

# ON THE MOVE



## A Ghost of My Past

by Lou G. Nelson

“... like most Army Brats, we said goodbye, knowing we’d probably never see one another again.”

In the summer of 1987, in the backwoods training areas of Ft. Stewart, Georgia, I spotted a “Ghost of my Past”.

My name is Lou Nelson. I attended Toul American High School, in Toul, France for 7th and 8th grade in the years 1961-1963 just preceding DeGaulle’s decision to ask the Americans to leave. One of my best friends at the time was Lonnie Edenfield. He sported a level blond crew-cut and laughing eyes; I had (and still have) red hair and blue. We were both short guys, and we liked the same girls (one of whom gave me my first kiss).



Lou G. Nelson

When the convoys left, moving entire units and families to Germany, Lonnie and I were separated, and like most Army Brats, we said good-bye, knowing we’d probably never see one another again. My family ended up in Mannheim, Germany How wrong I was.

We left Germany in the summer of 1965 to Ft. Benning, Georgia, I finished high school in 1968, and joined the Army. As the time went by, I left the Army, went to college on the G.I. Bill, and re-entered with a commission in the Signal Corps in 1976. After a series of assignments, I ended up at Ft. Gillem, Georgia, a little known post in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. I was a Signal Branch Assistance Trainer, providing active duty support and training assistance to Army Reserve and Army National Guard units in the Georgia/Florida area. That job took me to Ft. Stewart for the annual summer camp period of two weeks that each reserve and guard units do every year.

It was on an extremely hot summer day, plagued by the legendary sand fleas and mosquitoes, that we were sitting under an oak tree covered with Spanish Moss, trying to get a bit of relief. I watched a unit begin to set up a bivouac area, but a head bobbing across the field about 75 meters from me caught my eye, and a brief flash of deja vu flashed in my mind. A blond crew-cut on a short guy in camo fatigues. Not possible, I thought, but I hollered anyway. The head turned, we looked at each other over the distance, and the mutual recognition was instantaneous.

Twenty-four years after being separated from Lonnie, here we were, in the most unlikely spot, both in uniform, he a lieutenant in the Georgia ARNG, and me, an Active Reservist Captain. Turns out, he was a full-time city administrator in Middle Georgia, living just an hour away from my home in Atlanta. We talked for a bit, then events overtook our reunion, and we had to “finish the mission”. We saw each other later for the obligatory “remember whens”, and then got together a couple times after the summer camp period. I haven’t seen Lonnie in 10 years now. I retired from active duty as an LTC in 1995. I suspect, if we ever spotted each other in a crowded mall, parade field, or a ball park, we’d have no trouble with recognition even half-way across the park. (P.S. Rikki Gloria C. P., I still think about that kiss! Lonnie and I talked about you and Judy).

Editor’s note: Lou Nelson now lives in Stone Mountain, Georgia.

## Made in Japan

by Robert Lester

It usually starts with ‘So, where are you from?’, as if this somehow becomes the basis for how much validity to attribute to my opinions. When my initial rambling explanation proves insufficient, I am often given another chance . . . Well, where did you go to high school?’

I try and explain that in actuality I went to 3 different high schools, but this only serves to create more confusion on the part of the listener. I am then given a final opportunity for redemption ‘Ok, so where were you BORN?’

This question usually has a clearly distinguishable edge to it, as if the listener has tired of my cute charade and wants to know dammit, if I am to be treated with import, or dismissed as some left-wing liberal

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This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 1.

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# Welcome to This Special FREE Issue

Greetings fellow Military Brat! This is a “Best of” issue designed to give you a sense of what the publication is about and what you have to look forward to as a subscriber of the only publication devoted to Stateside and Overseas Military Brats and their unique heritage.

Below, are editor’s notes from both Marc Curtis and Vann Baker, which will give you some background on how this publication came into being.

In 1994 I stumbled into a new forum on CompuServe for Military Brats. This was the first time since my dad retired in 1963 that I had any knowledge that there were other people who had the same feelings of being disconnected from the civilian population, and wanted desperately to find kindred souls.



Marc Curtis

Around the same time I “accidentally” found a book by Mary Edwards Wertsch called *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress*. The book and the forum lit a candle inside me that eventually caused the creation of the **Military-Brats Registry** web site.

