

Guantanamo Bay Association

A 501 (c) (7) Organization

www.gitmobay.org

APRIL 2023

ED: Many times, over the years I've been told there is no "I" in Gitmo but read on and maybe you might see it differently.

2023 Naval Station Guantanamo Bay Reunion. February 17-24, 2023

"Welcome to Guantanamo Bay, the temperature is 84 degrees with a slight breeze. Please remain seated while the Guantanamo Bay Association disembarks the aircraft" And so it began, 7 wonderful days in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The Commanding Officer was at the bottom of the ladder greeting each member of the Association. "Where's Joe Healey?", he asks the Air Terminal Manager. "Right here, Skipper." Captain White shook my hand and said he was glad to welcome our group to GTMO. He appreciates those that have served on the base before him and those that still have a special place for GTMO in their hearts. We met the Public Affairs Officer, Ms Biggs, inside the Air Terminal. She told me that she was at our disposal for the next 7 days.

The Skipper hustled us through Security and onto waiting buses for the ride to the ferry landing. A Utility Boat was standing by to take our group of 37 to Bulkeley Landing on Windward. Executive Officer CDR Gesaman accompanied us on the ride across the Bay. My son-in-law was able to talk golf with XO and wrangled an invite to a round or two at the Lateral Hazard golf course. When we arrived at Bulkeley Landing, Captain and Mrs White were there to greet us. Mrs White introduced herself as Robin, and gave everyone a hug. Such a warm welcome. Aside from the CO and his lovely wife, the acting Command Master Chief and other Command staff members welcomed us to the base. After a group picture, there were 2 dedicated buses to take us to our lodging and rental cars. Most of us stayed at the Navy Lodge, a few at the BOQ/Navy Gateway Inns and Suites. After a long day of traveling, most people familiarized themselves with the base and relaxed at their comfortable temporary quarters.

Saturday morning, Dee Gesaman, wife of the XO, delivered some fresh King Cakes to the Navy Lodge for our dining pleasure. Such a nice gesture on her part. Saturday was a free day, many went first to the galley, then to the Lighthouse Museum for a refresher course on GTMO history.

A special treat on Saturday night: After the National Anthem, Topgun: Maverick was shown at the Downtown Lyceum. Sitting in the comfortable chairs, looking up at the tens of thousands of stars, sure brought back memories. By the way, there is now a full-fledged refreshment stand at the Lyceum, not just popcorn.

Sunday morning, we attended a brunch at the home of Captain and Mrs White at 1101 Deer Point. We were greeted by Skipper and Robin, and invited into their lovely home. Tables were set up under the magnificent shade trees in the yard of the residence. Many base dignitaries, base residents and Special Category Residents (Cuban and related family members) were also invited. A diverse and friendly crowd that produced some interesting conversations. I'm repeating myself; everyone was glad to see us and so welcoming. The food and beverages were wonderful, especially the homemade desserts supplied by some to the guests.

Monday was President's Day. On Tuesday, Robin White invited our members to a kayaking excursion on the backwaters of Guantanamo Bay. I didn't expect a big turnout for kayaking, but I certainly missed that mark. 16 people, two groups of 8, had a wonderful time in calm and sometimes otherwise inaccessible waters. Robin and her experienced kayakers made sure that everyone was comfortable and safe.

Wednesday was base tour day. Several of our members were interviewed by Radio GTMO (AFRTS for the old-timers). Others got to tour the radio station, the huge vinyl record collection and the now unused TV studios. Unfortunately, the tour had to be modified for security and logistic reasons. We made up for it by going back out to the Lighthouse Museum. A special part of this day was a Flag presentation to Mr. Diego Mella. Diego escaped Cuba as a young man by swimming to the base from Caimanera, Cuba. More details about Diego and his story will be in the next newsletter.

GBA member Richard Burns arranged a Guantanamo Bay Sunset Cruise on pontoon boats. 4 boats were captained by Special Services crews. We were on the water for approximately 2 hours visiting the back bay, the Watergate, Hicacal Beach, Fort Conde, the mouth of the Guantanamo River and along the Windward side of the mouth of the Bay before heading back to Pelican Pete's Marina. The base and the bay certainly look different after dark. Such a beautiful place to be on a moderate February evening.

