



# 39<sup>TH</sup> ENGINEER BATTALION ALUMNI NEWS



[www.39thengrbn.com](http://www.39thengrbn.com)

March, 2025

President.....	John Lewis	Historian.....	Jerry Bright
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## 39<sup>TH</sup> ENGINEER REUNION-METAIRIE, LA

Join your fellow 39th Engineer Brothers and their spouses/families for our reunion in Metairie, LA (just outside New Orleans) at the **Sheraton Inn on September 17-21, 2025.**

Reservation deadline for the hotel is August 15th. There is a link to the hotel within this newsletter.

### FROM THE PRESIDENT



When I was in my young teens, on the book shelf at our house beside the 100-year-old complete collection of Mark Twain, there was a book titled *Up Front* by Bill Mauldin, a combat cartoonist that accompanied the Infantry in the fighting in Italy in WWII. The two soldiers that he talked about were Willy and Joe. Common

soldiers, Grunts, Dog Faces, they only wanted a few things – a hot shower, a hot meal, and a warm dry bed.

Before I arrived in Vietnam, I did not get any experience in leading men and definitely not in combat when I got to Tien Phuoc, Third Platoon D Company, 39th Engineer Battalion. I tried to take care of my men the way Willy and Joe would have liked me to. Since I had made it to PFC before I became a 2Lt, I identified with my men. At the end of my tour, I was the field XO of C Co and was the only officer at NDP Knight.

Recently researching the 39th, I'm pretty sure the men of the 39th who participated in the three invasions of Italy probably served beside Willy and Joe. I also learned from Mike Male and Marty Walsh that the 39th, who initially went over on the LST and troop ship, were also some of the first ground combat troops in Vietnam. It makes me proud to follow in the footsteps of such fine men.

For our reunion this year, we will be in Metairie, LA (New Orleans) September 17-21, 2025. There is a booking link within this newsletter.

***If you require a handicap room, please call the Hotel directly at 504-837-6707 to let them know of your needs.***

***Please remember: If you have the need for special accommodations such as handicap accessibility, it is your responsibility to take care***

**of that with the hotel when you make your reservations; we can't do that for you.**

In service to you.

*Brothers then, Brothers now and Brothers forever.*

John Lewis, President

39th Cbt En Bn Alumni Association

Plt Ldr D Co 3rd Plt and Field XO C Co 1971

[Ltjohnlewis49@gmail.com](mailto:Ltjohnlewis49@gmail.com)

812-385-6044 (cell)

## REUNION 2025 INFO

We are ready to start taking reservations for the 2025 Reunion in Metairie, LA. Please click on the booking link at the end of this article or call **504-837-6707**. Be sure to let them know you are with the **39th Engineer Battalion Alumni Association**. We have a block of room set aside with the discounted rate of **\$139.00 per night** (plus state and local taxes). This price includes breakfast for two each morning. **The deadline for making reservations is August 15th.** However, don't wait! If something comes up, you can cancel your reservations up to 48 hours before the beginning of the reunion (September 15th). Yes, we know there are some cheaper motels you could find to stay at. However, these discounted rates, rooms booked, and concessions negotiated are based on the requirement that we book *at least 40 rooms per night*. That way, we don't have to pay for our Hospitality Room or any meeting rooms we need. Besides, it makes more sense to stay in the same hotel with the reason you're coming to the reunion – be with your buddies and their families. PLEASE call or book as soon as possible.

There are two types of guest rooms: Two double beds, or One king size bed.

Each room has a workstation with a stationary and a moveable work desk, a task lamp and ergonomic chair, and complimentary high-speed wireless connection. There is a coffee maker and microwave in each room in addition to the flat panel television with cable and pay-per-view movies, clock radio, hair dryer and iron with full-size ironing board.

***If you require a handicap room, please call the Hotel directly at 504-837-6707 to let them know of your needs.***

***Please remember: If you have the need for special accommodations such as handicap accessibility, it is your responsibility to take care of that with the hotel when you make your***

**reservations; we can't do that for you.**

If you plan on driving, there is **free parking** at the hotel. If you plan to fly, there is an **airport shuttle** for the hotel.

As has been the custom in previous years, we will be holding our **Meet and Greet** on the first night (Wednesday) with Pizza and Salad.

