



A group of GR/MA Veterans Association members visited the Vietnam Veterans memorial at the Somerset County Courthouse on Friday to pay their respects. Many of the members who attended the association's recent reunion in Somerset were Vietnam veterans. STAFF PHOTO BY BETH ANN MILLER/THE DAILY AMERICAN

GR/MA Veterans Association visits Somerset for reunion

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A group of military veterans — whose service has identified and returned thousands of fallen U.S. service members to their families — recently paid a visit to Somerset County.

Members of the Graves Registration-Mortuary Affairs Veterans Association, aka GR/MA Veterans Association,

toured the courthouse and other notable local sites last weekend during their annual reunion meeting. They had voted to resume their annual meeting this year, held from Sept. 30 to Oct. 2 in Somerset. The county seat was the expected location for their 2020 reunion, which was then canceled because of the pandemic.

This veterans association has about

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Ted Veskosky
association's president

Reunion

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200 members total, said Ted Veskosky, the association's president. Approximately 40 of those members came to Somerset for the reunion from locations such as California, New York, Texas, Florida and Ohio.

Most of those in attendance were Vietnam veterans.

"A lot of the (other) military reunions have been canceled, but our members voted to go ahead," Veskosky said. "We thought, 'What do we have to lose?' After all of us being at home for the last 18 months ... we've all been 'shot up' (vaccinated) and we might not be here tomorrow. We decided to take our chances."

Veskosky, a Somerset County native who now lives in Florida, included Somerset in a short list of possible locations to hold the latest reunion. Members then voted for the final destination.

Visiting Somerset

The GR/MA Veterans Association members arrived Thursday afternoon at the Quality Inn in Somerset. That evening, Veskosky said, they held an opening ceremony and placed a wreath below the large American flag posted near the Pennsylvania Turnpike entrance.

On Friday, association members received a proclamation from the Somerset County commissioners and took a tour of the county courthouse, led by George Kaufman, a local historian and past president of the Somerset County

Bar Association. Members also visited the old county jail, located next to the courthouse, and paid their respects at the memorials posted outside the courthouse.

Veskosky said Friday's itinerary also included the Quecreek Mine Rescue Site and the Flight 93 National Memorial, at which the association's members placed a wreath in honor of the heroes of Flight 93.

Saturday's schedule offered the members an opportunity to do some local sightseeing on their own before returning to the Quality Inn for their closing dinner and annual business meeting.

Who are GR/MA veterans?

The reunion is typically held each

year to recognize this group of veterans from all five branches of the military who volunteered during their military service for the task of identifying the remains and personal effects of service members killed in action and returning them to their families in the United States.

From 1917 to 1991, these military men and women served under the Graves Registration Service. The name was changed to Mortuary Affairs in 1991.

Currently there are more than 1,400 Mortuary Affairs Specialists serving the nation around the world, Veskosky said.

"(The reunion is) another way of thanking this group for all they've done," he said. "It takes a very special individual to be able to do that job."