

A Reunion to Remember - written by Tony Seahorn

There are all kinds of reunions: high school, family, college, etc. Then there are those reunions that aren't organized just for celebrations, but more importantly for remembrance, honoring fallen comrades, and healing. The biennium gathering of Vietnam Veterans who served in Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry was one of these. This year it was held in Colorado Springs, CO, and we were invited to be part of the three day events. On Friday we visited Ft. Carson where the group was graciously granted access to several special base training sections including the simulation area where troops were able to practice their shooting skills. Another simulation building housed four look-alike Humvee Vehicles with machine guns, and other high tech equipment. Soldiers practice their driving skills and teamwork prior to deployment (or re-deployment) to assignments in Iraq and Afghanistan. These maneuvers proved far more challenging than any of us ever imagined. It made us realize how incredibly intelligent and efficient our current troops are when being trained for combat. Our young military guides were so enthusiastic about their mission, their work and their willingness to serve their country. Each had been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan at least once. Many had experienced three deployments with a fourth coming soon. I couldn't help envisioning the huge sacrifice they were making, as well as the commitment from spouses, children, and parents.

The reunion ended with a banquet on Saturday evening which was far from any I had ever experienced. Before dinner was served, the names of almost one hundred fallen and missing comrades were read by various members of the Regiment. Then, all eyes focused on a round, empty table that sat on the stage with a vase tied with a red ribbon holding a single red rose. A dress military hat sat next to the vase which made the entire scene a poignant reminder of those who would never attend any of these reunions. Since many of our customs and stories are mirrored through metaphors and symbols, I thought you might find the following explanation of the empty table meaningful.

The table is round - to show everlasting concern for our missing men.

The tablecloth is white - symbolizing the purity of their motives when answering the call to duty.

The single red rose - reminds us of the life of each of the missing, and the love ones and friends of these Americans who keep the faith, awaiting answers.

The vase is tied with a red ribbon - symbol of our continued determination to account for our missing.

A slice of lemon on the bread plate - is to remind us of the bitter fate of those captured and missing in a foreign land.

A pinch of salt - symbolizes the tears endured by those missing and their families who seek answers.

The Bible - represents the strength gained through faith to sustain those lost from our country, founded as one nation under God.

The glass is inverted - to symbolize their inability to share the evening's toast.

The chair is empty - they are missing.

Sometime, perhaps 20 or 30 years from now, the warriors of today will be the old soldiers of tomorrow. Perhaps they will gather to remember, to heal, and to honor those who die in today's war zones. And likely they too will honor a single empty, round table with an inverted glass and a red rose.