All during the week there was plenty of free time. Most of the GBA members visited the beaches, mini golf course, fitness center, bowling alley, Navy Exchange, golf course, SCUBA diving and the Marine Site pool. Hunting for shells, coral and sea glass was very popular. Senors Juan Suarez and Diego Mella were able to visit the Cuban Community Center to reacquaint themselves with and meet the Cuban Community Special Category residents. Some of us went to our old neighborhoods. Some of us got to see our homes from 40+ years ago.

Thursday was pack up day, and getting ready for the Mongolian Barbeque at the Bayview. Because our group could not find enough souvenirs at the NEX, Robin White coordinated with MWR and the Bayview to have a GTMO Craft Show on the patio of the Bayview. That worked out very well for our group, and the crafters. There is a large home-based business network on the base, from knick-knacks to coffee shops to special food vendors. All add to the comfort and quality of life on the base.

Friday was departure day. The Command/PAO made sure we had transportation for our bodies and our luggage to the Leeward Air Terminal. Some of the base residents that we met during the week came to see some of us off at the ferry landing, what a great bunch of people!

Unfortunately, 10 of our group were left behind on Friday. Although it wasn't our initial intention, we had to use Space Available flights from JAX to GTMO and return by Space A GTMO to JAX. There was room on the flight to GTMO, but found out mid-day on Friday that some of our folks would not have a seat going back to JAX. The PAO and XO quickly offered assistance for lodging, car rental and return flights. Two of the 10 flew to Andrews AFB on Saturday, then commercial back to JAX. The remaining 8, AKA The Castaways, were able to spend 4 additional days in GTMO before catching a flight to Jacksonville.

6 months in the making, hundreds of hours of work, hundreds of emails, scores of telephone calls, bumps in the road, changing requirements, airport changes (the GTMO flight took off from NAS Jacksonville, the return flight landed at JAX International. Not a big deal normally, but most of our vehicles were left at NAS.) All in all, it was worth it to see smiles on everyone's faces as we were treated as VIPs, and Distinguished Visitors. I'm not sure that the 2023 Guantanamo Bay Association Reunion in Guantanamo Bay will ever be duplicated, but I would love to see it happen again.

Our most humble gratitude to Captain and Mrs. White for the invitation and VIP treatment. Many Thanks to XO CDR Gesaman for his guidance and coordination of the entire process. Our appreciation to Dee Gesaman for the King Cakes, helpful hints and offering advice to our group. The Public Affairs Officer, Joycelyn Bigg was at our disposal 24/7, she went above and beyond to support our visit. 1st LT Phelps and 1st Sgt Ferrer, USMC and their Marines for arranging a Flag ceremony. The Navy Lodge and BOQ/NGIS staff, The NEX Rental Car staff, the Air Terminal Supervisor and her staff, everyone at MWR for catering to our needs, All the Base Residents that were so friendly, helpful and welcoming. Thanks to all for making our return visit the best that any of us could have imagined.

Joe Healey

ED: Maybe there isn't an "I" in Gitmo because I'm no longer there, but I will long cherish the memory of a truly memorial visit.

Membership and Communications

New and returning members:

January - April 2023

J. Doyle *\$	B. Wellbrock *	H. Radcliffe
K. Fairchild	G. Bedia	D. Rickhoff
O. Smith	C. Wheeler *\$	D. Miller
G. Kennedy	G. Christoferson	D. Relinski
J. O'Connor	S. Skipper *	M. Relinski
J. Suarez	M. Skipper *	T. Ridley
W. Nienow	L. Heiden	T. Hayward
K. Bunn *\$	O. Buchanan	J. Brown
W. Jones *\$	D. Buchanan	E. Warner
P. McCutcheon *	E. Hall *	O. Angeli *
J. Parker CM *\$	P. Porter *	T. Keene
A. Parker CM *\$	C. Rumbo *\$	P. Fiorilli
C. Huston	K. Rumbo *\$	W. Bradburn *
D. Kornowski	G. Ardinger	G. Swain
R. Lake	F. Pratt *	S. Kromfols *
D. Brunson *	J. Loyle *	R. Pierce
L. Lankford	D. Stoiber	D. Seeger \$
S. Horne *	S. Backer	

*two + year membership

BOLD = new members

CM = charter member

\$ = donation

*Please take note of the **DATE** next to your NAME on the newsletter address label. The expense of printing and mailing our newsletter continues to increase. We rely on membership dues, please stay current.*

If I missed listing your name or made some other mistake or omission, please let me know.