For Thursday and Friday night, the hotel has a restaurant and bar. There is also a pool, spa, and Fitness Center if you're so inclined.

On Thursday, we plan to start our tour with a visit to the World War II Museum. You could spend two days looking at everything, but we're going to be there from 9:00 am – 1:30 pm. Then, we go to the Destrehan Plantation until 3:30 pm and we board the motorcoach for the trip back to the hotel.

Friday is a FREE DAY to visit attractions on your own. You could go back to the WWII Museum or take an Air Boat Ride in the swamp. There is also an aquarium close to the WWII Museum. Of course, they have cemetery tours (the cemeteries are above ground).

Our last full day will be Saturday, with our **General Meeting** in the morning at 10:00 am. Everyone is invited. Our Banquet will be Saturday night. Check the registration in this newsletter for your food options.

Please consider bringing something to donate to the **Silent Auction**. Winners will be announced after the Banquet on Saturday night. All the items will be on display in the Hospitality Room during our reunion.

We need you to sign up as soon as possible. You can always cancel before the event, but we need to get at least 40 rooms booked to meet our contract obligations.

This is the booking link for the hotel – hover your mouse over the blue type, then press the Control button with one hand and click the mouse with the other. This should open the link:

[Book your group rate for 39th Engineer Battalion Reunion](#)

**Event Summary: 39th Engineer Battalion Reunion**

**Start Date: Wednesday, September 17, 2025**

**End Date: Monday, September 22, 2025**

**Hotel(s) offering your special group rate:**

**Sheraton Metairie - New Orleans**

**Hotel for 139.00 USD per night**

**Last Day to Book: Sunday, August 24, 2025**

[Book your group rate for 39th Engineer Battalion Reunion](#)

If the link does not work for you, please call the hotel reservation number at **504-837-6707**. Be sure to mention that you are with the **39th Engineer Battalion Alumni Association** to get the reduced

rate for the rooms. If you use the link from the newsletter that was emailed to you, it will already have the \$139 rate for your room.

Diane Helser, Reunion Chair

956-367-0998

[diane\\_helser@yahoo.com](mailto:diane_helser@yahoo.com)

## FROM THE CHAPLAIN

### Patience-Courage-Persistence!

This past Reunion in Dayton, Ohio was a wonderful success for all who attended, especially for me. Seeing everyone together and united with old brothers and their families has always gladdened my heart. However, each year our numbers at our Reunions have fallen due to a variety of reasons. As you know, we are not getting any younger and our health-related problems are not going to disappear, but have grown worse. Time marches on and “waits for no man”, but as a select few of our population, we know this all too well. On the other hand, we all had to live through “hurry up and wait” and that became part and parcel of our enlistment and career.

So far, every Reunion I have attended has been filled with various interesting military venues, and this time was no different. Going to see the US Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, OH, took us from the beginning of aviation where we tried to soar into the clouds, to venturing out into space. I was amazed at the size of the four huge hangers that comprise the museum and the amount of planes and other flying machines they house there. It was an actual walk through the history of flight of all nations and it did not disappoint. From its beginning with the Wright Brothers to the Space Shuttle and massive booster rockets that carried animals and humans into space. All in all, it was very impressive and well done.

Moreover, can you imagine the progress and development required from the beginning and infancy of flight to finally being able to propel humanity into space? Such an enormous project and undertaking should not overpower the simple fact that flight started in a small bicycle shop in Dayton, Ohio with two brothers. The experience of actually visiting and entering their small Bicycle Shop and residence was an eye-opening look back into time to see the primitive tools they used to get their project off the ground (pun intended).

What foresight, Patience, Courage, and Persistence to overcome such obstacles, failures, and harassment by their peers and town folk. The trials and tribulations they endured should inspire all of us to never be overtaken by fear or failure but to fail forward as they did while never losing the vision they had of flying in the first place. With each step forward new problems arose and needed to be dealt with. You can imagine the files they amassed of “lessons learned” to achieve their goal of soaring in the skies like Eagles. Just as with Fulton’s Folly, the Wright Brothers persisted even in the face of catastrophe.

