



**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA
Darwin J. Thomas Memorial Chapter 201
San Jose, California**

July – September 2016

Chapter 201 Fund Raising Event

Chapter 201 held its second fund raising event of 2016 at the Moffett Field Commissary in Mountain View, California on July 16 and 17. The Chapter holds periodic fundraisers at the former Naval Base at Moffett Field to support Chapter events and activities such as scholarships for Vietnamese children under the "Draagoon Scholarship Fund." In addition to collecting contributions, the Chapter provides information on Agent Orange, PTSD and the Veterans Initiative to help resolve the issue of American and Vietnamese Missing In Action.



Chapter 201 Members Reuben Willhite, Jim Medeiros, David Sanders (Chapter 201 President), Jack Wells and Dennis Foggie (Chapter 201 Treasurer) also handed out information along with VVA and AVVA brochures to recruit new members and collected donations. Chapter members

rotated participation at the Chapter booth over the two-day event. Not included in the photo of the successful weekend were Bob Kadlec (Chapter 201 Vice President), Warren Finch (Chapter 201 Secretary) Fran McVey, Gerald Arnold (Chapter VSO) and John Hassenplug.

Chapter 201 Provides Vietnamese Scholarships

Darwin J. Thomas Memorial Chapter 201 is providing scholarships for four Vietnamese children under the "Dragoon Scholarship Fund" in conjunction with the Children of Vietnam NGO, headquartered in Greensboro, North Carolina.



Richard Brummett, a member of VVA Chapter 165 in Bellingham, Washington, served in the Army's 1st Armored Cavalry in Vietnam between 1967 and 1968. He returned to Vietnam in the summer of 1970 as a freelance photographer. In 2011 Richard came up with the idea, in partnership with the NGO, the Children of Vietnam, to make small scholarships (\$130) available for the children of the village of An Son, a few miles west of where Richard served on Hawk Hill (Hill 29) in the former Quang Tin Province. An Son is a poor area and most of the villagers earn their difficult livelihood as farmers. The annual scholarship money goes to poor families that cannot afford school supplies or need tutoring for their sons or daughters, or a bicycle for them to ride the several miles to the nearest schools.

The Dragoon Scholarship Fund is a unique program where the names of individual students are provided to donors that have supported them. San Jose's VVA Chapter 201 Member Jack Wells, working with Richard Brummett, was instrumental in coordinating scholarships from the Chapter to the Dragoon Scholarships Fund. Jack has returned to Vietnam and has met some of

the scholarship recipients. Richard returns to An Son village annually and takes photos of the students. Richard took the photo of two of the four children that San Jose's VVA Chapter 201 is sponsoring this year.



Chapter 201 Meeting Activities

The Chapter August 2016 meeting was called to order by President David Sanders at Holder's Country Inn. John Hassenplug led the Pledge of Allegiance and Ed Akai provided the invocation and called for a moment of silence in respect for our POWs, MIAs, KIAs and our Brothers and Sisters with health issues or are in dire straits.

Rita Hitching from the VA Palo Alto discussed a study taking place at PAVA for those who may be having sleep issues related to PTSD. The study is six weeks long. Individuals are taught relaxation techniques. Participants will be paid at the end of the study.

Maya Esparza gave a presentation on Measure A that is a bond to fund housing for the less fortunate including veterans. She asked for support from VVA 201 on the measure.

The August California State Council (CSC) Conference was held in Fresno on 27 and 28 August, 2016. Randy Sessler attended as the VVA Delegate from Chapter 201 and Mary Sessler attend as the Chapter Associate (AVVA) Delegate.

Chapter 201 POW/MIA Day

Chapter 201 AVVA members provided the Color Guard for the American Legion POW/MIA Fire Watch POW/MIA. The Fire Watch began at dusk Friday September 16th and ended on Saturday morning, September 17th, at 0700. The event was held on the occasion of National POW/MIA Recognition Day and was sponsored by the District 13 American Legion Riders, Legion Mission City Post 564 and VVA Darwin J. Thomas Memorial Chapter 201.



Chapter 201 Member In Print

Following is an article written by Chapter member Don MacDougall that was published in the Summer 2016 issue of the magazine "Veteran's Voice."

My March Through The MASH by Donald F. MacDougall



If I told you I spent time as a patient in a MASH hospital, you might think I was being treated for a combat wound. Well, I was a MASH patient in Korea for three months, but it had nothing to do with combat. Oh no, it was nothing as noble as taking a bullet for my country. I was recovering from hepatitis. I was in the Army's lower enlisted grades, just twenty-one years old, and it was eight years after the beginning of the uneasy cease-fire between North Korea and South Korea that continues to this day. My job in the Army was radar operator for a surface-to-air missile system. Somehow, then in December of 1961, I contracted hepatitis. It's a viral infection that attacks the liver. Symptoms include jaundice, nausea, and lethargy. There is no quick cure for hepatitis. Bed rest and a healthy diet can usually allow a patient's immune system to overcome the infection.

