

CAPT. MARK ASKS *Who's on the Island?*



WHITNEY ECHOLS, JR.

Whitney Echols, Jr. was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. It's a beautiful city where the giant water oak trees lined the streets. The city is often referred to as the Druid City which was nicknamed after an ancient Celtic people who worshipped the huge Druid oaks.

Whitney's dad was in Real Estate, and his mom worked for First Mortgage Company. He has one sister, Sara, nine years his junior. His dad had 12 brothers and sisters so he had lots of aunts, uncles, and cousins. A family reunion was a big event.

Anyone growing up in Tuscaloosa was automatically an Alabama fan. As Whitney said, "I was a fan with my first breath." Looking around his condo, one would never

have to ask. Alabama reigns supreme from the University flags to the photos and mementos on display inside to the big Alabama "A" on his T shirt.

Whitney loves football, but says he particularly appreciates the building of character of so many of the young athletes that are involved in varsity sports. He believes in so many circumstances they grow up to become better citizens because of the training and discipline they had on the field, or on the court.

During WWII, Whitney's uncles all got drafted, but his dad wasn't. His dad wanted to help the war effort, so he packed up his family, moved to Mobile, and got a job including training as a B-29 engine repair person at Brookley Field. There was so much going on at the time in the Mobile area, the only place they could find to live was a garage apartment on Bienville Street.

Due to the nature of Mobile's war effort, there were air raid warnings and drills regularly throughout the city.

After the war, they moved back to Tuscaloosa where Whitney went to school. He was active in the Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts and became an Eagle Scout when he was 12. After graduating high school, Whitney, not knowing what to do, told his dad he was

going to join the Marines. His dad told him to go talk to his Uncle Joe, an Army major, at Fort McPherson, Ga., for advice.

His dad hoped his uncle would talk him out of joining the Marines. After Whitney and his uncle talked, his uncle called his dad, and told him he'd talked Whitney out of the Marines, but now he was going to join the army and be a paratrooper. Whitney joined the army in 1958.

He spent time in Fort Jackson, S.C.; Fort. Gordon, Ga.; and then went to Ft Bragg, N.C. to Jump School, and from there to Okinawa. He made jumps on the Island, in the Philippines, and into Korea. He also was on alert to go to Lebanon if needed.

Returning to the States, he finished his commitment to the Army, and applied, went to, and graduated from the University of Alabama. While there he served as the Commander of the US Army ROTC brigade. The day he graduated from Alabama, he was back in the Army on active duty with a Regular Army commission as Second Lieutenant.

With his diploma and his Commission in his hand, he hopped in his car, and headed for Fort Lewis, Wash. He was assigned as Infantry Platoon Leader with B Company, 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry (Red Warriors). Whitney was one of the "boots on the ground."

In July of 1966, Whitney and the Red Warriors were sent to Vietnam. They trained and fought as a fine tuned unit. As tough as it was there, there was camaraderie, there was teamwork, there was respect and there was a brotherhood. Whitney was assigned to an area in the central highlands where he received a purple heart when wounded by mortar fire.

It was a hotbed of action, and, in telling me about it, he pauses. You can tell he's remembering friends and comrades that never made it home. Between tours, Whitney went to flight training school at Fort Stewart, Ga., and Fort Rucker where he learned to fly fixed wing multi-engine planes.

In 1969, during his second tour to Vietnam, he flew twin engine Beechcraft reconnaissance aircraft for the Army Security Agency out of Saigon. They would intercept radio signals and could triangulate to spot and report the targets on the ground. Returning to the States, he was assigned to Fort Benning, Ga., where he attended the Infantry Officer Advanced Course.

From 1971 until 1974 he was assigned and taught Army ROTC at University of Alabama, then from there to the Commander General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. His last assignment before retirement was being the Department of the Army Representative to the Federal Aviation Administration in Atlanta. His territory of responsibility was for eight southeastern states, Central America and Puerto Rico. His office was located in the FAA headquarters in Atlanta.

