



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

July - September 2017

Chapter 201 Moffett Field Fund Raising

Chapter 201 conducts approximately four community information and fund-raising events each year. On July 15th and 16th, 2017, the Chapter held an event at the Commissary on the former Naval Base at Moffett Field in Mountain View, California. Information was provided on Agent Orange, PTSD and the Veterans Initiative to help resolve the issue of American and Vietnamese Missing In Action. Fund raising was conducted to support Chapter events and activities such as scholarships for Vietnamese children under the "Dragoon Scholarship Fund."



Some of those participating at the Moffett Field Commissary in July included: Dave Sanders (Past President), Steve Thompson (Secretary), Mary Sessler (AVVA), Randy Sessler (Director), Jack Wells, Dennis Foggie, (Treasurer), John Hassenplug (Sergeant-At-Arms), and Gene Fanucchi (Vice President).

Chapter 201 Participates in Da Nang Marathon

Chapter 201 member Jack Wells (LT Col, USMC, Ret) travels to Vietnam about twice a year and coordinates the Chapter's participation in the Children of Vietnam Dragoon Scholarship Fund. On the sixth of August, this year he participated in the annual International Marathon event held in Da Nang. During this year's marathon, that included 5,000 runners from 40 different countries, Jack paid the entry fee for 13 boys and girls from the 5th House orphanage to run in four "fun run" races; marathon, 1/2 marathon, 10k and 5k.



Jack Wells graduated from the sixth Marine Basic Class in 1967 and, with his classmates, was sent to Vietnam. Jack served as a forward observer with the 7th Marines. In December 1968 he was the artillery advisor for the 21st Army of the Republic of Vietnam Ranger Battalion. He finished his Vietnam tour as the Executive Officer for Hotel Battery, 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines.

Jack Wells' Basic Class 6-67 sent more young Lieutenants off to war and suffered more officers killed or wounded than any other Basic School Class since the Korean War. In 2010, Jack Wells published his book "Class of 67" as a memorial to his 44 classmates who gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country (ISBN: 1439268088).

In 2014, Jack published the following article about a Navy veteran who returned to Vietnam for the International Marathon event that year.

Veterans Return to Da Nang for Marathon By Jack Wells

Tens of thousands of American veterans have never forgotten the tropical sights and smells of Da Nang they experienced stepping off their flights at the air base there during the war. Now they are sensing them again at a more peaceful time, when medals will be awarded not for valor in combat but for victory in a 26-mile race.

The Da Nang Marathon/Half Marathon and 5K fun run, in its third year and scheduled for August 30, has been attracting veterans like former sailor Dennis Zaborac, who served at the nearby naval patrol base in Hoi An in 1971.

When he heard about the Da Nang marathon, Zaborac thought, “Why as a Vietnam vet would I want to go back?” After all, “the last time I ran in Vietnam it wasn’t a marathon; it was a midnight sprint to a sandbagged bunker after a mortar attack.”

But the frequent marathoner decided to give the Da Nang run a try and signed up for the inaugural race on Sept. 1, 2013. “The heat and humidity of the marathon made it the toughest race I’ve ever run,” he said “but seeing the warm friendly smiles of the Vietnamese made it the greatest race I’ve ever run.”



Zaborac returned to Da Nang in 2014 to run the half marathon and 5K.

The 2013 event was organized by Dr. Khiem Ngo, a marathoner and sports injuries specialist in Houston who wanted to introduce the benefits of running to Da Nang’s residents. He had been among the “boat people” fleeing Saigon in the years after it fell to the Communists in April 1975.

The second marathon and half marathon, on Aug. 31, 2014, brought in more than 300 runners from 18 countries, including three dozen from the United States. The 5K race had more than 3,000 runners, most of them from schools and universities in Da Nang. The races raised money for the Da Nang Cancer Hospital.



This year's race is organized by Pulse Ltd., based in Ho Chi Minh City. The cancer hospital is again the designated charity.

Few Americans could have imagined such an event 50 years ago when the Marines landed at Red Beach, north of Da Nang Air Base, on March 8, 1965. They became the vanguard for more than 55,000 U. S. military personnel operating from Da Nang and surrounding areas by the end of 1968. When the fighting ended in 1973, the U.S. death toll was more than 58,000.

"I left Vietnam saying 'never again,'" Zaborac remembers, but the children he saw along the marathon route changed him. "As a runner whose war memories were burned away by the sunny smiles of these children, I now hope to return again and again."

Chapter 201 Participates in POW/MIA Service

Chapter 201 VVA and AVVA participated in the POW/MIA Ceremony sponsored jointly by VVA Chapter 464, American Legion Post 409 and the Department of Veterans Affairs at the Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno, California on September 15, 2017. Chapter 201 member Rose Herrera (former San Jose Vice Mayor) conducted the Missing Man Table Ceremony and AVVA Chapter 201 Vice President Cang Kim Dong gave an emotional presentation on his time as a POW in Vietnam.



*Rose Herrera conducts the Missing Man Ceremony and AVVA Chapter 201
Vice President Cang Kim Dong presents his experience as a POW*