Finally, their entrepreneurial spirit and drive to conquer the skies paid off in the end, but that did not detour them from looking into other areas of investigation they were interested in. “The brothers gained the mechanical skills essential to their success by working for years in their Dayton, Ohio-based shop with printing presses, bicycles, motors, and other machinery.” The tour of their fourth bicycle shop is next to the Aviation Trail Museum, where we watched a wonderful movie about what Wilbur and Orville Wright went through in order to finally achieve flight. It was a great inspiration and worth every minute of our Reunion. God Bless All of You and Hope to See You This Year in New Orleans if God permits.

Respectfully,

Father Billy

39th Engineer Chaplain

## DAYTON IN REVIEW

Here are just a few photos from our trip to Dayton for our last reunion.



*Blue Bull of the Year - John Lewis*







# SERENDIPITY



*Serendipity* - The occurrence and development of fortunate or beneficial events by chance...

My "First Wife of 57 Years", Beverly, and I enjoy touring military installations as we travel. We have a meal, check out the PX and base museums. We highly recommend this excursion to all veterans.

Although a long-time Georgia resident, we have never visited Fort Moore Georgia – formerly Fort Benning. On a recent beautiful day, we decided to correct this oversight and headed to the base.

Fort Moore is an impressive facility, now named after Lieutenant General Harold Moore and his wife Julia. It is the only installation named after a husband/ wife couple as Mrs. Moore was very active in military issues.

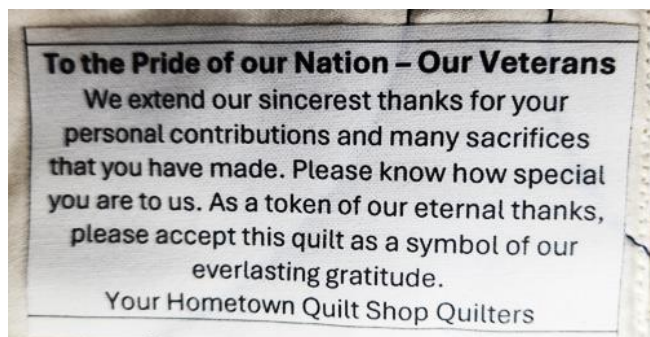
This is a large and distinguished Army base, and of major interest is the National Infantry Museum located on post.

After an engrossing day of exploring, we headed home to Stone Mountain. The drive on I-85 was a bit boring, so we opted to follow the backroads for more interesting views. And that is where "serendipity" took over – Our daughter, born while I was serving in Vietnam, has been considering having a special quilt made using fabric from shirts worn by her two children that had special meaning. Passing through the small town of Hogansville, Beverly happened to see the sign for Hometown Quilt Shop – and we stopped. There we met Penny Willingham and Cindy Foley. Hometown Quilt Shop is a very nicely appointed business with many interesting decorations. But without a doubt, the most intriguing feature is the "military wall" honoring not just owner Penny Willingham's family, but all military members.

Penny's Dad, Jessie L. Yearta, gave 31 years of

outstanding service, including tours in Korea and Vietnam. He was an Airborne Ranger Green Beret. He was held POW in Vietnam for three years, and was highly decorated, including eight Purple Heart awards and the Distinguished Service Cross, among many others. This fine soldier retired as a Command Sergeant Major!

Viewing the military memorabilia was a treat, but I did not know there was much more to come...





Totally unexpected, Penny and Cindy presented me with a true treasure, a "Quilt of Honor"!!! To say I was overwhelmed is an understatement.

For those unaware, the "Quilt of Honor" and "Quilt of Valor" are wonderful symbols and tokens of thanks for all who have served in the military. While I was familiar with these tributes, never have I had the honor and pleasure of receiving such a very special gift. To date Penny and Cindy have awarded 145 quilts...one of which I am the proud recipient!

Thank you, Penny. Thank you, Cindy. And thank you to all of the others who make these special recognition gifts of distinction!!!

