



The Military Reunion Market

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THE MILITARY REUNION MARKET

To many hotels, this is a niche market with growing importance.

This presentation will show you

WHO is involved in the Military Reunions Market

WHAT that market is composed of

WHEN military reunions take place

WHERE they are held

WHY you might be interested in hosting some, and

HOW you can succeed in pursuing this market

It was prepared by leaders of **The Alliance of Military Reunions**, a membership group for military reunions and those who serve them.

Collectively, these leaders have extensive experience as officer and enlisted personnel in the Armed Forces, as founders and leaders of their own military reunion groups, as hands-on planners of numerous successful military reunions, and as executives in the hospitality industry. We hope you agree they know what they are talking about.

WHO Is Involved in the Military Reunion Market?

Mostly people who served in the military sometime from WWII through the late '60s

Mostly male, but many females

Mostly in their 60s and 70s – usually retired

Some younger, some older

Mostly accompanied by spouses

Some in wheelchairs or with walkers, or with special medical needs

Sometimes accompanied by

Grown children

Grandchildren

Active duty military personnel

They tend to look like this...



Who Is Involved in the Military Reunion Market?

With few exceptions, they are U.S. veterans and their spouses. They served in...

World War II: 1941-1946

The Cold War: 1947-1991

The Korean War: 1950-1955

The Vietnam Era: 1961-1975

The Gulf War: 1990-1991

Most were young when they joined the service: 17-22 years old

Most put in two to four years, then left for civilian life

Many others spent a career in the service

Usually stayed in for 20-30 years

Retired in their late 30s to late 40s

Had a civilian career after that

Most were Enlisted (≈90%)

Typically enlisted as recent high school graduates. Some were dropouts.

Many went to college after their service

Had various civilian careers

Some were Officers (≈10%)

Typically entered the service as recent college graduates

Typically had professional civilian careers

Who Is Involved in the Military Reunion Market?

ALL have done exciting things

Most have a well-developed sense of duty, honor, and patriotism

Most have a conservative outlook

Many are religious

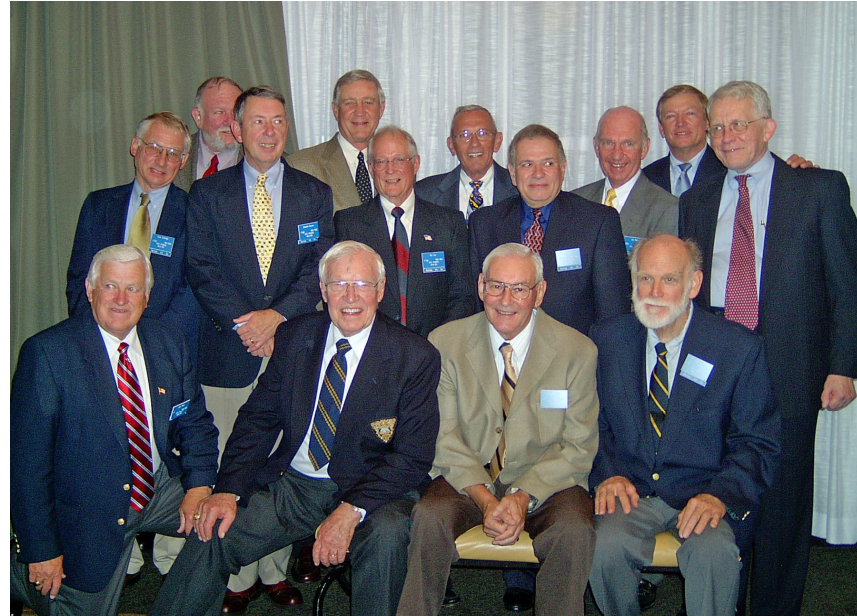
Some are rich, some are poor, most are solid middle class

As you can see, most are Very Happy People...





Officers of the USS Rankin – 1963



Some of those officers at a reunion 40 years later



Typical, and then some. The fellow at the left combines a lot of the attributes of military reunion attendees, especially the “done exciting things.”

He enlisted in the Navy in 1947 as a tenth-grade dropout.

At age 53 in 1983, he became a Rear Admiral.

Along the way, he was Captain of five ships, commander of U.S. forces in Lebanon during the 1982 civil war, deputy chief of all training in the U.S. Navy, and a few other mildly exciting things.

At age 77, he graduated from Liberty Bible College. Recently he and his son, a pastor, have started a church in Virginia Beach.

WHAT is the Military Reunion Market?

The buyers are Military Reunion Groups (more on them later!)

The sellers are those who serve them

CVBs / DMOs

Hotels

Local tour operators

Local attractions

Reunion management companies

Specialized vendors

The Alliance of Military Reunions serves both the buyers and the sellers

It is a membership organization for military reunion groups and those who serve them

It seeks to be a valuable resource for people from all services, eras, and industries

It provides its members with information, training, and personal networking opportunities

Is a nonprofit, all-volunteer organization

Founded in June, 2009

One year later...