Since launching the web site in 1997 I have watched the Registry grow to more than 50,000 registered Brats. I receive e-mail every day from those who are thrilled that they have a place to search for their friends. The stories they have told me are very touching, and very exciting, but they really need to be shared with everyone.

Vann Baker and I agreed that a printed newsletter would be a terrific thing to do for our “family.” Thus, this first edition of many to come is in your hands! It is our sincerest intent that these newsletters are filled with as much information as we can possibly fit into each edition, as well as articles of interest written by other Military Brats.

There was an attempt years ago by “Military Brats of America” (I’m still a card-carrying member) to produce a newsletter and build an organization for Brats. Mike Adams was the creator and has become a good friend over the last year. His vision was grand, the timing just wasn’t quite right.

The time has come now however to pull together the resources that are available.

Marc Curtis  
Redlands, California

I consider myself a cyber pioneer – I’ve been “online” since I bought my first computer in 1988 and realized early on that e-mail and BBSs (Bulletin Board Systems) were more than a fad—they had incredible potential for making the world smaller.



Vann Baker

Like Marc, I had discovered America Online long before anyone took them seriously. And like many of the computer bulletin board services I called regularly, I found a connection with my past through several of the online conference groups.

As the World Wide Web began to emerge as a global information system, I saw it as a way to connect and to build community “online”. **Military Brats Online** was started because, at that time, late in 1994 there really wasn’t an online resource (BBS or web site) devoted to Military Brats, so I decided to create one.

At first MBO was simply a number of military-related links, but as the months passed and turned into years, the e-mail I received over and over again was how much many visitors missed the things that were a part of their growing up as a Brat. I also found the web site growing in the areas of **Announcements** and **Alumni Groups** wishing to connect to fellow alumni.

The **Military Brat Life** area with stories and articles has touched so many visitors lives, helping Brats everywhere to reconnect with their own experiences.

In 1997, Marc and I connected online, then by phone. We began exchanging ideas and more ideas. Both of our web sites compliment each other and by forming an alliance, we now offer Military Brats everywhere links, content and connections to other Brats.

We sincerely hope you enjoy *On The Move*. We welcome editorial contributions—articles, ideas or news relevant to fellow Military Brats.

Vann Baker  
Duluth, Georgia

## Credits

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Vann Baker & Marc Curtis

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For editorial contributions, announcements, news and information of interest to Military Brats, e-mail your information to:

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You may mail articles and story copy on disk, along with photographs to:

On The Move  
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For submission guidelines (articles and photograph), please go to: [www.military-brats.com/otm](http://www.military-brats.com/otm) or e-mail Vann Baker at [vann@militarybrats.com](mailto:vann@militarybrats.com) or write Vann Baker at the address above.

### Contributors

Special thanks to Lou G. Nelson, Pat Riley Blackwell, Richard P. Roberts, Mitchell Bell, Robert Lester, Anica Smith, Jessi Beavers and Vann Baker for contributing to this special issue.

### Subscription Information

*On The Move* is \$20 for four issues and includes U.S. Postage only. (See page 12 for ordering information).

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# Searching for Roots

by Anica Smith

I have read many of the stories on Military Brats Online and as I read, through tears and laughter, a flood of memories came rushing at me. I began my military brat life when I was eight years old. My stepdad was in the Army, and as I grew to love him as my father, I grew to hate the military.

Unlike many of the authors on this list, I hated every move, because I needed my friends. Maybe it was because of what I had just come from, or maybe it was because I didn't know how strong I really was, but every move broke my heart. I knew that I would never be able to keep in touch with my old friends, and making new friends was hard for me, because I was extremely shy.

Somehow I made it through, but the whole time I vowed never to join the military, or marry anyone who was in the military. It hurt too much to leave. I even broke it off with my high school sweetheart because he joined the Air Force. It was the toughest thing that I ever did. Just when I was about to go to him, I prayed, and God led me in a different direction. That's when I knew that I would be o.k., and so would he.

Someone once said that a military brat has a hard time keeping in touch with people, and that is so

true. After 18 years of being away from my grandmother, I am just now keeping in touch with her again, and it is like a gift from God, but I really have to work at it.