In 1982, the Joint Special Operations Command was formed at Fort Bragg, NC., and Whitney's experience was needed. After making a comprehensive study where it involved, among other things, opening, or closing, specific airports for "training" involving all branches of the military, Whitney presented the facts to the Pentagon, and was able to secure the mission for airspace management worldwide for JSOC.

This also involved hostage, and hijack training, and various other military exercises. Whitney was responsible for all airspace management prior to and during the Grenada invasion. Whitney served with distinction for 28 years retiring as a Lt. Colonel.

He now is a member of the 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry Red Warrior Association, Vietnam 1966-70 where there are about 800 members that served and fought together during the Vietnam War. He is extremely proud of the fact that he was elected President by the men he served with in the Red Warriors. He has served as President for six years and it is a position that is very dear to his heart as symbolic of the respect his fellow soldiers felt

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toward him.

Whitney says it was one of the greatest honors he's ever had. Among other things, the Red Warriors send members to visit wounded warriors in hospitals around the country, and they recently collected more than \$12,000 for the Red Warriors when they deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq to help support families that had special needs, or just needed help.

After leaving the Army, he retired in Atlanta. Deciding Atlanta wasn't where he wanted to be, and after going through a divorce, he informed his two daughters he was moving to the beach. He had been to the Island many times during his career, and he wanted to come back.

His daughters, Mary and Melinda, were working. Mary lives in Birmingham, married and has one daughter, Allison with an Honors Scholarship to the University of Alabama.

In 1973, Mary's family lost their seven year old daughter, Lesley, to brain cancer. This was a horrible experience for the entire family. Melinda, living in Woodbury Minn., is married and has two children, Bain and Anna Kate. They loved the idea of him moving to the beach but told him to expect company. They also love the beach.

In 1990, while having Thanksgiving lunch at the Perdido Beach Resort he ran into some friends from Tuscaloosa. They told him about Cotton Creek Golf Club needing help, and he went over, and

ending up working there for the next three years. While there, he was offered, and accepted the job as installation manager for a carpet company. It wasn't what he wanted to do, so after a short period of employment, he gave that up.

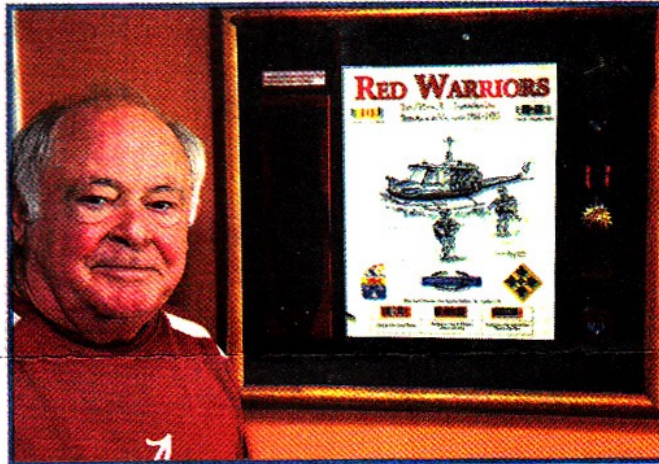
Now, on Thursdays he meets with Bama Breakfast Bunch at Hazel's for coffee and conversation, and he's an active member of the Lion's Club in Orange Beach.

He also has to come up with a trail that no one can answer to help collect money for the Lions. In 2015, Whitney was chosen as Lion Club Member Of The Year. The Lions projects are local, and their big fund raisers are to help raise money to help people with sight problems.

Whitney's big love these days is Orange Beach and of course Alabama football. If it's game day, he'd be watching it somewhere.

Above all else, Whitney is a loveable, jolly, full belly laugh kind of guy that is not afraid to get involved. If you need help, he'll be there for you. If he sees something that isn't right, he'll speak up, and be active to make it right. He's not a put his hands in his pockets and turn away.

He sizes up a situation, then jumps in with both feet. We, as should all Americans, thank Whitney for his service to our Country. Orange Beach is fortunate to have Whitney as part of their community, and I'm proud to be able to call him my friend.



Red Warriors Vietnam Association
www.RedWarriors.us