Please pray for the families of our recently deceased members: 1/3/2023 **Charlie Ardinger**; 1/26/2023 **Carolyn Hall**; 3/4/2023 **Marybeth Sedlak**

Greg Swain (first time visitor to Gitmo)

GTMO is certainly a memorable place. After visiting there I can understand why some people love it. What really struck me are the stark contrasts and the incongruities you find there. As you fly into GTMO you go over the Bahamas and see islands surrounded by white drifting sands visible under the clear water. When you arrive at Cuba you see a blue wind-swept ocean and a distinct line where the water stops and the land drops off into the ocean, no drifting sands. Likewise, the water by GTMO looks inviting while the land is arid, rocky, thorny, and populated with large iguanas. I was fortunate to see portions of the fence that separates GTMO from Cuba and was surprised to see what looked like three separate chain link fences each about two feet apart. Not much of a transition or buffer. What was most curious was the placement of the barbed wire. All fences had the wire placed to keep people out of GTMO. The Cuban fence was designed to keep their people in, not to keep us out. A stark contrast between two countries. The free open air movie theater looked like a step back in time but the seats were comfortable and the movies were the latest releases. I wonder if the iguanas enjoyed the movies as much as the base residents. Some of the incongruities were a lighthouse museum that had interesting historical information but nothing about the lighthouse, a souvenir shop that had lots of different t-shirts designs but limited size selections (only large or extra-large), and finding sea glass at the ferry landing beach and not at the glass beach. Of course, the ferry landing area is where Christopher Columbus landed in 1494. He and his crew must have had quite the party if their glass is still washing up. Altogether, GTMO is a most intriguing place.

GUANTANAMO BAY ASSOCIATION

Savannah, Georgia – REUNION

October 9 - 12, 2023

NAME OF ATTENDEE(S) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE & ZIP CODE _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER(S) _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

SPOUSE/GUESTNAME _____ Guest Name _____

DATES IN GITMO _____ UNIT/COMMAND _____

WHAT DATES WILL YOU ARRIVE/DEPART? _____/_____

SPECIAL DIETARY REQUIREMENTS Y/N. Please provide details _____

Hotel Information:

Holiday Inn Savannah Gateway

11 Gateway Blvd E

Savannah, GA 31419

For your convenience, please use the internet booking link

912- 925-2525 (mention Gitmo reunion)

Standard Guest Rooms: **\$129.95 + tax.**

Rates shown are per night, reservations made **after September 13th** subject to space available – no guarantees.

* Breakfast included for up to 2 persons per room

* Free onsite parking

REUNION FEE'S ARE PER PERSON. Mail checks to: Guantanamo Bay Association

232 Majorca Rd

Saint Augustine, Florida 32080

Mail your reunion fees as soon as possible and **NO LATER THAN September 28, 2023.**

Reunion activity fees **DO NOT** include hotel cost.

Feel free to call Mike Warman 407 323-3632 with any questions or concerns.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO BRING A JUG OR TWO OF WINE FROM YOUR AREA OF THE COUNTRY. IT HAS PROVEN TO BE A LOT OF FUN TO SHARE WITH OTHER REUNION ATTENDEES IN OUR HOSPITALITY ROOM. ALSO, FOR OUR BEER DRINKERS, PLEASE PICK UP A COUPLE SIX PACKS OF YOUR LOCALLY MADE *BREW* TO SHARE.

Gitmo Bay Association Reunion Activity & Agenda Request Form

I would like to reserve the following activities for:

Name _____

Spouse/Guest _____

Agenda and Activities	Number	Total
Sunday October 8 th , 2023 (Early Birds) Hospitality room opens @ 1600 Ghost tour (1900 – 2100) only 35 seats available \$35 p/person		
Monday October 9 th , 2023 Reunion registration fee \$25 per/person Italian buffet dinner 1730 \$15 per/person Auction 1830 in hospitality room (items needed)		
Tuesday October 10 th , 2023 All Tours (both days \$140 per/person) Private Trolley Tour 0900 - 1200 River boat tour with lunch 1200 - 1430 Dinner on your own		
Wednesday October 11 th , 2023 Trolley Tour (hop on & off) 0900 -1600 Dinner on your own		
Thursday October 12 th , 2023 Business meeting 0900 til ?? Fresh pastries & coffee (freebie) Banquet buffet style \$40 p/p ** dinner 1800 (Please circle entrée choice) <i>fish chix beef</i>		
Friday October 13 th , 2023 Farewell's – see you next year (2024) in Pensacola Beach, Florida		

Total this page \$ _____

Please make checks payable to Guantanamo Bay Association

Mail complete form to: Mike Warman
 232 Majorca Rd.
 St Augustine, Florida 32080

Here is a little more detailed look at our tours

Ghost tour anyone? Join us, if you dare!