So, there is much to be said for "serendipity" ...  
Respectfully submitted,  
Mike Shaw, Member at Large  
C Co. 70-71  
nsxtarga@bellsouth.net

## OBITUARIES



**Joe Carl Smith** of Laurel, MS passed away Tuesday, February 11, 2025 at his home after battling bladder cancer. He is preceded in death by his father, Robert Coy Smith; mother, Dorothy Almeda Blakeney Smith; brother, Dale Smith; daughter,

Angela Elaine Smith; grandson, Logan Braydon Walters. He is survived by his beloved wife of 62½ years, Barbara Faye Upchurch Smith; son, Dawayne Smith; son, Clint (Stephanie) Smith; daughter, Amy (Bryan) Walters; grandchildren, Chase (Katie) Smith; Hunter (Keri) Smith; Savannah Smith, Leah Smith and Anna Cate Walters; great-grandsons, Liam Braydon and Colin Isaiah Smith. He is also survived by his brother Garland Smith, sisters Elaine Hankins, Jane Polk and Frances Hodge and a host of nieces and nephews.

Joe was born and reared in Taylorsville, MS attending school in Mineral Springs and Taylorsville High School. He graduated with a focus on Agriculture and Industrial Arts. Shortly after graduation he enlisted in the Mississippi National Guard where he served from 1959-1962. During these years he worked various companies as a truck driver and laborer until he entered the United States Army in October 1962. He obtained advanced combat engineer training and was promoted as a Sergeant and Squad Leader. Joe served 3 tours overseas, 2 in the Republic of South Vietnam and 1 in Manheim, Germany. He served 9 years in the U.S. Army

and received the Purple Heart, Bronze Star, U.S. Army Commendation Medal, Good Conduct Medal, and many other honors. One of his highest honors was to stand guard at the funeral procession of Pres. John F. Kennedy, Jr. in Washington, D.C. He was proud American and served his country and God faithfully.

Out of the military, Joe worked first at Masonite in the chipper dept., then at Amerada Hess as a diesel mechanic in Laurel until he retired. Joe and his wife Barbara raised chickens for 23 years for Sanderson Farms. Once retired, he worked part-time as a truck driver for Walters Construction and RJ Walters Trucking.

Joe was an active member of Freedom Baptist Church in Myrick, MS. He loved fishing, hunting deer and squirrels, mostly. He was an avid farmer and gardener. He shared his crops with anyone. He raised sugar cane and made syrup. He enjoyed working with his cows and mules. Playing the biblical dulcimer and psaltery was one of his most peaceful pastimes. The biggest joy of his life was his family. He treasured his time with family; loved teaching things he had learned and passing down traditions, and educating his children, in-laws, and grandchildren. He was a great storyteller to anyone who would listen. Joe loved and served his Lord and Savior, Jesus his entire life. He made it a point to show love and tell everyone he met about Him. He was a great man with a big personality and will be missed. If you ever met him, you are a better person for knowing him.



**Betty Elizabeth Lester**, 74, wife of Walter Allen Lester, passed away Thursday, January 23, 2025 in Winchester, KY. Born May 25, 1950 in Lexington, KY, she was the daughter of the late Dan Estep and Reba Lane, and grew up in Big Stone Gap, VA with her late adopted

mother, Georgia Yost. Betty served people in need as an LPN. Along with her husband Walter, she is survived by four children, Amanda (Ryan) Bedinghaus, Anthony "Tony" (Alisha) Lester, Wesley (Cassandra "Cassie") Lester and Teresa "Nikki" Lester; seven grandchildren, Kenneth Lester, Kaleb Lester, Corey Lester-Johnson, Kadi Lester, Sophie Lester, Kadyn Lester and Jocelyn Bedinghaus; and three siblings, Brenda Rucker, Becky Doyle, and James Estep. Besides her parents, she was preceded in death by two siblings, Charlotte Long, and Bobby Estep.



**39th Engineer Battalion Alumni  
2025 Annual Reunion  
Sheraton Metairie-New Orleans Hotel  
4 Galleria Blvd., Metairie, LA 70001**

**Payment Deadline: August 15, 2025**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ for name badge \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/Guest name \_\_\_\_\_ for name badge \_\_\_\_\_

Unit and Years in country \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency contact & Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Registration fee: \_\_\_\_\_ \$50.00 member \_\_\_\_\_ \$45.00 Spouse/Guest Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(Registration includes member gift, hospitality supplies, Meet/Greet, beverages & snacks)



**Member Gift:** (Member shirt is free / Spouse shirt is \$25)

Sizes: Black Long-sleeve Polo Shirt XS - S - M - LG - XL - 2XL - 3XL - 4XL (circle one)