My husband and I have been married for about 6-1/2 years and we have lived in 7 or 8 homes already. Each time I said were staying put for awhile, and each time we have moved. We finally bought a house, so maybe we can make some roots. I am committed to giving my daughter, and any other children we have, a place to call home, because the most awkward question that I get asked is, "Where are you from?"

Don't get me wrong, I have learned some valuable lessons, have seen many things, and met some very wonderful people from being an army brat, but I really didn't like moving all the time. I hope that one day I can settle down and call someplace home because as I sit here in the house that we bought a year and a half ago, I am thinking about the next house we will live in.

Does it ever stop, the need to keep on moving?

*This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 1.*

"My stepdad was in the Army, and as I grew to love him as my father, I grew to hate the military."

"I hope that one day I can settle down and call someplace home."

## Find Your Military Brat Classmates with the

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*"I always knew I was different...now I know I'm not alone!" (Marty Condiff--Military Brat)*

The **Military Brats Registry!** is THE online Brat database. If you are looking for someone or want to help your friends to find you, be sure to utilize this great Internet resource.

[www.military-brats.com](http://www.military-brats.com)

# Atlanta Area Military Brats Get- Together -fun and more fun!

by Pat Riley Blackwell

The Atlanta Area Military Brats Get-Together hosted by Brenda and Jim Garth on Saturday, August 15, 1998 was a great party!

One couldn't help but break out in a big grin at the "MP" standing by the "base gate" as the Military Brats entered the beautifully landscaped, poolside gathering area. At a closer look, the MP's body had been fashioned in wood by Jim's handy dandy tools. Sporting fatigues, boots, hat, and gloves, and complete with an "imitation" pistol in a holster, we all had to agree that the rouge on the cheeks and lipstick on the lips was a clear indication that "this man's Army's not what it used to be!

Camouflage parachute material adorned part of the fence, served as a canopy over the food and drink area, and covered various tables. Wine was seen cooling in helmets and ammunition boxes. Soft drinks filled another ammunition box. Red, white and blue decorations carried out the American Military Brats theme, and to complete it all, posters of advertisement for various branches of the service were seen on the walls throughout the area.

Silver colored plastic plates and bowls imitated the metal of the "mess kit". Even napkins of various



Pat Riley Blackwell

types of Army drab and camaflouge helped complete the thematic decorations. The "piece of resistance" was the 50's, 60's, 70's music played in the background.

Approximately 20 people gathered to celebrate their Military Brats heritage . . . some from as far away as Augusta, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama and Cleveland, Tennessee representing all levels of schooling and several decades from across the USA, Asia and Europe. What a "melting pot" of friendly people!

It was obvious that as Military Brats, we never meet strangers - we meet friends we've not seen before.

Chips, dips, and salads brought by the guests were served with the delicious hamburgers and hot dogs which were prepared by Jim's brother-in-law, Steve. Everyone saved room for the scrumptious desserts also brought by guests.

"There was lots of reminiscing, memories, questions, revelations and laughter."



(Left to right): Dave (a friend of Martha Reed), Angela Owens, Martha Reed, Brenda Ezell-Garth, Bobbie Joyner Jenkins.

Continued on page 10

## Operation Footlocker



What is green, covered with stickers and filled with memories and icons which only a Military Brat can understand? Operation Footlocker.

We've all grown up with footlockers, but Operation Footlocker doesn't travel with one person from destination to another—it travels to brat reunions, events and military bases as a mobile memory project.

Operation Footlocker is a grassroots effort to celebrate the shared cultural identity of Military Brats and grew out a discussion in the spring of 1996 on the Military Veterans of America site within America Online. Mary Edwards Wertsch, author of the book *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress*, and one of the participants in the discussion, first conceived the idea of taking a real footlocker and sending it around the country as a way of gathering memorabilia and bringing brats together. Reta Jones Nicholson provided the first footlocker and was the catalyst who brought Operation Footlocker from discussion to reality.

Operation Footlocker is a volunteer effort and requests can be made to have the footlocker shipped to for brat events or sharing brat history with the general public.

For more information on appearances or to bring the Footlocker to your event, visit the Operation Footlocker web site at: <http://www.tckworld.com/opfoot>

This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 1.

# A B-52 Mid-Air Collision

by Richard P. Roberts

On September 8, 1958, two B-52 collided about 1,000' above the eastern approach to the runway at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Washington. The time of the crash was about 1730 hrs (5:30 PM) Pacific Time.

