

REUNIONS



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Display until July 31, 2013.

VOL 23 NO 4
MAY/JUNE/JULY 2013
\$3/USA

Fairfax County is where it's at ... Especially if you're a brat!

by Dean Miller

Normally, being called a "brat" is not something you'd want to hear. But for the sons and daughters of tens of thousands of American military personnel and foreign service officers stationed overseas, being a military brat or a foreign service brat is a badge of honor. It means you grew up living in different countries, probably moving regularly with your family, getting used to making new friends quickly and easily, learning new languages and absorbing new cultures. You're proud to be a Brat!

Many Brats attended high schools located around the world that were (and are) run by the US government for children of American service members and civilians stationed there. In fact, there are now so many ASA (American School Abroad) alumni groups around the country that they have their own umbrella organization to assist them in organizing and holding reunions: The Overseas Brats, headquartered in Wichita, Kansas (www.overseasbrats.com).

Three Brat alumni groups elected to get together in Fairfax County, Virginia, recently. Fairfax County's proximity to Washington, DC (right across



Kubasaki Brats at the Iwo Jima Memorial.



the Potomac River), makes it a natural location for Brat reunions. Many reunion attendees were stationed (at least for a while) in the Washington metropolitan area while growing up, making getting together here a true homecoming. And the area's wide variety of attractions, museums, and activities ensures that any group will find lots to see and do.

Graduates of Kubasaki High School, on the Japanese island of Okinawa, met at the Sheraton Reston hotel for three days of fun, festivities, and reminiscing. Attendees spanned a wide range of class years, but the weekend was highlighted by the 50-year reunion of members from the Class of 1962. A total of 154 Kubasaki Dragons and their spouses enjoyed seeing the Washington, DC, monuments by moonlight, as well as touring the White House. The group's hospitality suite was decorated with a large *torii*, a ceremonial Japanese gate found at the entrance to Shinto temples. The group's banquet event included Okinawan dancers and musicians playing the *sanshin*, a three-stringed banjo unique to Okinawa. Reunion chair Sunny Schwentner

noted, "This was the BEST reunion we have ever had. We never thought we'd be able to find authentic Japanese musicians here in Fairfax County, but we did, and this really made the reunion special!"

Meanwhile, at the Marriott Fairview Park, Brats from Berlin American High School and Karlsruhe High School celebrated their common high school heritage with a weekend full of German food, a "volksmarch" (a ten kilometer hike through nearby woods), and July 4th fireworks on the National Mall in Washington, DC. Attendees recalled how Berlin High School was featured on The Ed Sullivan Show at the height of the Berlin Crisis in the early 1960s.

The Berlin Bears and the Karlsruhe Knights joined together for a trip to the 9/11 memorial at the Pentagon, where a fellow Berlin Brat, Lt. Col. Kip Taylor, had perished.

According to Berlin Brat Association President Jeri Glass, the highlight of Saturday evening's banquet was the promotion ceremony of US Army Lt. Col. Michelle Estes, overseen by US Air Force Major General Frederick ("Rick") Martin. Both Lt. Col. Estes and Major General Martin are Berlin Brats. Lt. Col. Estes, on active duty in Afghanistan, flew to Fairfax County while on leave for her promotion ceremony.

Over 400 graduates of the two schools attended the reunion.

About the author

Dean Miller is the National Sales Director of Visit Fairfax and worked with the planners of these reunions. He's eager to help you plan your reunion in Fairfax County, Virginia, too. He can be reached at 703-790-0643; www.fxva.com.