There was quite an epidemic of hepatitis in Korea that winter of 1961-62, not only among civilians, but among American soldiers serving on the peninsula. So many Army personnel caught hepatitis, that hospital wings unused since the Korean War were opened up to

accommodate the overflow. And it wasn't just the younger guys who got infected. Old master sergeants and officers were also hospitalized.

Remember, back in those years sanitary conditions were very poor, especially in remote villages up near the DMZ, where we had our missile installation. Koreans still fertilized rice paddies the old fashioned way...with human excrement. It's no surprise that an epidemic could affect a large number of people.

I experienced all the symptoms of hepatitis: dark urine, chalky white stools, nausea, and extreme tiredness for several days before I went on sick call for the first time in two-and-a-half years. I was examined by an Army doctor who diagnosed me with hepatitis, but I had no idea what that meant. The doctor ordered me to be transported to a hospital. A medic named Gauze (his real name!) drove me to the 43rd Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, a bit closer to Seoul than my regular duty station. The 43rd was the model for the MASH movie and the subsequent television series. But I never got to meet Hawkeye, Hot Lips, or Radar. I met grumpy nurses, wise-cracking hospital corpsmen, and a whole room full of very sick soldiers. The corpsman who processed me into the hospital laughed in my face. He thought it was a big joke, so many soldiers catching hepatitis

There were probably 25 or 30 patients in the 43rd MASH when I arrived the day after Christmas, 1961. As far as I know, we all had hepatitis. The ward was a long Quonset hut with a row of beds on each side. Meals were brought to us at our beds. It was several days before I could eat anything and keep it on my stomach. One night the evening meal was liver and onions. For the first time since I got sick, my digestive system was able to function. I always thought it ironic that I had a severe liver infection, and the first thing I could eat was liver. Maybe it contains some vitamin or mineral that my body needed then, but that's when I turned the corner. I started to recover.

Recovery is a slow process when you have hepatitis. My appetite returned, but my strength did not. Most of the time I just lay there in bed. There was a movie night once a week, and most of the patients looked forward to viewing an old movie on a small screen. The nurses encouraged patients to get out of bed and play cards or Monopoly as soon as they felt well enough. There was a small library available to us. I read one of Isaac Asimov's robot novels while sitting up in bed. So, I kept my mind active, when my body was still too sick to move around. Dad's Puzzler is a little box filled with squares and triangles. The object is to move pieces until a large square goes from one corner to another. It takes a while to solve it, and even longer to master it, but within about a week after it made the rounds in the hepatitis ward, everyone there could solve it in just a few seconds. We did it over, and over, and over. We had plenty of time!

Oh, about the Monopoly board that we had. I was able to sit at a card table and play three games. Some kid from San Diego won all the games, but at least I could compete at something. It was a big step up from the depression I felt when I was first hospitalized.

Danny Kaye headlined a USO show that toured South Korea that holiday season. I wasn't feeling quite well enough to go see the show on the compound the MASH shared with an infantry unit. I stayed in bed that day, but hepatitis patients who went to see it said it was very good. They got to see some real American girls! A few of the entertainers (all male) came into the hospital ward after the show to wish the patients well. I always appreciated the gesture, even though I was still very weak.

Three weeks after my arrival at the 43rd, the doctors determined that I was ready to transfer to another facility, where I could begin therapy to regain my strength. I was strapped onto the runners of a small helicopter, left side. Another hepatitis patient was attached on the right side. And that's how we were flown to the 48th MASH in Seoul. What a way to get fresh air!

The 48th was larger than the 43rd. There must have been 60 patients in the two long parallel Quonset huts that made up our wing of the hospital. We all had hepatitis, except for one guy with a broken leg. When blood tests indicated we were well on our way to recovery from the liver infection, and our appetites returned to nearly normal, we were encouraged to get more exercise. We got two sets of pajamas: a light blue pair to sleep in, and a dark blue pair made of heavier material to wear outdoors. We no longer had meals brought to us. We had to go across a street, across a ditch, and wait in line for chow, just like at a regular Army mess hall.

I had a bit of a relapse soon after I got to the 48th. Blood tests indicated my liver function was not as good as when I left the 43rd, and I experienced some tiredness. Several other hepatitis patients experienced similar symptoms. One theory is that vibrations from the helicopter ride jolt the innards, so that there is a set-back in liver function. But after a few days I was feeling stronger.

Hepatitis patients were transferred to the 48th MASH from a number of Army hospitals around the Korean peninsula. At my regular duty station, I had little contact with infantry, armor, or aircraft personnel. But in the hospital, I got to know guys who were stationed all over Korea. Tank, Nike missile, infantry, field artillery, helicopter, and medical personnel were all represented. Guys get to know each other pretty well, when they are crowded together in a small space 24 hours a day for months at a time. I knew most of the patients' home towns, where they had worked, where they went to school, and a bit about their families. I got to talking to one patient who knew some guys that I knew back in civilian life.