Hop on a Grave Encounters trolley tour for a thrilling and chilling overview of Savannah's notorious haunted history. Every night of the week, our ghostly guides share blood-curdling tales of murder, voodoo, death, disease and disaster in the Hostess City of the South. Our original ghost tour stands apart as Savannah's best introduction to the city's paranormal past.

Along the way, you'll hear lively tales told by some of Savannah's most illustrious "spirits" – from deceased theater performers to dead pirates – who hop on the trolley to tell their terrifying tales of woe. Learn whether Savannah socialite Matilda Sorrel actually killed herself, uncover Civil War secrets from Confederate soldiers, discover where the victims in the Siege of Savannah are buried and "meet" some of Savannah's most frightful historic figures. Additional highlights include the Sorrel-Weed House, widely considered the most haunted house in Savannah, and Colonial Park Cemetery, where many Yellow Fever victims are buried. We'll also see the iconic Olde Pink House, known for its supernatural activity, as well as Yamacraw Bluff, Madison Square, the Mercer-Williams House, the Kehoe House, 17Hundred90 and other haunted sites around downtown Savannah.

Day One Tours

For a whole 'lotta history in a little bit of time, this is the tour for you. Sometimes you just get tired, you know? You wanna keep 'going' but you also like the idea of just 'sittin.' Nothing wrong with that! And that's why you'll love our Historic Overview tour. Think of it like this – the Historic Overview tour is like a cousin to our Historic On/Off Tour – same appealing qualities without the 'on/off' part. *Be on the lookout*, because characters from Savannah's past like to hop aboard the trolley from time-to-time.

You get it all on this tour – moss-draped oaks, stately mansions, beautiful squares, expansive riverfront, and over 270 years of history – from the comfort of your nostalgic trolley seat.

A View of Savannah from the River

Living on the coast certainly has its advantages and it would be downright silly of us not to – well – take advantage of it. You could call this the 'surf and turf' tour option (which is likely what will be on your lunch plate tonight). But until then, we highly suggest you spend your afternoon on the Savannah River Queen paddleboat for an utterly relaxing cruise down Savannah's waterway paired with an Overview (90 Minute cruise

Day Two Tour

Tour As You Please (Hop on/off)

As any self-respecting Southern hostess knows, you must keep your guests happy. At Old Savannah Tours that means offering a tour that allows you, our guests, to customize your experience.

So, if sittin' a spell sounds more like your speed, then ride along and see all the highlights of Savannah's Historic District in about 90 minutes. But if you're the type who likes to see things for yourself (and who doesn't?) then this on/off tour is a great way to make a day of it as you meander past 14 stops at the city's most popular historic sites.

Hop off when you want to take a closer look or stay on board if a simple drive by will do. And always be on the lookout for Old Savannah Tour's signature Savannah characters to charm you with their colorful personalities along the way. This tour is sure to please!

This year's reunion hotel Holiday Inn Savannah Gateway

Finally, we have a hotel for this year's reunion (2023) in Savannah. I've included a link to assist in making your reservations. Hopefully by using the link it will eliminate the confusion at the front desk regarding rates and room availability. However, if all else fails please call the hotel directly and NOT central reservations. Please be sure to mention that you're with the Guantanamo Bay Association. I guess the method of last resort if all else fails, call me and let's see what we can do.

Our (discounted) room rates this year will be \$129.95 plus tax. When making your reservation you will see an additional \$25 charge which is for incidentals, this will not be charged if not used. Included in the room rate is a breakfast buffet served in our hospitality room and free parking.

The initial room block is for 20 rooms; 10 King and 10 Queen. This can be adjusted as needed.

As word to the wise, **book early** if you plan to attend this year's reunion because we have a **limit**. The meeting room (our hospitality room) at this hotel has fire code rating of 50 people. Sorry folks but all the other hotels that I contacted, those with larger meeting rooms, meant higher prices along with a daily charge for the meeting space plus in some instances parking cost.

