

## **Class of '69 reunites out of love, appreciation**

**By Justin Creech/Staff writer | Posted: Thursday, August 14, 2014 8:44 am**

The U.S. Army Engineer Officer Candidate Regiment Class 22-Hotel-69 returned to Fort Belvoir for a reunion dinner at the Officers' Club, Saturday night.

Twenty-three of the graduates and one TAC Officer (Teach, Assess and Counsel Officer, the primary trainer for the class of candidates) attended the dinner, which was the last event of the day. Earlier Saturday the class traveled to Washington, D.C. for a wreath laying ceremony at the Vietnam War Memorial and a visit to the World War II Memorial.

The events his former classmates planned were fun for Jim Quimby, a former first lieutenant.

"It's been very impressive," said Quimby. "I think the guys who organized it did a great job."

The wreath, which was laid at the middle of the memorial, contained the names of class members who have passed away since the class graduated. None were killed in combat during Vietnam, but the class still wanted to honor their memory.

"I knew one or two of them really well," said Quimby. "I was shocked to see the number of the guys who have already passed on. Most of us are between 67 and 70 years old so, for that many to be gone already is sad and surprising."

Several members of the class spoke during dinner including former captains Joe Tavares and Dennis Gehley, and former 1st Lt. John Dawson. Tavares talked about how he submitted an application to "Wish of a Lifetime" hoping they would provide the resources to organize a reunion.

"To me it was important to see them one more time, to share our experiences and see how we did in life," said Tavares. "We were very close, so I wanted to see what the next chapters of their lives were all about. I felt it would be good for everybody if we could pull it off."

The officer candidate course was 26 weeks long and included daily physical fitness training, classroom instruction and chores in the barracks, including cleaning and waxing floors.

Candidates were only permitted four hours of sleep a night, so they had to learn to juggle their responsibilities while managing their fatigue. Also, candidates who were married were only permitted to see their wives at church on Sundays.

Handling that stress prepared each graduate for their time in the Army as well as life, according to former Capt. Casey Casebeer.

"The camaraderie we built allowed me to face things I wouldn't have been able to face alone," said Casebeer. "The obstacles we overcame gave everyone the attitude that there is nothing we can't do. OCS shaped me into the person I am today."

Several graduates discussed the principles that were stressed during the course and the sayings they came up with to help themselves get through the adverse times the course created. False Enthusiasm for a Better Attitude (FEBA) and Real Enthusiasm for a Better Attitude (REBA) are the two sayings the class created, according to former Capt. Larry Baxter, who added he has used them throughout his life.

“I’ve been a teacher, dairy farmer and a cattle rancher since then,” said Baxter. “I’ve coached sports, too, and all my teams would say REBA. It caught on and the children I teach and coach have always kept positive attitudes.”

A sense of gratitude and appreciation for one another and their time together was the prevailing sentiment after the dinner. Appreciation is also why they all came to the reunion, according to Gehley.

“We all love each other,” said Gehley. “That’s how we got through OCS and that’s why we are here tonight.”