

October 16, 2012

The Society of the Vietnamese Airborne  
Letter from the President  
Initiatives for 2013-2014

Dear Red Hats, Red Markers and Mu Do:

It is an honor to have the opportunity to serve as your president for 2013-2014. Joe Kinzer Paul Devries, Mike Flynn and John Martin did an outstanding job over the past two years, culminating in the dedication of the new monument at the Museum at Ft. Benning. The entire reunion weekend reflected the effort of Bill Block and the accommodation of our hosts on post. Second only to the monument dedication, being allowed to pin jump wings on new troopers at their graduation ceremony is something I will not soon forget. Well done, gentlemen.

By way of introduction, I am a 1967 USAFA grad and became a FAC right out of pilot training. I served with the Red Markers from late December 1969 until July 4, 1970. Following Vietnam, I was an instructor pilot and flight commander at Keesler AFB teaching Vietnamese Undergraduate Pilot Training. I earned jump wings at Benning in 1964 and jumped once with the Airborne at Cu Chi in 1970. I was also awarded Vietnamese pilot wings for my work with the VNAF students at Keesler. I separated from the service in 1973 and pursued a career in the energy industry in Houston, working for a natural gas pipeline company and pipeline engineering companies till retirement five years ago. Retirement presented the opportunity to do some things I have wanted to do for a long time, including catching up with comrades in arms from my service years.

With regard to the future, we are lucky that Paul Devries, Mike Flynn and John Martin all volunteered to continue serving as officers of the Society. And we also already have volunteers working on the next reunion. Plans are underway for the next reunion in Tampa, Florida in late May 2014, sometime between Mothers Day and Memorial Day. Bill Ball and Mick Cole are point on that project. There are a number of Red Hats and Red Markers in the area who can assist as needed.

The result of having a Spring reunion is that it is only a year and a half away. Therefore, I propose the following initiatives that can be accomplished in that relatively short time period:

- 1) Add a third figure in Airborne camouflage to the exhibit at the Airborne and Special Ops Museum at Fayetteville representing a Red Marker to complete the display of the three components of the team. Nametag to read Red Marker. Maybe with a dummy UHF portable radio. John Martin has volunteered to contact Paul Galloway at the Museum.
- 2) Create a Society of Vietnamese Airborne website with history of the Airborne, the Red Hats and Red Markers. Offer items for sale ... hats,

shirts, coins, bumper stickers, etc. My son is an art director at a design firm and can prepare a proposal to design and maintain a website for Board approval.

3) Investigate locations for relatively low cost installations memorializing the Vietnamese Airborne, the Red Hats and Red Markers. I am thinking of places that might have an ongoing "Paver Project" where for several hundred dollars we could put a paver in a walkway. One place that comes to mind is the FAC Museum in Ft Worth. We need ideas from members for other locations.

4) Solicit design ideas for the possible monument at the Army Museum at Fort Belvoir. I understand that project has been delayed waiting funding for the main facility. But doing some design work in advance might benefit us when the time is right down the line. Mike Flynn has suggested that we replicate the Ft Benning monument, which is also a good idea. It is simple, elegant and tells the story well.

5) Begin a new member drive. One suggestion at the last reunion was that each member ask a fellow Red Hat or Red Marker to join. That is an excellent plan. Also, my hat is off to Mike Anderson who took it upon himself to contact all of the Florida members to ensure their contact info was up to date. His efforts greatly assisted Mike Flynn's work and I know got some members interested in participating. We could use other volunteers to focus on a geographic region as Mike has done.

I ask the membership to suggest ideas for any other activities we could undertake during the next 18 months by emailing or calling any officer or director of the Society.

Nhay Du,

Gary N. Willis  
President