



The First Gathering 12/2/01

A Personal Retrospective
by Thornton Ridinger

As Andy Staley noted on the Web Page: "Wow! There are not enough superlatives to describe the first cadet gathering in so many years. This event came together better than anyone on the committee had dared to hope."

Wow is right. After a couple of false starts, the FMS alumni really came together in a big way in Ormond Beach on that Sunday afternoon. With more than a hundred people registered, and about 50 former faculty and cadets in attendance with their spouses or significant others, the event was a high point of the holiday season for a lot of us.



And what a roller coaster ride for the committee. First, we worried that no one would come. Then we got so many registrations that we had to quickly find another place to hold it (not enough room at the first place). Boy, did we get lucky. The Tomoka Oaks Country Club was a great setting, and everyone seemed to enjoy it.



It has been quite a journey for me. Last year, I had no contacts with any friends from my FMS days. That changed last February when Max Elliott contacted me via e-mail from Classmates.Com. We got together and started working on a directory. Then, to our happy surprise, we learned that another group (Robert, Tim, and Andy) was also trying to get things together, so we joined forces, with spectacular results.

I have renewed friendships with 10 of my classmates of 1959 and several others at the school when I was there, and have made new friends with those who came to FMS after I left. I've been fishing (for the first time in 42 years) with Bill Bennett and Jim Turner, have visited in Georgia with both Bruce Bullock and Jerry Metzdorf, with John Costello in Illinois, and with Dennis Eyre and several others in Florida. I've talked on the phone with Jim Purucker in Arizona, George Hanna in West Virginia, and Herb Jones in North Carolina. What a great time.

The Gathering allowed us not only to renew acquaintances and remember old times, but also to discover the new perspectives of old friends and the paths they have trod during the intervening years. Probably the most interesting thing to me has been the quick renewal of friendships that have resulted. Despite the length of years, and the different directions we have taken, all of the people have remained very much the same in personality and remembrance of shared history. What a great surprise and gift.



The Gathering was terrific, with a great meal and a large area filled with memorabilia. Getting together with the faculty members in attendance was also a

treat. Faculty from the early years, the middle years, and the last years were present, and set the standard for future events. Before the dinner, I thought that there would be a lot of people I didn't know. That's not exactly the way it happened. All of us have this unique shared experience, and that experience brings us together in a manner quite unexpected. So there really weren't any strangers there. Wow, what a trip.

For those of you who were there, "You ain't seen nothing yet." Wait 'til you see what's happening at the all-class reunion in October. And if you missed The Gathering, you sure don't want to miss the next one. It's going to be a Lollapalooza.

The members of the committee want to thank everyone who attended and all of those that provided support for the endeavor. We hope that you who attended had an experience that created new memories and resurrected many old ones.

As they say in New Orleans, "Laissez les bons temps rouler!" or -- Let the good times roll!

Let's Roll!!!!

Okay, we have had a taste of what it's like to get many of us together. Now it's time to start looking forward to the big enchilada to which the Committee has given the moniker of "The Lollapalooza". The Committee met in January and in the midst of swapping stories and experiences of The Gathering, began planning, in earnest, the all-class reunion.

We have locked in a date and location. The Lollapalooza will be held October 11-14 in DeLand. We have selected the Holiday Inn on Highway 92 (about a mile from the old campus) as the reunion headquarters. We have negotiated great rates with them and will be using their facilities for many of the weekend's events.

The cost will be \$60 per cadet and \$40 per guest. Faculty will receive the special rate of \$40 per faculty member and \$20 per guest. While we encourage immediate registration, please be aware that a minimum \$20 deposit will be due by August 30th, with the balance due September 16th. Late registrations will be accepted for an additional \$15 between August 31st and September 16th. The registration fee gets you into all reunion events and a great Welcome Packet. Why not just get it out of the way and pay in full, right now?!?

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By now, you should have received your registration packets. Note some of the highlights as:

- A welcome packet with goodies
- Saturday night BBQ and dance at the airport
- Tours of the campus grounds
- A cadet formation on campus to dedicate a permanent plaque and to conduct a memorial service for those that have passed away.

Please make a special effort to return the data sheets! They will play a large role in makeup of the FMS Directory.

As the Editor of the Florida Military School Newsletter, I would like to give special recognition to Max Elliott, Sue Courtney, Thornton Ridinger, Tom Sperling, and Bill Dreggors for the great work and massive amount of time and effort they continue to expend to make this the best class reunion possible.

The committee is hoping that each class will get together and do "their own thing" for a Friday or Sunday night outing. Also, please give some thought to a display at our Hall of Memories that you can set up for viewing not only by your class, but everyone in the cadet corps.

So, go ahead and mark your calendars right away, reserving those dates for a weekend full of fun and camaraderie. Reservations are being accepted. Please send your registration fee to Andy Staley at the address below.

Change of Address

Please note that Tim Tyndall's website service provider changed the internet address for his website. You can now find his site at:

<http://home.ATTBI.com/~timt/FMS/>

If you have any comments, questions, or would like to submit information for future Florida Military School Newsletters, please contact Andy Staley at:

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