

2 SEP 2023

From: Don Poss, VSPA Dir Comm., and Webmaster

To: Marissa,

RE: VSPA Membership Management background:

When I joined VSPA in early 1996, there were six Excel spreadsheets maintained by six individuals who would not share info and did not have a master-live spreadsheet. This continued for about three years as I built a modest website within the limitations of that period, and as membership began to rise in numbers.

When I was ready to address the multi spreadsheets issue, I acquired all six versions, created a master compiled copy with standardized column headings for records formatting them accordingly in MS Access (a then powerful new database builder, but with high annual support and maintenance). At one point MS discarded that version and did not support it for 2-3 years, until releasing a new MS Access— for Business only.

Membership Management was about to convert, but first it was necessary to create a real database with an interactive capability for updating online. I drafted the Board as volunteers to do the data entry using an interactive app I designed with MS Access (but a phase out-date was ticking), and when completed, we would convert to an Excel spreadsheet whereas it would accomplish the same output as MS Access, but would not be interactive, and would be slower to update and maintain (The web site was my main focus).

When VSPA converted from MS Access to Excel, the then-Membership Chair (MC) refused to give up his single version of Excel, and his record keeping method amounting to a nail in the wall and 3M notes slapped on it. He refused to use MS Access db and wanted VSPA membership to stay at around 300. He was noisily removed as Chair and a new Chair appointed when the time came.

The cumbersome Excel membership management worked for years, as elected MCs came and went. I had designed about 70-80 unnecessary check-the-boxes fields to aid with membership data entry. The update surpassed column-numbers limitations for Excel, and it was necessary to create script to bypass that issue— for a time. As membership numbers passed 1000, the very size of the spreadsheet required another rewrite; one that MCs had difficulty working with, as I had reduced the 70-80 check box fields into one single field. I selected the Bases and Squadrons field as the field all membership data would be selected-from as qualifying for inclusion as appropriate on the current 115 Rosters.

The Base and Squadron field is position and case Sensitive, with exact acronyms for bases and squadrons. Plus, correct positioning of commas, semicolon, or period alignments. Otherwise, that member would not appear on one or more, or any, qualifying Roster.

Most MCs had little knowledge about Excel. Errors were inevitable and required constant fixing. Fixing required time. Other errors were bound to happen: The master spreadsheet was sorted incorrectly by name-only, and other fields, several times in a brief period of time, and were not “Expanded,” which would have carried each member’s data to wherever row the sort placed him. Instead, with each sort the name moved leaving the member’s info in place and on several other members’ names as info shuffled and split with ever sort. Sort after sort.

Members began calling and reporting they were alive and well and appeared on the RIP-111 (passed away) list. Many members were dropped from various Rosters altogether.

— End of Background —

It has taken three months to rebuild the master spreadsheet, and rediscover info for members that are actually RIP. My confidence in the accuracy of total data is high, but I'm sure errors are still unknown to us.

When an applicant joins VSPA, they are required to complete an VSPA Application, and submit a copy of their DD-214 (Discharge paper). This is important for research— 1) because VSPA knows the questions to ask and research; 2) for future AF Security Forces to discover. VSPA has information for about 3400 AP/SP contacts, and actual DD-214s and Applications for over 2000— about 10%+ of all 20,000 AP/SPs who served in Vietnam.

Together, DD-214s and Applications have all the information necessary to successfully build and maintain a factually-accurate and statistically-reliable spreadsheet, compiling reports, charts, rosters, and history of Air Police and Security Police in Vietnam and Thailand (the war theaters) during the Vietnam War.

The current Rosters hopefully will post by September 5, 2023, include nine additional Rosters for members with missing information in fields. Truthfully, most all the missing information is available—and always has been — in the DD-214s and Applications. The problem with that is both have always been in hard copies and in possession of the several MCs.

Several months ago, I asked Paul Shave, current MC, to scan over 2000 DD-214s and 2000+ Applications. Paul agreed saying he had a high-speed scanner that scanned and saved files as PDF at a very high rate of speed. The problem then generated was the scanner saved the PDFs naming them sequentially from 00001-04500 (estimating the numbers and range).

Paul and I began renaming the new PDFs with useful meaningful names to help locate members data. At best, we have only renamed about 200. Frankly, health issues have been a recent problem for us both. Paul is likely to step down as MC. This has stopped our renaming project, which is vital for our research future and confirmation of data.

What I first need help with is:

The first assignment I would ask of you, and any other volunteer who joins us, is to complete the Renaming Project. This would begin with the first numbered-member and opening the file (Application or DD-214) to read its info and rename the numbered-file to a uniform format.

You would set you own pace. Hopefully, other volunteers will help, and you will see renamed files as a results.

File renaming naming conventions are simple:

\* Last, First Middle (or MI if the scanned copy presents only an MI), and Birthdate (DDJANYYYY).

Examples:

\* For DD-214 [DD2]

"Poss, Don Louis\_13OCT1944\_DD2"

\*For Application [APP]

"Poss, Don Louis\_13OCT1945\_APP"

Renaming Project will begin after the current Rosters are posted, and I have merged the different copies of duplicates and prepared them for working on.