If you have any questions or concerns give me a shout via email or by phone. 904 461-9431

[Guantanamo Bay Association Reunion - OCT 2023 Holiday Inn Savannah Gateway, Group Booking Link](#)

From: GTMOBayAssnVP/Travel <gtmobayassnvp@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 1, 2023 3:06 PM
To: Biggs, Joycelyn N CIV USN (USA) <joycelyn.n.biggs.civ@us.navy.mil>
Subject: [Non-DoD Source] Guantanamo Bay Association visit and extended visit.

Good afternoon Ms Biggs,

I can't begin to thank you for making our recent visit a huge success. Your support and guidance before, during and after our visit has been no less than remarkable.

From pre-trip communications, to a VIP arrival, awesome transportation, wonderful activities and valuable communications, we did not expect such an awesome week(+4 days).

You made yourself and base assets available to us 24/7. We knew we could count on you. You had our backs for 11 days. You kept your eyes on us, but allowed us to do our own thing. We can't thank you enough.

When 10 of our members weren't able to leave last Friday, you jumped into action. Lodging, transportation, guidance, prescription issues and friendship, nothing was lacking. You made a less than desirable situation extremely tolerable, and for most, enjoyable. You did not rest until everyone had a boarding pass. Thank you so much.

Being the only person in your office, I'm sure that you will be playing catch up for a while. Thanks for the personal and professional sacrifice you made for our group. We appreciate your dedication and helpfulness.

Every single member of our group has mentioned your exceptional efforts to make our visit more than perfect. I especially appreciate how kind you have been to me and my family, especially my granddaughter Cami.

After we returned home, I asked Cami what her favorite part of the trip was. Airplane rides? Hotels? Restaurants? Playgrounds? Beaches? Bowling Alley? Lyceum? Museum? Shopping? U boat, ferry and pontoon rides? Her response? "Papa, I met a lot of nice people." You, Joycelyn, are one of those "nice people" that made a positive impact on everyone, young and old. Thank you so much for that.

V/r, Joe

Hello Mr. Healy,

You guys are so kind. Whatever you perceived as “above and beyond” was actually reciprocity and every single effort was my absolute pleasure! To be fair, most of the heavy lifting was done by someone else, I was simply the conductor. I truly appreciate the kindness and understanding from your group. In the worst circumstances, you guys were phenomenally good sports about everything that didn’t go exactly as planned. For that I say thank you!

I know you guys were ready to be home and just kick back, but you took time from your day to deliver a package for me and I don’t think you realize how much that meant to me. It is not lost on me that is a huge lift when one is tired and just want to be home, so thank you for that as well.

Camie was awesome! It wasn’t an act, she made my day with both her outstanding fashion sense and her sweet personality. She is truly a jewel (and mature well beyond her years!)

Here is an inside scoop for ya. I made her “pinky swear” she would be a good girl all year long and MAYBE, just MAYBE she will get a chance to come back one day. ;)

Tell everyone I said hello, and thank you again for making my job easy. Until next time!

Sincerely,
Ms. Joycelyn Biggs
Public Affairs Officer (PAO)
Naval Station Guantanamo Bay

Was it luck of the draw or divine intervention? I’m leaning toward the latter.

While in GTMO both Jan and I caught colds from going from heat to cold / heat to cold, 90° heat to cold drafting air from the white bus’s AC units. I have asthma so that was not a good combination. Jan got over her cold, but mine persisted. If we had not been able to get the last two tickets the Association may have had the Med/Evac Insurance tested. Why? After we got back to Tucson my breathing hadn’t improved. Remember on the news March 2nd there may have been mention that it snowed in Tucson? That was the morning Jan took me to the ER at Tucson Medical Center. I ended up spending 6 days in the hospital with asthma complications. I was released from the hospital March 9th.

I’m using an oxygen generator at night and various medications and inhalers during the day. My breathing capacity is slowly improving.

We are cutting our stay in Tucson from April first to leaving this coming Sunday. Jan wants me to be home for our local doctors.

Thank you again, Joe, for all your hard work in pulling the GTMO trip together.

Most Sincerely,

Jim & Jan Fitkin

Did you know that the GBA now has a new Facebook Page? Check it out, lots of photos from our recent visit. If you’re Facebook challenged, like me, let us know and we can get our FB Wizard to bring you up to speed. What a great way to impress the grandkids – yo my granny is using FB!! Get started by going to Facebook and do a search for Guantanamo Bay Association. That should take you to our home page.



Gitmo travel group 2023

