. We were on our own for lunch, but many of us sat down together and tried out the "Lincoln Café" at the Museum. Not bad at all.

In the afternoon, we again assembled in the Hotel's Lincoln Room for another three-block forced march to the Lincoln family's home, the only one Lincoln ever owned. The beautifully furnished home was where he lived from 1844 to 1861, and to which he intended to return, when he and his family took the train to Washington to fulfill their destiny. The guided tour provided a look into Lincoln's life as a family man, while exploring his rise as a successful lawyer and politician, both state and federal. Those of

us who took the time to explore the back yard were somewhat bemused by the five-seater outhouse. We then had the opportunity to explore the historic neighborhood surrounding the home.

At 5:00 PM classmates and spouses gathered for cocktails in the Lincoln Room (part of the reunion package). Lou introduced our four first-time reunion attendees and their spouses: Bob Arnold and Judi Adel; Mike Meyers, Tom and Carolyn Lankford, and Rodney and Kim Shortell. They were told they would be “formally” introduced at the Reunion Banquet and were advised that their classmates would like to hear what they had been up to for the last 55 years. (BTW, At the end of the reunion, all of the first-timers “confessed” to having had a great time.)

To wrap up the cocktail hour (actually, two hours), Brian Flora offered a PowerPoint presentation that he entitled “*Mourning Lincoln*,” AKA, “*Lincoln’s Last Train Ride*.” He provided a slide show and commentary on Lincoln’s three-week countrywide funeral pageant, which lasted from his assassination on Good Friday, 1865, to his burial in Springfield’s Oak Ridge Cemetery on May 3rd. A special funeral train took his and his son’s remains from Washington D.C. across the country with frequent stops along the way (including full-blown funerals in eleven major cities), before bringing him back to Springfield for his funeral and placement in a temporary burial vault. Brian went on to describe how, since the burial, Lincoln’s casket has been moved 17 times and the coffin opened six times. The saga included an almost successful attempt to kidnap his body for ransom.

Tuesday, October 8: Lincoln’s Tomb, the Illinois Military Museum, or

the Edwards Place Historic Mansion.

After breakfast, the group carpooled to Lincoln’s Tomb and Mausoleum for a guided tour. Lincoln’s spectacular tomb, constructed of Massachusetts granite, has a rectangular base surmounted by a 117-foot-high obelisk and a semicircular entrance way. Four bronze statues adorn the corners of the rectangular base. They represent Civil War battle scenes. Above these stands a full-length statue of Lincoln. In front of the entrance there is a massive bronze bust of Lincoln. The nose is shiny because visitors cannot resist rubbing it for good luck.

As you walk into the tomb's rotunda you come upon a seated bronze figure of Lincoln. It is a smaller replica of the Daniel Chester French statue in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. The tomb's hallways have excerpts from Lincoln's speeches and small bronze statues depicting different stages of his life. At the center of the burial room stands Lincoln's cenotaph, a 7-ton block of reddish marble which marks the location of the burial vault ten feet below.

After lunch, for those interested, there was a choice between the Illinois State Military Museum and the Edwards Place Historic Mansion, which had been built by a successful lawyer (Benjamin Edwards), who was also a major Springfield political power broker during Lincoln's time in the city. Classmates and spouses made their choices, looked for a ride if they needed one, and carpooled to either site.

Tuesday Evening, October 8, Reunion Banquet and Banquet Program featuring President Abraham Lincoln.

5:00 – 7:00 PM: Cocktails in the Lincoln Room.

6:30 PM: Company Photos. The first group photo was for classmates only. The second group photo was of classmates and their spouses.

At some point, **President Abraham Lincoln** appeared at the door and asked if he could join us for dinner and then deliver some important remarks. Well, you just can't say no to the President! Classmates and spouses immediately began lining up for pictures with Abe. Reunion Committee Chair Lallo temporarily lost control of the program's timing.

7:00 PM: Open seating was offered for Dinner, and the Pre-Dinner Program began.

--**A Hearty Welcome** from Lou Lallo, Reunion Planning Group Chair, who then introduced the "Missing Man Table."

--**"Missing Man Table" Video.** Provided by Scott Davis, it helped us remember and honor classmates who are no longer with us.

--**An Invocation/Blessing** was given by our 50th Company Padre, Mike Eberhardt.

--**A 50th Company Toast** was offered by Craig Biggs. (A salute to 50th Company!)

7:30-9:00 PM: Banquet Dinner Buffet. Bon appétit to everyone!