Has 350 Military Reunion Groups as members

Has 200 Hotels, CVB/DMOs, and vendors as members

Has 2,800 addresses on its email list

Publishes a web site, a newsletter, and valuable handbooks

Holds Seminars and Town Hall Meetings

WHAT are Military Reunion Groups?

They are groups of people who get together to...

Reconnect

Reminisce

Have fun

See the sights

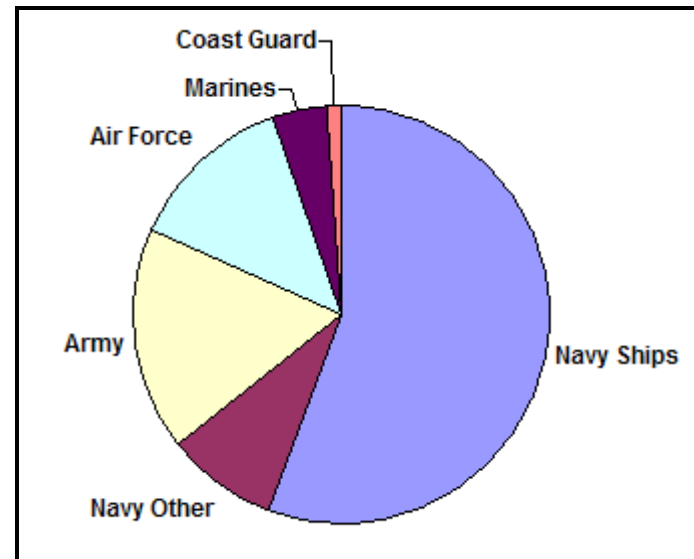
Bask in their camaraderie

They are people who have a common bond based on their common service

They often have additional bonds because of their shared experiences at reunions

They are usually organized around a unit in one of the U.S. armed services

Over half are Navy ship reunion groups...



Source: 345 Alliance Members

What are Military Reunion Groups?

There are thousands of these groups – some say as many as 12,000

The market has historically been *extremely* fragmented – the groups are highly independent, don't know one another, don't work together, etc.

There are a few specialized umbrella groups, but only the Alliance works to unify the market

The size of the groups varies from twenty members to over 10,000

A typical group might have 500-1,000 names on its mailing list

Many are run by one person from home, often assisted by a spouse. They do it as a hobby, a challenge, or a labor of love

None are run to make a profit

The largest have staffs and 7-figure budgets, but most are fairly informal operations with very little money behind them

Some are incorporated, but many are unorganized informal associations

Few have meaningful sources of revenue outside their reunions

Typically, they collect money for their reunion, and spend all or most of it there

Often they have only a few hundred dollars on hand after the reunion

But occasionally they have thousands of dollars in their bank accounts

What are Military Reunion Groups?

The groups may be well- or poorly-organized. Many, but not all, have...

Officers and a Board of Directors

Dues and a bank account

A newsletter

A web site

Many do NOT have active workers other than the leader

They typically have annual reunions, usually in a different city each year

The size of the reunions varies from twenty attendees to over 3,000

A typical military reunion might put 100 people in a hotel for three to five nights:

DAY 1 of 4 - THURSDAY

Noon: Registration begins. Hospitality Room opens.

5:00-6:00 PM: Welcome reception. Casual dress.

Dinner on your own (good front desks can suggest restaurants)

DAY 2 of 4 - FRIDAY

7:30-8:30 AM: Continental breakfast

8:30 AM: Bus leaves for optional tour. Lunch on the tour.

9:30 AM: Hospitality Room opens for those not on the tour

4:00 PM: Bus returns from the tour

6:00 PM: Social hour. Cash bar.

7:00-10:00 PM: Informal meal in the hotel banquet facility. Raffles, entertainment, etc.

DAY 3 of 4 - SATURDAY

7:30-8:30 AM: Continental breakfast

8:30 AM: Buses leave for optional tour. Lunch on the tour.

2:00 PM: Buses return to the hotel

3:30-4:30 PM: Business meeting in the Hospitality Room

6:30 PM: Cocktail hour and photo session

7:30 PM: Banquet in the hotel ballroom. Coat & tie recommended. If you can still wear a complete and correct uniform, do it.

8:30 PM-???: Guest speaker, entertainment, dancing.

DAY 4 of 4 - SUNDAY

8:00 AM: Private buffet breakfast, followed by a Memorial Service

WHEN do military reunions take place?

Usually every year, at the same season of the year

Some are every other year or less often

Occasionally there are mid-year mini-reunions, chapter meetings, etc.

Some you talk with will be having their first reunion ever

They are most often in the fall, second most often in the spring, very seldom at other times

Dates are usually flexible – Money Talks!