From two crews of nine men each, only two crew members survived – a tailgunner and a weapons officer. Sixteen men joined the “Ghost Squadron” that day! Tomorrow will mark the 30th anniversary of that tragedy.

I was a witness to that mid-air collision and I will never forget it!

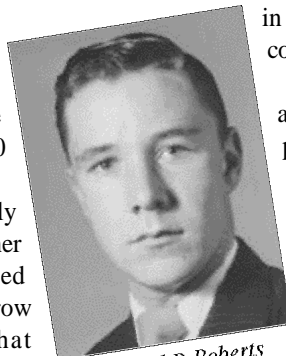
An Air Force Brat since WWII with a flying father who was fortunate enough to survive flying in three wars, I have always loved airplanes and flying (I have a private pilots license). Of course our family was always aware that the Base Chaplain could knock on our door at any time to inform us that my mother was now a widow – thank God it never happened! Several of my friends had lost fathers to anti-aircraft, fighters, groundfire and accidents, but I was a lucky one.

On September 7, 1958, the day before, we drove through Fairchild Air Force Base for the first time. My father had just been transferred from Turner AFB in Albany, Georgia, and was to report on the 10th. He had been flying the KB-50's and KC-97's; this was to be his first experience as an inflight refueling technician (boom operator) in jets – the KC-135.

Since there was no room at the base guest house, we had to rent a motel room at Airway Heights, a little community at the end of the base. The next afternoon I was watching television near the door of the motel room when I heard a truck make an emergency stop. I stooped over and looked out the door just in time to watch the planes collide. I knew what was going to happen and I screamed for my father, as though I thought he could have stopped it. Then they hit!

There was the crunch, followed by an explosion and fire. The nose (from the wing forward) on one plane fell off while the other plane slammed into the ground. The bomber with the missing nose became tail heavy and started to climb with her eight engines screaming like banshees, then stalled and fell off on it's left wing. It hit the ground with engines at full power.

My next thought was the crews. I counted eight parachutes, seven of them were on fire. The 'chutes had opened automatically when the men were blown out. My father, in the meantime, told us to stay put and he drove the car to the site – when he got there to check three men, he threw up and was back at the motel with-



Richard P. Roberts

in ten minutes. There was simply nothing he could do.

Needing to do something, my brother and I spent hours searching the area for the papers that had drifted down, many of which were marked: “Secret” or “Top-Secret”. These we turned over to the Air Police.

The survivors? Well, the tailgunner had heard over the intercom, “We’re going to hit!” He ejected with no injuries. Ironically, he was the sole survivor of a B-52 crash the month before which had killed the base commander and six other crewman. (He quit flying after the collision). After he landed in his parachute, he went into the wreckage and pulled out a Major, the Weapons Officer which were the only other survivors. The Major spent over a year in the hospital and although he retained his mental faculties, he spoke and walked in slow motion. I had met him about two years after the crash.

There! After 30 years, I have finally written the story down! Writing it has gotten a bit off my chest, but it is also a way of paying tribute to the eighteen flyers aboard those bombers – the 16 killed, the tailgunner who risked his life to save others by pulling a severely injured crewmember from a burning aircraft and the weapons officer who would never be the same. At 8:30 PM Eastern Time tomorrow (September 8), I want to be alone in my thoughts, thinking of them.

The cause of the crash? It was quite simply, Ground Control Approach (GCA). GCA cleared a plane which had been shooting touch-and-goes to land. GCA “thought” the other plane was ten miles out and cleared that one too (it was actually less than half that distance). Thus, both planes tried to land on the same runway at the same time and it didn't work.

The scapegoat . . . was a 1st Lieutenant, a fighter pilot, attached to Fairchild who had been assigned as “Tower Officer” and was on a legitimate coffee break in the Base Operations Cafeteria at the time of the crash. A fighter pilot, who knew nothing of control tower operations, was court-martialed and drummed out of the service for an accident of which he was totally innocent. The responsibility, first, was with GCA, the control tower operators and pilots/copilots of both aircraft.

This is but a small portion of my memories as a Military Brat. My thanks to the reader for bearing with me.