**Spouse Black Long Sleeve Polo Shirt (\$25):**

Sizes: XS - S - M - LG - XL - 2XL - 3XL - 4XL (circle one if ordering) Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Special requests for beverages or snacks? \_\_\_\_\_

**9/18 WWII Museum and Plantation Tour:** \$45.00/person \_\_\_\_\_ number attendees Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**9/20 Banquet:** \$55.00/person \_\_\_\_\_ number attendees Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Menu Choices:** (Choose one per person)

**1. Tournedos of Beef** (Seared Beef Tenderloin Medallions with Madeira Demi-Glace) \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Chicken en Croute** (Boneless Breast of Chicken baked in Puff Pastry  
Mushroom Duxelles, Tarragon Cream Sauce) \_\_\_\_\_

**Menu Selection includes Soup, Salad, Starch, Vegetables, Rolls and Butter, Iced Tea, Regular and Decaf Coffee with 39th Engineer Sheet Cake for dessert.**

**Total enclosed** (min. deposit required to hold all selected events **\$100/or pay in full**) Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**(Fully refundable if canceled prior to 19 August)**

If paying by credit card: Circle one: VISA MasterCard Discover American Express

# \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ 3-digit Code on Back of Card: \_\_\_\_\_

American Express 4-Digit Code on Front of Card \_\_\_\_\_

Describe any special needs (i.e., room amenities, mobility issues, dietary considerations for banquet, etc.)

Arriving via (check one) \_\_\_\_\_ driving \_\_\_\_\_ flying (Airline \_\_\_\_\_)

**Mail Reservation Form and payment to:**

**Diane Helser  
941 W. Rio Guaymas  
Green Valley, AZ 85614**

**MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: 39th ENG BN  
OR E-MAIL TO: diane\_helser@yahoo.com**

# JOIN US FOR THESE EXCITING TOURS



On Thursday, our first stop is the WWII Museum in New Orleans. This is a HUGE display of WWII memorabilia. We will arrive around 9:30

and have scheduled our visit for 4 hours. We're not sure if that's long enough for everyone, but that's what Friday is for. If you'd like to eat lunch, they have two restaurants – the American Sector Restaurant and the Soda Shop. We return to the hotel at 4:30 pm, so we highly suggest you grab something at the museum.



After the museum, we head to the Destrehan Plantation, which was a working plantation back in the 1800's.

We will have two hours there to learn about life when the big plantations were run as a business.

On Friday, you are on your own to visit the Aquarium, the French Quarter, the Preservation Hall (which opens at 5:00 pm) in the French Quarter, schedule your own Airboat Tour or Flat-Bottom Boat tour, or many of the other options available in the area.

## 2025 39TH ENGINEER ALUMNI ASSN TENTATIVE ITINERARY

<b>Sun-Mon</b> Early arrivals <b>Sep 14-15</b>	<b>Fri</b> 6:30-10:30am Breakfast <b>Sep 19</b> Free Day - Visit area attractions on your own 10:00am Hospitality room open all day Dinner on your own
<b>Tue</b> Officer arrivals <b>Sep 16</b> 10:00am Exec Board Meeting	<b>Sat</b> 6:30-10:30am Breakfast <b>Sep 20</b> 10:00am General membership meeting in Hospitality room 5:00pm Social Hour Cash Bar (Hospitality room closes during banquet) 6:00pm Banquet and Cash Bar 7:00pm Blue Bull presentation (Hospitality room opens after banquet) Raffles/Silent Auction Winners announced in Hospitality room
<b>Wed</b> 6:30-10:30am Breakfast <b>Sep 17</b> 10:00am Set up Hospitality room 12:00pm Registration-Hospitality room 5:00pm Meet & Greet Pizza Party	<b>Sun</b> 6:30-10:30am Breakfast <b>Sep 21</b> 8:00am Clean-up and Farewell in Hospitality room
<b>Thur</b> 6:30-8:30am Breakfast <b>Sep 18</b> 9:00am Load buses for WWII Museum Lunch on your own at Museum 1:30pm Load buses for Plantation Tour 3:30pm Load buses-return to Hotel Dinner on your own	

**Note: Hotel Rooms are available at our discounted rate 3 days prior and 3 days after our Reunion.**

*Any changes will be announced during the reunion.*