

## Carl's Refugees & Carl's Corner

On Sunday morning, July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007 a small group of people gathered outside Carl's Tavern at 1565 West Vista Way. At 11:55 AM, Tom Morton and Chip Dykes lowered the American, POW/MIA, and Marine Corps flags for the final time, ending a chapter in the history of the City of Vista, CA. Carl's Tavern, which was opened in the late 1930's, was officially closed. As the small crowd looked on, Morton and Dykes performed the traditional flag folding of the colors and presented them to Joann MacGillivray, the last owner of the tavern.



For the next three years one hundred and twenty-six days the Carl's Tavern faithful – renamed **Carl's Refugees** by Tom Morton – took to the road and hung their hats in several beer joints around North County. The Riverbottom; One More That's It; Scotland Yard; Smithy's' Downtown; The Golden Tee; McCabe's; Squid Joe's; The Stagecoach; Hooligan's; The Grand Grill; Wing's, Pizza & Things; and The Turf Room (aka The Spot) became our temporary rally points on Friday afternoons. We fell in love with Hooligan's (and the owner Kathleen) and stayed there for Marine Corps Birthday Celebrations until the latter part of 2009 when we moved our Friday gatherings to The Turf Room (eventually renamed The Spot). The reason for the move was because the owner of The Turf Room, former jockey Bill Harmatz, took a liking to us and passed the word to all his staff that the Carl's Refugees would be charged no more than \$2.00 for a bottle of beer. Bill even came by once in a while with a plate of bar snacks for us. It was at this point we met Bob Lamb. Bob was a regular at The Turf Room and possessing the unique ability to judge good character in people, took a liking to us immediately. Bob eventually became the only person to be presented (by Tom Morton) with an honorary membership in the Carl's Refugees group. Things went along smoothly until that day of destiny in September 2010 when Tom Morton and I stopped by the American Legion Post 365 at their new location at 1234 South Santa Fe Avenue in Vista. We met with Post Commander Chris Yates. He was aware of our search for a permanent home where the Carl's Refugees could meet and, made us a deal we couldn't refuse" - i. e. "Move

your organization to the post and we will let you have this corner of the bar and name it Carl's Corner". After negotiating the deal over several bottles of ice cold beer, all purchased by Commander Yates, we agreed that it was the right thing to do. On November 10, 2010, the 135<sup>th</sup> Birthday of the United States Marine Corps, Post 365 and Carl's Corner had their Grand Opening.

## **NOTES**

### **The Riverbottom**

At the time this article was written, The Riverbottom had closed. It ceased operation in about 2014, shortly after the owner, a lady named Pat, passed away.



### **Vista Entertainment Center**

On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018 the Vista Entertainment Center was demolished to make way for a car dealership. The VEC was home to The Turf Room (later to be renamed The Spot after an extensive renovation).

The following was sent to me by Bob Lamb. Bob is a member of the SONS Squadron 365. Bob moved to Buffalo, N.Y. recently and was the first person we met when the Carl's Refugees began their weekly get-togethers at The Turf Room.

After moving to Vista in 2001, I was in search of a local watering hole. This seems to be a reoccurring theme in my social life. Vista didn't offer a lot of options – unlike my home town of Buffalo, NY where every corner seems to have a gin mill. I saw this odd building next to the Primo's parking lot. It wasn't pretty, bore little adornment (Carl's sign) and did not look particularly welcoming. Upon asking – I was informed that it was a Marine bar. I thought that wasn't a place for me and never entered the premises.

**NEVER JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS' COVER!**

Moving along, I settled at the Turf Room in the VEC as it had the NFL Sunday ticket. It wasn't pretty inside; dark, worn down and needing a lot of work. In my experience – a typical Buffalo dive bar. The beer was cold (and cheap), the staff friendly and had enough eye candy to keep an old man amused.

Never too crowded during the day – not too noisy – decent juke box – perfect place for day drinking. Then one week – my oasis was invaded. A somewhat rowdy crowd of older gentlemen started showing up quite often for Happy Hour. They weren't bowlers but could hold their own on the barley sandwiches and were mostly a polite bunch. They were Refugees – somewhat like Moses wandering the desert – but they were looking for a different kind of spirituality. Over time we conversed, learned their rituals and included them in the daily circle of life. It was a Win-Win scenario.

The old Turf Room was closed (mercifully) – we spent months in the “temporary” bar and then graduated into the new “Spot”. Life was good.

The continuing saga of the Refugees is told elsewhere. I apologize to Ray, Tom, Joe, Big Jim, Sue, Jay, Leon, Chip, Chris, Russ and all the names that escape my mental data bank at the moment for never crossing the threshold into Carl's years before. It was my loss but I think we made up for it along the way.

Semper Fi – Bob Lamb