*Richard P. Roberts lives in Binghamton, NY, SFC, U.S. Army (Ret.).*

“I was a witness to that collision and I will never forget!”

“There was the crunch, followed by an explosion and fire.”

*This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 1.*

# Creating a Local Military Brat Group

By Vann Baker

A few years ago, I was planning to attend the Frankfurt American High School School Closing/Reunion, but things didn't work out as planned and I missed connecting in person with other Alumni and fellow brats.

While Brat events are happening all over the country for many Brats, getting to a reunion or an out of state gathering is very difficult if not impossible.

It occurred to me a little over a year ago that living in a city such a large city as Atlanta, there must be more than a few Military Brats nearby. I was right.

What I did was to invite all branches of service and any school affiliation to come and meet with other brats, to reconnect, talk and rekindle old memories. And I discovered you didn't have to go the same school in order to identify with other members of the group.

## Getting the word out:

I had the advantage of using my Military Brats Online web site to publicize the group. You can also use your local paper or weekly publications such as Penny Saver and other publications, many of which often have a group or organization category and may offer free advertising. Run an ad for a few weeks and keep a list. You might also consider submitting an announcement to Military Brats Online at ([www.militarybrats.com](http://www.militarybrats.com)) about your group forming or use the Military-Brat Registry ([www.military-brats.com](http://www.military-brats.com)).

Your paper might be interested in your quest to connect with other Military Brats—this may just be the story of the week for the local news editor.

As people call in be sure to let everyone know that you're in the initial outreach stage and would like to

suggest a get-together in the next few weeks. Be sure to get everyone's e-mail address in order to make informing everyone of the get-together date, place and time.

## Where should you have an event?

Consider a restaurant which has a meeting room or a banquet room area if you end up with a lot of potential guests. Know that even if you have a large list, some will not be able to make the get together because of schedule conflicts, work and so forth, and even when you have a RSVP from your group, a few will cancel at the last minute.

Our first gathering attracted about 12 Brats and some drove several hours in order to meet other Brats. We met at a restaurant which was quite fitting the occasion, the **57 Fighter Squadron**, which overlooks the Peachtree DeKalb Airport.

The next couple of events were also at restaurants and the most recent Gathering (see Pat's article on page 4), was a pot-luck dinner at Brenda and Jim Garth's house. I think the pot-luck gathering is the best since it allows for a more relaxed atmosphere, and people are more apt to move around to mix and mingle than when a guest at a restaurant.

## Organizing your Brat Group

The Atlanta Military Brat Group is not a formal organization—yet. While one part of me wants to create a more formal organization, the other part of me says, "keep it simple . . . keep it fun." If you would like more information on forming your own group, e-mail me at: [vann@militarybrats.com](mailto:vann@militarybrats.com) or write me at P.O. Box 956541, Duluth, GA30095-6541

"It occurred to me a little over a year ago that living in such a large city as Atlanta, there must more than a few Military Brats nearby."

*This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 1.*

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## Made in Japan

*(Continued from page 1)*

intent on playing some deranged version of 20 questions. 'Japan' I reply, often pausing for affect, and always without further explanation, taking a bit of glee as the eyes of my listener glaze over and their eyes roll back into their head.

Over the years, I have modified this linguistic ballet, and now more often than not, I choose to answer 'West Virginia'. 'Oh really', asks my listener, 'how long did you live there?'. 'Oh, I never have actually lived there, I reply,' and saying not another word, I turn abruptly and walk away, like some vaulted Zen master leaving his student with a life-altering riddle to solve. And maybe I have . . .

*This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 1.*

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# Finding Ashley Rome

By Mitchell Bell

"We all grew up together and well, I fell in love with a girl named Ashley Rome."

My name is Mitchell Bell and my story is probably the same as many of you out there. My family was stationed in NAB Little Creek VA. from 1971 to 1978. This was during the middle of the Vietnam cut backs and the Navy didn't PCS anyone in our neighborhood. We all grew up together and well, I fell in love with a girl named Ashley Rome. She was my 6th grade sweet heart (unknown to her) and the girl I always thought about.

My family moved up to Washington DC in 1978 and I kept in touch with a couple of friends back in Little Creek but everyone moved at the same time.

