

Silver Jackets Meeting September 17, 2019

Georgia Tech Police Headquarters

Minutes

Members Attending (17): John Balsam (GTRI), Kathy Tomajko (Library), Susan Keenan (Language Institute), CA Johnston Folds (Language Institute) & her mother, Helena Mitchell (IAC), Mary Duncan (Development), Ian Garland (Physics), Steve Cseplo (Facilities), Luzette Cseplo (guest), Nannette Dooley (Library), Pat Davis (College of Sciences), David Williamson (Transportation), Sandra Thornton (Public Policy), Jim Marks (GTRI), Walter Allen (Purchasing), Wayne Book (ME)

Business Meeting: John Balsam, President called the meeting to order. He introduced one of our hosts at the new GT Police Headquarters: Assistant Police Chief Frank Trammer, and our speaker, Donna Rowe.

Program: Assistant Police Chief Trammer gave us an overview of the GT Police Department and its headquarters: 101 sworn police officers and about 2,000 security cameras across campus. He gave us a tour of the first floor of the new Police Headquarters, later joined by GT Police Chief Rob Connelly. We saw the radio/dispatch room, evidence room, fingerprint ID area, one of the bomb-detecting dogs, the locker rooms, and training rooms. It is a topnotch, state-of-the-art, high-tech facility.

Police Chief Connelly reviewed their proposed partnership with the Silver Jackets related to the need for mentors for the many student Capstone and Grand Challenges projects with which the GT Police are involved. More information about this will be forthcoming.

John Balsam, in the absence of Vice President Ed Rondeau, introduced our speaker, Donna Rowe. Donna is a Vietnam War veteran and nurse whose experiences in Vietnam bring a unique perspective of the service of American personnel during this period in American history. She is the first female to be inducted in the Georgia Military Hall of Fame.

Donna explained who the Vietnam veterans are: they came home from war and did much good, working in their communities. She said circumstances make great leaders. She specifically mentioned Georgia Vietnam vets, Max Cleland & Bill Burns. There are 58,320 Vietnam casualties on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, DC. 33,000 of these were 18 and even younger, as they lied about their ages in order to serve. There were misconceptions about Vietnam veterans that they were drug addicts, drop-outs and misfits. They were highly educated in a lot of cases, with masters, bachelors, and associate degrees. The soldiers treated their units as family. PTSD, in many cases, was a result of these soldiers being too young to see their comrades wounded or dying.

Women were not drafted and there were 265,000 women who volunteered to serve in Vietnam. Their average age was 21. There were 11,000 women on the ground and 8 females on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall. Donna's medical unit was comprised of 42 doctors, 39 medics, and she was the RN. In the unit where she served, there were 15 surgical suites. She felt fortunate that she and her late husband, Al Rowe, volunteered together for the Vietnam War. Al received a PhD in Civil Engineering from Georgia Tech and was active on the GT campus for many years.

Donna was involved in one of the 15 stories in a documentary film entitled "In the Shadow of the Blade" (intheshadowoftheblade.com). Donna's was a story of "Baby Kathleen" - Kathleen Epps with whom she was reunited in 2003.

Excerpt from Atlanta Journal Constitution article by Bill Hendrick in May 2011:

“Rowe was on duty in a bloody, busy emergency room on May 15, 1969, in Saigon, and a chopper pilot radioed that he was bringing in a baby, barely alive, that had been found in her dead mother’s arms. Rowe and another Atlanta-area soldier, the late medic Richard Houck, saved the child’s life, going against protocol that required wounded Americans to be treated first. Donna insisted that the baby girl be baptized as she knew it would be cared for in a Catholic orphanage if the baby survived her serious wounds. Rowe named the baby Kathleen, after the Irish ballad “I’ll Take You Home Kathleen,” and the little girl was adopted by a U.S. Navy corpsman. Rowe and the “baby” got together again in 2003. Kathleen Cords Epps is now about 40 and has four children of her own.”

Kathleen had been looking for the soldiers who saved her life since she was 13 years old. Donna showed us a trailer from the documentary. The documentary tells the story of how the “Huey” helicopter saved so many lives in Vietnam. From 1965 to 1973, the Bell UH-1, officially named “Iroquois” was the most common utility helicopter used in Vietnam.

Announcements: the next meeting will be in the GT Police Headquarters Community Room at 10:30 am-12 noon with speaker Steve Nowicki, Emory University, for Part 2 of his Silver Jackets talk in 2018 related to psychology and aging. The November meeting is scheduled for November 12. If you have speaker ideas, contact Ed Rondeau, VP, edrondeau@realestate.gatech.edu. The SJ Holiday Luncheon will be on Tuesday, December 3, at Petite Violette.