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On August 18, 2015, five members of the class visited the Normandy beaches.



At Omaha Beach, Normandy: L-R: Les Denend, Doug Hardgrave, Cy Rickards and Jim Butt

Les **Denend** wrote: “Following a short but very nicely done ceremony (the flowers we are holding were from the ceremony) to honor all veterans visiting that day, the five of us and spouses spread out to pay private respects and come to grips with the impact of the nearly ten thousand markers of the American soldiers buried there. Later we visited Omaha Beach. We all walked down to the water — it was about mid-tide similar to the conditions on D-day — and looked back at the imposing cliffs just behind the beach. I walked 221 steps from the water’s edge to the beginning of the upslope to the cliffs, a very tough assignment I thought under fire.”

After attending the Blackbird reunion held in Reno back in June Jim **Wilson** did some reflection on memories and challenges faced when he wrote “You may or may not recall that I was selected for the SR-71 program in mid 1972 and checked out in the spring of 1973 at Beale AFB. On the occasion of my first Mach 3 flight in Feb 1973 I was presented with a Mach 3 pin by the 9th SRW Vice Wing Commander Colonel Pat Halloran. The much cherished pin is given by Lockheed Aircraft Corp in the name of the SR designer Kelly Johnson. Per SOP my family was invited to attend the short presentation...lots of smiles and happiness but no speeches. I’ve proudly worn that pin on my lapel for 42 years while attending many memorable events. It is

irreplaceable . That fact is well known from the start. Don't lose it. You only get one and they can't be purchased.”



Jim receiving coveted Mach 3 Pin in 1973 and 42 years later

The black and white picture is from Feb 1973 at Beale AFB.. at plane side right after landing. In the 1973 photo Colonel Pat Halloran is the presenter. Jim’s wife Rachael and their children at the time (L to R) Richard, Jim , Susan and Russ were present. Son Ryan was born at Beale and not in the photograph. At the June 2015 Blackbird Reunion in Reno (42 years later) were Jim, Rachel, three of their Children Richard, Jim and Russ and MGen Pat Halloran (USAF retired). Daughter Susan and son Ryan were unable to attend due to work.

“Lastly, my most memorable SR-71 flight occurred in Nov 1973 when I was fortunate enough to be one of the few selected to fly in the Yom Kippur War. Takeoff was from Griffiss AFB New York ..to and over the battle lines in the Sinai , the Suez canal and the Golan Heights and return for a landing at Seymour Johnson in NC (12,181 miles,5 Air refueling, 10 hours 49 minutes.). I wrote a short 4 page story on the flight. If any classmates would like to read it, they can send me an email and I will reply with the text (jrwilson@surewest.net).

Mini-Reunion 2015: Taken from e-mail by Jimmie Butler:

The cup turning ceremony normally occurs in Arnold Hall by the cup cabinet after the football game. However, the USAFA—San Jose State football game wasn’t scheduled to kick off until after 8 p.m., and Arnold Hall had a wedding anyway. **Bill Ball** served as Master of Ceremonies for the turning of four cups. The cups for each of our classmates were turned with **Bob Desanto** by **Bill Ball**, **David Dougan** by **John Heimburger**, **Hugh Webb** by **Dave Nuss** and **Bud West** by **Jim Kuhn**. Following the cup turning , **Jim Fain** led the ceremonial toast and salute to the four. **Butch Verdier** closed with a reading of a verse or two of the 144th Psalm. Was rather astounding to see **Gordie Bredvik** standing and visiting with people when I walked in. As most of you know, he was severely injured in a tractor accident on his ranch in late June. Great to see him smiling and in great spirits. Many thanks to **Bill Browning** for

taking the initiative to get a block of tickets for the game so most of the attendees didn't end up scattered all over Falcon Stadium in groups of ones and twos.



2015 Mini Line-up

L-R Seated: Bill Ball, Jim Hauser, Larry Thacker, Dave Nuss, Gary Bender, Rod Johnson, Jimmie Butler, Jim Kuhn, Roy Marshall, Jack Martinez, DeVere Hendrson and Standing: John Helinski, JJ Kennedy, Butch Verdier, Bob Hall, Bob Hayes, Mike Cristie, Randy Reynolds, Bob Lorenz, Bob Donovan, Ed Reisdorf, John Heimberger, Jim Fain, Bill Browning, Jay Miller, John Shmoldas, Gordon Bredvick, Ev Vaughn, Skip Lee, Drue DeBerry, Phil Tate, Gil Merkle

Not pictured in the line-up but present was Roger **Zoeller**. Jim **Gaston**, Dick **Shutack**, Fran **Porch** and their wives were at the Villa Restaurnt in Palmer Lake on Friday.

While at the Villa I had a nice talk with Randy **Reynolds** about a book he wrote that I found on the Amazon Kindle site. The book's title is TEN YEARS FLYING THE F-105. Randy tells some great stories and he makes you feel like you are in the cockpit.

Pete **Ognibene** reported on the successful introduction of a USAFA License Plate in Virginia. His note said "We had a number of false starts over the years, but this time the AOG carried the ball across the goal line. The Commonwealth of Virginia now has a USAFA license plate. Here's a shot of mine, which arrived about a week ago. Special thanks to the AOG's Kevin Hoppin '90 and staff member Corrie Grubbs for leading the effort." Good news but unfortunately picture limits do not permit publishing the photo of Pete's plate in this article. You can view it however by going to the Class Web Page (<http://www.usafa63.org>) in the Newsletter Section. Look for December 2015.

Follow-up on JFK Graduation Speech: Gary **Bender** alerted us to a new USAFA recruiting video posted on the Academy Facebook page. As Gary says, this is 30 seconds that all 1963 grads should see and Hear: the voice over is by our 500th classmate:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRRH1Yla7EQ>.

Again, we have reached the enforced end to this Class News effort. It has been a privilege and apologies to those who sent inputs that did not make it to the final cut. There will be more

opportunities so please keep sending your thoughts and pictures. Have a happy and safe holiday season. PS: Thanks to John and Chris **Heimberger's** for the Kettle Corn. It was a big hit in our world.