I lost track of Ashley in 78 but never forgot about the girl who would go roller skating with me on the weekends. During college I started to think about the old crowd and what happened to them. Especially Ashley. So I called down to my elementary school in VA. Beach and asked to speak with the principle. When I got him on the line and explained that I was trying to get ahold of a classmate from 9 years in the past, he thought I was crazy. But told me he would check into it. About 2 weeks later, he mailed me the best letter of my life. "Mitchell, sorry I couldn't find out more, but her Dad's name was LCDR. (blank) Rome. Good luck in your quest."

With this information I went to the Navy Annex in Arlington VA. and found out that he was retired. So I went to the Retired branch. The lady pulled him up on the computer, and said "Yep, here he is". "Great!!" I replied "Can you give me his address and phone number?" She just kind of looked at me and said "I'm really sorry but we're not allowed to give that information out to the public."

I was crushed having come this far so I asked her "O.K., then can you just tell me what city he retired to and I'll take my chances with the white pages?"

She looked around and whispered "Elvis is buried there" and then winked. "Good luck" she said as I left the office.

I called Memphis information and asked for Mr. Rome's number. He was there and now I had the number. I hesitated on calling, wondering if she would remember after all these years. My sister pushed me to make the call, so I did.

Her mom told me she was at a small school in Tenn. and here is her number. I dialed that number and was greeted with a really sweet, soft and somewhat familiar voice. "Hello, Ashley?" I asked. She said yes and then I went on. "Ashley, this is Mitchell Bell." and stayed silent for a couple of seconds. She was quiet for a minute and then said "Mitchell Bell, Mitchell Bell from VA. Beach?" I was so happy that she remembered after all these years. I explained that I had always thought about the great times we all had back in the MOQ area as kids and wanted to track her down. We talked for around an hour on all the kids we remembered. This was in 1987. We continued to keep in contact after that.

I ended up joining the Marines and becoming a pilot in 1989 and as I drove to my next duty station down in Corpus Christi TX, I stop by to see her in Houston where she worked for Exxon. To me she hadn't changed in the eleven years since we had last held hands during the couples skate at D&J's skating rink.

Sorry to say that we never got married but, we have stayed in contact and always will. That is my tale.



Mitchell Bell

"I hesitated on calling, wondering if she would remember after all these years."

*This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 1.*

## Camp Chitose, Hokkaido, Japan

Ron Troxel explains, "This is the elementary school there, grades 1 through 8. As you can see, the school was in a quonset hut. The temperature outside was about zero and there was three feet of snow on the ground."

*I've heard from several of the kids in this photo, but I'd like to hear from more. Maybe if this is published in your newsletter, it will get some response." roytroxel@erols.com*

*This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 2.*



# Reunion Announcements

## Cristobal High School Class of 1961 Reunion

**Date:** August 9, 2001  
**Location:** Orlando, FL USA

**Details:** Please contact Robert Geddes for more info on the Cristobal High School class of 1961 Reunion in Orlando, Fl. from Aug. 8th thru the 12th, 2001

**E-Mail:** chiefbob@fidalgo.net  
**Phone:** 360-299-1483

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## Goose Bay High School, Labrador, Canada

**Date:** July Select Day, 2001  
**Location:** Biloxi, MS USA

**Details:** Reunion in the works for July or August 2001 in Biloxi, MS -- always looking for alumni (1956-1976 AF years), teachers and parents from Goose Bay - contact Georgette (Bullock)

**Web Site:** www.goosebaybrats.org  
**E-Mail:** gdoxon@hotmail.com

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## Osterholz High School Full School Reunion

**Date:** June 2001  
**Location:** Pensacola, FL USA

**Details:** This will be a reunion for anyone whom attended Osterholz American High School. Please if you are interested email me. Please include your name and phone number; this will be solely used for contact purposes only.

**Contact:** Michelle heard  
**E-Mail:** sisbear927@aol.com

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## Mannheim American High School - Classes of the Mid-1980's Las Vegas 2001 Reunion

**Date:** June 16, 2001  
**Location:** Las Vegas, NV USA

**Details:** Tentatively set for the weekend of June 16, 2001 (but is subject to change). Event is for MAHS classes from mid to late 1980's but all MAHS alumni are welcome. Class of 1984 encouraged to participate. Contact Sharon Osborne Cherry for more information.

