

Gamewarden Members and Friends:

As everyone is well aware, this newsletter is way overdue. The reasons are many, but taken as a whole they do not add up to an "excuse." Please accept my apologies.

Thanks much to those of you who have supported me during these past months. *Your calls and your letters have helped.*

Last year's West Coast reunion was a great success. Because of a misunderstanding on my part, the East Coast reunion planning got off to a late start. Heroic efforts by Dave Crockett, Coop, Past President John and several others got things rolling, and we did manage to do quite well with our meeting at the Lake Wright Inn.

There was a rumor going around saying that our organization had ceased to exist because we had failed to file with the Virginia Corporations Commission. That is simply not true. Our Treasurer had filed the appropriate materials, but had forgotten to include one form with his submission. When notified of the omission, I filed the form and paid the required \$25 late fee to reinstate. To maintain our status we file forms once a year, in April, telling the commission about ourselves. One form names our registered agent, one tells the state about our corporate structure, one tells them who and where our officers are, and one tells them we are paying our annual registration fee.

Another rumor said the West Coast Chapter was taking over the functions of the national office. Also not true. John Williams remains our registered agent in Virginia and our East Coast Vice President. John has expressed the hope that someone would relieve him of these duties, but he is still serving. Thank you, John.

I have finally completed the great task of sorting through each and every one of the boxes passed on to me by Past President John. He would be the first to tell you that there was a lot of stuff in there, much of it duplicates of items in other boxes. There were some action items, which have been dealt with, and one heck of a lot of nostalgia. I found the first letter I had ever written to Gamewardens, more than ten years ago. Two boxes contained more than 500 copies of newsletter #31. There were slips of paper with only a word or two on them, financial records, our incorporation file, our original by-laws, information about past scholarship applicants, magazines, photographs, books, notes and all sorts of paperwork about past reunions.

For those of you wondering what great, dark secrets were hidden there, I'm sorry to disappoint you. There were none. There was, however, documentation to help me understand that I am not the first president of this organization to have come under fire by guerrillas from within.

I found many envelopes which scholarship applicants had sent to us as part of their search for assistance. I have sent them the same materials we send to any current applicant, asking them to forgive us for our lapses and asking that they send the completed materials back to us as soon as possible.

Past President Tom sent the GW computer to me. I checked it out and sent it along to West Coast Vice President

The Norfolk NAB was kind enough to donate \$1,000 to our scholarship fund. Thank you, Captain Leroy Brown and all of those who helped make that donation possible.

In this newsletter I have tried to provide some information which will be of value to you. The reunion flyer is in here, as is some information about hearing loss. Many thanks are due to Past President Tom for his research. It is his letter written in support of a claim filed by one of our members that has served as the basis for the materials provided here.

We had one meeting of the Board of Directors during 1997. Unfortunately, the tape recording our Secretary thought he was making of the meeting came up blank. During that session we discussed

scholarships, the newsletter and whether we should put together a web page on the internet for our organization. We decided to accept scholarship applications for as long as possible, to try to issue two newsletters per year, and to go ahead with publishing a web page. Two members of the board offered to pay for the web page, so it would be at no cost to the membership. That project, unfortunately, is one of those I have allowed to lapse. Materials for the page are being assembled as you read this.

One of the jobs I was asked to take on when I was elected was to copyright our Gamewardens logo. That is one task I can report as almost complete. The copyright of our logo (the TF116 logo with our white collar around it) should be granted before the Portland reunion.

If you are on the internet, please send me your e-mail address. My address is liken@wcta.net. Please do this even if you have sent me materials via e-mail before. I had to quickly change computers a couple of months ago and lost all of the e-mail addresses I had gathered.

My telephone number is still (800) 450-8699. Please call if you have anything to contribute, or any questions I can help with. Your feedback is very much appreciated.

As a friend of mine pointed out a few weeks ago, depression is just a state of mind. There's always someone who will say the right word at the right time, if you let them. Thanks, Basil.

POW/MIA Ceremony

One of the highlights of the East Coast Reunion this past summer was a ceremony honoring those who are still listed as MIA and POW. The ceremony was carried out as it was originally described in a column called "In Remembrance" attributed to Larry H. Tassone, USAF (Ret.). In response to the requests for copies of that column, it reprinted here for our membership.

~~In Remembrance~~

By Larry H. Tassone, USAF (Ret.)