9:00 – 10:00 PM: The Evening Program

--**“With Malice Toward None and Charity for All... President Abraham Lincoln** greeted the assembly, told stories, and spoke about his hopes and dreams for reconciliation in a post-Civil War America. Amazing performance!

--**50th Company Retrospective Video:** Scott Davis.

--**Awarding of the Coveted 50th Company FUBAR Award** to Clarence Kugler (on multiple counts): Scott Davis.

--**“Changes, Changes”** a Poem by 50th Company Poet Laureate, Brian Walrath.

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

Editor’s Comment: Brian Flora went online and found the Lincoln reenactor who joined us for dinner and “orated.” Brian had never seen him perform in person but interviewed him twice by phone and was confident that he would do well at the Banquet. He greatly exceeded Brian’s expectations. He was the right height (six foot four), was a spittin’ image of Old Abe, beard, hat, and all, spoke in a Kentuckian twang, and had learned to raise the pitch of his voice to match Lincoln’s. He was charming, humorous, interacted easily with all of us, and delivered a very appropriate address on his vision for a reconciled America. Hat’s off to him for a wonderful performance.

Wednesday, October 9, 2024: Farewell to Those Who Left.

The final group breakfast gave everyone a chance to say goodbye to those departing. However, about two-thirds of the group opted to stay in Springfield on Wednesday.

Wednesday morning, Brian Flora and Kay arranged for a guided tour to Frank Lloyd Wright’s spectacular Dana-Thomas House, an architectural gem in his iconic Prairie House style. Twenty-eight classmates and spouses signed up for the tour and seemed fascinated by the place. Most would agree that the house was a beautiful work of architectural art, and then add, “But I wouldn’t want to live there.”

Wednesday Afternoon Suggestions:

- **Lincoln-Herndon Law Office**, a block from the hotel.

- **Illinois State Military Museum**, if you missed it on Tuesday afternoon.

- **Edward's Place Historic Mansion**, if you missed it on Tuesday afternoon.

- **Historic Route 66 (as in, "Get your kicks on...")**

Sites: There are several in Springfield. Fans could go on-line and hunt them up.

- **Union Station**, from where Lincoln departed for Washington DC in 1861; four years later he returned in a casket.

- **The Modern State Capitol Building**, the largest state capitol in the country and easily one of the most beautifully designed and decorated.

Wednesday Evening - Final Reunion Dinner Arrangements:

Scott Davis made reservations for a gathering at *Maldaner's*, a historic (established in 1884) Springfield restaurant offering "contemporary American fine dining in a casual setting." It was two blocks from the hotel. Twenty-six classmates and spouses signed up for the dinner and showed up at *Maldaner's* at the appointed hour, only to find out that the whole block had lost electricity due to something "underneath the street." (Evil tends to lurk in 140-year-old sewers.) Estimated time of electrical remediation? Answer from Public Works: "Soon, but these things take time."

The Maldaner's Maître d' authorized complimentary cocktails while we waited. And waited. Finally, he said let me take care of this. In typical Midwest fashion, he checked around the area and set us up in a private space in an unpretentious, but very nice and accommodating, Italian restaurant two blocks from our hotel. That's where we celebrated our final gathering with good food, wine and spirits, and wonderful fellowship. Thus ended our 5th reunion to celebrate 55 years of friendship and camaraderie on a very positive note.

50th Company is on a roll! Let's keep it going.

2024 Springfield, Illinois - Reunion Attendees

*Bob Arnold (2nd PLT) and Judi Adel
Craig Biggs (5th PLT) and Jill Carter
Don Cramer (3rd PLT)

Scott Davis (5th 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 (3rd PLT)
Chuck Granner (3rd PLT) and Sherry
Terry Hummel (6th PLT) and Wanda
Clarence Kugler (2nd PLT) and Ali
Louis Lallo (3rd PLT) and Suzie Plecas
*Tom Lankford (3rd PLT) and Carolyn
*Mike Myers (3rd PLT)
Peter Nowlan (2nd PLT) and Kathy
Charles Oliver (Arty OC11-70) and Susan
Steve Porter (3rd PLT)
*Rodney Shortell (5th PLT) and Kim
Bill Snodgrass (2nd PLT) and Debbie
Ken Sutton (6th PLT) and Debbie
Brian Walrath (2nd PLT) and Dace
James Zack (2nd PLT) and Yvonne
Gary Zittlow and Anne