**E-Mail:** renellie@aol.com

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## Poitiers American High School-All Classes Reunion

**Date:** May Select Day, 2002  
**Location:** New Orleans, LA USA

**Details:** The next reunion in New Orleans in 2002 will be our 6th reunion for all alumni who attended Poitiers. You do not need to be a graduate of the school to attend. Contact: Peggy Anderso.

**E-Mail:** pander3575@gulftel.com

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# A Chance Encounter on a 737

by Tony Higgins

Last night as we descended into Oakland I struck up a conversation with the passenger next to me. When I mentioned that I had lived in NJ when I was in high school she asked me if that was where I was from.

I replied, "No, I was an Army brat growing up." She said, "So was I." We began to share experiences of military life. I told her I still remembered my dad's serial number 30 years later. She said, "How could you not remember it." You always had to know it, whether at the hospital when getting a medical exam or getting your shot records updated or checking out a book at the Post Library. As we talked she told me of life in high school in Germany.

She told me that she had lived near Camp Casey, Korea where my dad had served. When I asked what year she graduated she told me, "1968." I replied, "So did I." She introduced herself as Elaine and told me about this wonderful web site she had discovered for Military brats. As we got off of the plane we exchanged business cards and E-Mail addresses. As we departed I told her I felt as if I had met a part of my past, my roots. She said that she felt the same way.

Was our meeting just coincidental? How differ-

ent was it from the "re-meetings" with previous acquaintances we experienced as kids and even as adults? As I eagerly searched for Military Brats Online and read through the contributions I suddenly realized the bond we all share. Individually we saw ourselves as unique in the context of civilian life, often feeling like we didn't fit somehow. But together we share a heritage of military life, for many of us meaning moving often and changing schools. We learned diversity first hand before it was a buzzword of the '90s.

It was not a formalized course, just a way of life as we continually found ourselves in an ever changing mix of nationalities, races, religions and social places as various people left and others joined us. We are family! Someone once said, "You can choose your friends, but you're stuck with your family!" I don't think we need to view that as a negative. We should all be proud of our military experiences, always focusing on the positive ones that have contributed to making us better citizens.

Thank you, Elaine, for telling me about Military Brats Online and the Military Brats Registry. Already I have located someone I knew from high school at Pemberton.

I'll be checking back regularly.

"I told her I still remembered my dad's serial number 30 years later."

*This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 2.*



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# Daddy's Away

By Jessi Beavers

My family lived in a rented house in Navarre Beach Florida. The house was large with three bedrooms, a spacious kitchen, a living room combined with a dining room, and a family room. My sister Amber, twelve years old at the time, shared a bedroom with me. I was just nine. Across the hall, my sister Dakota, age three, had her bedroom. My mother, Debbie, age thirty-one, stayed at home with us kids while my father worked. My father, thirty years old, worked twenty minutes from our home at Hurlbert Field Air Force Base.

The day the continuous sadness began for us was the first day of school. I was starting the fourth grade. We had to wake up very early to take my dad to his work place where he, along with other men would be picked up by a bus and transported to the flight line. Their destination was Saudi Arabia, to participate in the Gulf War, better known as Desert Storm. That morning was a sad day for many families, especially my own. It was drizzling, not only rain, but also tears.

As the men left their families to board the bus, a tiny, three-year-old little girl ran after them calling, "Daddy, daddy." He stopped, turned around, bent down and picked her up. He hugged her and said, "I will miss you my baby," then returned her to the arms of his wife. The families being left behind cried at this little episode.

That little girl was my sister Dakota. I, myself, was trying to hold back the tears and not show emotion, but that sight was too heart breaking. My father hated to leave us for fear that something might happen and he would not be there to protect us. The memory of that day still brings tears to my eyes. It was hard to deal with the absence of my father, but as time went on it became easier to accept. One thought that helped was knowing his letters were coming. We would also keep reminding ourselves that he would be home soon.