We had a lot of facilities available to us at the 48th MASH. There was a recreation room with ping pong tables and a pool table. Playing few brisk games of table tennis went a long way toward improving coordination and endurance. I lost more games than I won, but I was glad to be able to play. A snack bar, a library, a movie theater, and a PX were also available. There was a young woman on site who worked for the USO. She stayed in the officers' quarters with the nurses. Her job was to organize pinochle tournaments and bingo games for the patients. She was a very good pinochle player, too. Some of us played a lot of four-handed double deck pinochle with her, when she wasn't busy with some other activity. She went missing for about a week. When she returned, she announced she was a married woman. We didn't even know she had a boyfriend.

In addition to pinochle, there were poker games, whist, and tonk. Tonk is a quick money game, but we only played for nickels. I heard of some high-stakes poker games taking place after hours, but I never participated.

So that's how we spent our days. Cards, table tennis, pool, library books, and movies. Oh, yeah, and just sitting around getting to know our fellow soldiers.

Three nurses worked the hep ward. The Major was an older woman, more like a grandma than an Army officer. The Lieutenant was a tall young woman who was pleasant enough, but with a no-nonsense attitude. Then there was the captain. She was kind of wide, not too attractive, and with a personality to match her face. That was one mean nurse! Hey, how are we going to recover if we have a nurse who behaves more like a drill sergeant? Well, anyway, all three nurses had to take a turn working the night shift. When the mean Captain was on night duty we played dirty tricks on her. She was the only one to strictly enforce the "no-talking-after-lights-out" rule. But she couldn't keep us from getting up to use the latrine. So, about every five minutes one of us would walk down the hall to the facilities. We always slammed the door near the nurses' station. One guy snuck some whiskey into the ward one day. Captain Mean saw him walking funny, and she suspected he had been drinking. She gave him a specimen bottle and told him if the lab test came back positive for alcohol, he was in big trouble! The lab test was negative, of course. Some other guy filled the bottle for him.

The conversations that went on after lights out, with the easy-going major on night duty down at the end of the building, proved to be one of the most educational experiences of my youth. Guys would talk about their encounters with women and some of the odd things that occurred. One guy loved to tell stories in the dark. He was somewhere between his mid-thirties to early-forties. He had spent some years traveling in a carnival. He had a barrel chest and huge arms. His job with the carnival was take-on-all-comers wrestler. Many a young guy thought they could take him and wound up sorry, or injured. He was a pro. The tales he would spin, especially after lights out, made us sheltered young guys believe that it's a really crazy world out there. He spoke of slick scams the carny guys played on the locals. He told of unusual sex practices he observed with the traveling show, and elsewhere. He scared the wits out of Captain Mean one night. He was going on and on about some crazy act he would inflict on her if he ever got the chance, when she snuck up behind him and listened for a while. One guy said, "She's standing right behind you!" Then he pretended to snore. The rest of us were very quiet. The nurse slowly walked back to the end of the building. It was the only time Captain Mean was ever speechless.

The hospital corpsmen on duty in the ward were more than just "bedpan jockeys" (Their own terminology, not mine). These were enlisted guys who were also trained to draw blood. And that's how the doctors monitored our recovery progress. Twice a week all hepatitis patients had to get up before breakfast and line up in the blood draw room to have blood taken from their arms. And in those days, they used a big needle. And they took a lot of blood. I don't know what SGPT stands for, but it's some blood test that measures liver function. Some of us felt fine for two months or so, but the doctor wouldn't let us go back to duty. Our SGPT reading was too high.

When blood tests indicated our liver function was nearly normal, we were ordered to walk laps around the compound. One lap the first day, two the second day, etc. After five laps on the fifth day, another gallon (it felt like it!) of blood was taken out of our arms. If the SGPT level remained low, we were ready to be discharged.

I was hospitalized just over three months, but that was no record. It took some guys four or five months to recover from hepatitis. Quite a few patients were in and out in about six weeks. I went back to my HAWK missile installation up on the DMZ at the end of March. I had lost 25 pounds, but I was getting it back! It was spring. The cold, snowy winter was over. And all I had to do was stand on my head until June, then board a troop ship and come home.

Word went around the American military bases in Korea, that volunteers were needed to go to some place called Vietnam to act as "military advisors". Army personnel were offered two months stateside leave, then hazardous duty pay for serving a year in Vietnam. Air Force personnel were offered one more stripe. I was not tempted, however. My three year hitch was up in July. I had big plans for my return to civilian life.

A 19 day cruise across the Pacific Ocean was all that remained of my life as a soldier. Looking back on it, I consider myself lucky. I was too young for the Korean War, and I was already out of the Army by the time that business in Vietnam got really nasty. I probably matured more during my time in the MASH than at any other time in my life.