As you entered the banquet hall this evening, you may have noticed a small table here in a place of honor near our head table. It is set for one. Please let me explain. The military caste is filled with symbology. This table is our way of symbolizing the fact that members of our profession of arms are missing from our midst. They are commonly called P.O.W./M.I.A., we call them "Brothers." They are unable to be with us this evening, and so we remember them because of their incarceration.

This TABLE set for one is small - symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner alone against his oppressors.

The TABLECLOTH is white - symbolizing the purity of their intentions to respond to their country's call to arms. REMEMBER!

The single ROSE displayed in a vase reminds us of the families and loved ones of our comrades-in-arms who keep the faith awaiting their return. REMEMBER! The RED RIBBON tied so prominently on the vase is reminiscent of the red ribbon worn on the lapel and breasts of thousands who bear witness to their unyielding determination to demand a proper accounting of our missing. REMEMBER! A SLICE OF LEMON is on the bread plate to remind us of their bitter fate. REMEMBER!

There is SALT upon the bread plate - symbolic of the families' tears as they wait. REMEMBER!

The GLASS is inverted - they cannot toast with us this night. REMEMBER!

The CHAIR - the chair is empty - they are not here. REMEMBER!

REMEMBER - all of you who served with them and called them comrades, who depended upon their might and aid, and relied upon them, for surely, they have not forsaken you.

Hearing Loss Claims and Tinnitus update

Tinnitus - that ringing and roaring sound you've been putting up with for decades, just might be related to your service on PBRs. Thanks to some in-depth research by past Gamewardens President Tom Thomson, there is now some hard evidence you can present to the VA in support of a hearing loss or tinnitus claim.

The letter which follows is a generic version of one which Tom wrote in support of a claim by one of our members. If you feel this will help you, please feel free to use it. If you aren't sure whether a more personal letter might not be more appropriate, check with your designated claims representative. Any Gamewarden national or chapter officer should be happy to personalize the letter to help you.

From: (Officer's Name and title), Gamewardens of Vietnam Association Inc.

To: Department of Veterans Affairs Adjudication Officer

Re: (Claimant's Name)

Dear Sir or Madam:

This letter is in regard to (Claimant's Name)'s claim for disability compensation for hearing loss and Tinnitus.

Gamewardens of Vietnam Association, Incorporated is a national organization and was started in 1968 by U. S. Navy Veterans of the River Patrol Force - Task Force 116 - Operation Gamewarden who served under the command of Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, Jr. Task Force 116 included River Patrol Boats (PBR'S), Navy SEALs and Seawolf Helicopter gunship personnel. Task Force 116 operated in the Mekong Delta Region of South Vietnam from 1966 to 1971. (Claimant's Name) served in the River Patrol Force from 19XX to 19XX, and his hearing impairment problems started in (approximate date) when he was in armed conflict against communist aggressors while serving with United States Navy Forces in South Vietnam. (Briefly outline your in-country service, mentioning any specific incidents of combat which may have contributed to the problem).

Virtually all sailors who served in Task Force 116 suffer from hearing impairment and Tinnitus. Our main armaments on the PBR'S were dual 50-caliber machine guns on the bow and a single .50 caliber machine gun on the stern. Those River Patrol Boats were 31.5 feet long and 10.5 feet wide. A .50 caliber machine gun registers 170 decibels while firing, a thousand times more damaging than the 140 decibels proven to cause permanent hearing damage. As you are aware, the likelihood of permanent damage increases logarithmically as the decibel level increases. There were also two M-60 7.62-millimeter machine guns along with various other weapons on the boats. During combat, (Claimant's Name) was exposed to all of these weapons firing simultaneously. Our PBR'S also at times received heavy enemy weapons fire, including that from rockets, mortars and grenades, all of which resulted in loud explosions. There is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that the Tinnitus and continual ringing in (Claimant's Name)'s ears and hearing loss is a function of his involvement with the 50-caliber machine guns and the incoming rocket propelled grenade rounds from the enemy held banks of the rivers and canals. After all, most all who served in the same capacity suffer from the same malady, and this has been one of the focal points at our organization's annual reunions.

There have been hearings in the United States Congress on the degree of hearing loss suffered by the veterans who served on those small boats, and the loss was proven. Warren K. "Tom" Thomson is a past President of Gamewardens, and he is one of those who have received a 10% compensation plus hearing aids from the Veterans Administration. In our organization's opinion and given the results of congressional hearings, (Claimant's Name)'s claim is irrefutable.

Very Respectfully,