The months slowly passed by, and with them so did the holidays. First there was Halloween, a time

when we would dress up and dad usually took us trick-or-treating. That year there was no dad, so mom took us with some family friends. Then came Thanksgiving, a time to give thanks for what we have. Since I had a nine year old mind, I saw nothing to give thanks for. My dad was not there and I was not complete. The next holiday was Christmas, the hardest of them all. On Christmas Day my father telephoned from Saudi. I spoke to him very few times while he was gone and that day was not one of them. This was because I felt angry with him for leaving. I did not understand that it was not his fault. I also knew that if I did talk to him that it would only make it worse. After my mother got off the phone, she walked into the living room, and then slid down the wall and cried. My mother's parents were there, and her dad took her and calmed her down. Not many times have I seen my parents cry, and to a young child it is a hard sight to watch. That Christmas still haunts my dreams.

For seven and a half months I cried myself to sleep every night. Every night I would listen to the song "Daddy When Will You Be Home." Every day I wore a locket with his picture in it.

The day we thought he might be coming home I went to the state capital, but he did not return that day. So after seven and a half long months, the day finally arrived to do to the flight line. My mother had known the day before he arrived, and she told us after she knew for sure that he was coming. Words really can not express the emotions that I felt that day. My mother cried as they hugged, but this time they were tears of joy and relief.

A week after he returned, his mother and two sisters came to welcome him home. To this day I never take my father or the love he has to give to me for granted. In life I never truly appreciated what I had until it was taken away. Fortunately, I got it back and I will now cherish it throughout my life.

"The memory of that day still brings tears to my eyes."

*This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 1.*

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## Atlanta Area Military Brats Get-Together

*(Continued from page 4)*

There was lots of reminiscing, memories, questions, revelations and laughter. It could have happened "just yesterday" as recollections of by-gone Military Brat days were recalled. Where have all the years gone?

Kudos to Brenda and Jim for having the courage to invite the Military Brats to their "home base" and for hosting a great event!

If you live anywhere in the general Atlanta area, plan on joining the group for the next get-together. You'll be glad you did!

**Editor's Note:** For a related article on how the Atlanta Military Brat group got together, please see *Creating A Local Brat Group* on page 6.

*This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 1.*

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# Once Upon Our Yesterdays

by Phil Digristina

There always seemed to be an urgency in my young life. The need to live a lifetime every day of my childhood. The reason was simple, everything could end at any moment. Such was the life of an Air Force Brat. Too many times my dad would walk in the door at the end of the day and announce that we were being transferred. At that instant everything that was “home” disappeared like a wisp of smoke.

This notion that we “Military Brats” shared some kind of privileged existence was sheer nonsense. The world was NOT our own private oyster.

From my own life experience I was the perennial new kid on the block having just said goodbye to friends that I knew I would never see again.

By the time I was a sophomore in high school, I was entering my third-count them-third high school. This is not to mention the 9 other schools I attended from K to 8th grade.

The day Northern Burlington Country Regional High School opened its doors on September 7, 1960, somewhere in my heart I hoped that this would be the last time I would have to endure the pain of endless goodbyes. Someone must have been listening. From that every moment on my life changed and actually began all at the same time.

There were hundreds of “Brats” whose dads had recently been stationed at McGuire AFB, NJ, just like



mine, who came to school that day and along with the locals, mostly farmers kids, we established a bond that has lasted even today.

Our first four graduating classes, 63, 64, 65, 66, became as close as any family and the “roots” I so longed for finally became reality. I met the love of my life and future wife and my best friends in life at Northern Burlington.

What might seem unimportant to most became a treasured moment when after years away, my family and I moved back to Columbus, NJ, not a half mile from the high school and eventually watched our two sons graduate from the same high school as both my wife and I. As I said, it doesn't sound important in the scheme of things but it established the continuity in my life that I never had growing up.

The Air Force was how my Dad took care of us. What I believe he never understood was how difficult it was for me, an only child, never really having a place to call home. Now after nearly 40 years life has come full circle. The love of my life has been my wife for nearly 33 years and our two sons have made us very proud.

I write this because I know that you who are and were “Military Brats” will understand. In a way we are all brothers and sisters cut from the same mold. Because of this we share a unique bond forever.

“Too many times my dad would walk in the door at the end of the day and announce we were being transferred.”

*This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 2.*

## Blast from the Past

*Does the image below bring back any memories?*

This A.Y.A. Center card comes to us courtesy of Keith Bradshaw, (e-mail: bradshaw@utdallas.edu).

A.Y.A.s kept most of us off the street and gave us a place to hang out after school and on weekends.--Editor

*This article appeared in Volume 1 Number 2.*



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