Weekends at airport hotels are popular

Sometimes mid-week at resort hotels

If you can offer a good rate on particular dates, let them know about it

Military reunions are typically scheduled a year or more in advance

Don't expect to host one in the next few months,

But all things are possible – there are occasional exceptions

When you DO book one, expect solid business scheduled for a future year

WHERE do military reunions take place?

Which **CITY**?

Which **HOTEL**?

WHICH CITY?

Usually a different city every year

Can be anywhere

Typically chosen at a reunion, by the attendees, based on recommendations

East is more popular than West

Some groups rotate locations (North, South, Midwest, West, or something similar)

There are many criteria for selection...

Near the unit's former base or home port

Near other military facilities

An exciting city

Interesting attractions

The planner/coordinator lives there

They fought there

It's someplace new and different

Somebody sold them on it (CVB, FAM tour, etc.)

Some CVBs set their sights on attracting Military Reunions, and they get them

Branson, Missouri

Fairfax County, Virginia

Northern Kentucky

Greene County, Ohio

Rapid City, South Dakota

Which City?

Remember: Every city is a candidate to host a military reunion

Some cities host a lot of them...

Branson, Missouri

Norfolk / Williamsburg / Virginia Beach

San Diego

Washington, DC area, especially Fairfax County

Nashville

San Antonio

St. Louis

Cincinnati / Dayton

Charleston, South Carolina

Philadelphia area

Seattle area

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

Jacksonville, Florida

Rapid City, South Dakota

Source: History, plans, and desires of 133 Alliance members

WHICH HOTEL?

Most groups use only one hotel

Usually it's a full-service hotel with banquet facilities and hospitality space

Sometimes it's a cruise ship

The hotel is typically recommended/chosen by one person or a couple

Usually there's a committee that approves the recommendation or choice

Sometimes a reunion management company is involved

Usually there is a site visit – without it, you are asking for trouble

Room and a meal are usually comped

Typically the reunion group pays for the travel, but sometimes the planner does

It is important to see the Hospitality Room

Price is very important

Reunions often want a nice hotel at a good rate

They look for \$79-\$99, maybe more if breakfast is included

Some groups will trade down to get a lower rate, but few if any want low-end hotels.

Which Hotel?

For most military reunions, the ideal reunion hotel has several characteristics...

Reasonable room rates

Reasonable food and beverage rates

Reasonable local transportation costs

Knows the SMERF market and how to deal with it

May have a SMERF sales manager

Might have a military reunions sales manager

Is well-equipped to handle reunion groups

Loves them for what they are

You don't have to be ideal to get the business, but the closer you come, the better chance you have

Remember that overall cost is extremely important to most reunions

They also like you to understand them and be responsive to their special needs

WHERE? – One Reunion’s History

2004 – Norfolk – Our ship’s home port from 1952-1971

Hilton Norfolk Airport – Non-luxurious airport hotel with a friendly staff and a legendary reunion sales manager. Nowhere to walk. Miraculously accommodated our growth in a few months from an expected 50 people to almost 300 at our Saturday banquet.

2005 – San Diego – The ship was on the West Coast from 1945-1947

Red Lion Hanalei – Very nice hotel on Hotel Circle. Professional but not very helpful staff. Close to things, but nowhere to walk. Memorable as a nice California location.

2006 – Washington, DC – An exciting city

Marriott Crystal City – Luxurious downtown hotel, with lots going on. Professional staff, not particularly friendly. Great walking in an underground city connected directly to the lobby.

2007 – New London, CT – Suggested by our management company

Radisson Hotel – A small downtown hotel with a friendly staff. Great walking in a picturesque New England town.

2008 – Stuart, FL – The ship is sunk off the coast as a fishing and diving reef

Ramada Stuart – Small hotel on a highway. Nowhere to walk. Exceptionally warm and welcoming. General Manager was personally involved in every aspect of our stay.

2009 – Norfolk – Back to our old home port

Sheraton Waterside – Big hotel on the waterfront. Professional staff, not particularly friendly. No free airport shuttle, but a truly wonderful walking location.

2010 – Branson, MO – Popular. Something different for us.

Radisson Hotel – Typical large but friendly Branson hotel. Haven’t stayed there yet.

One Reunion's History, continued

2011 – Charleston, SC – A popular reunion town with lots of Navy history.

The city was chosen more or less arbitrarily – a lot of people just seemed to like it

The decision was made by the Executive Board, without a lot of deliberation

I'm the sole decision maker about the hotel, and nobody's likely to question me

I don't have a lot of time to spend evaluating hotels and making a decision

Since we use a reunion management company, the decision isn't particularly burdensome

They have a favorite hotel, but it isn't an Alliance member

Their favorite isn't necessarily the best hotel for us – business considerations might well come first for them

Several Charleston hotels have prospected me

One is a stalwart member of the Alliance, and the sales manager is an outstanding military reunions specialist

With me and the management company both involved, we'll definitely end up in a nice hotel

2012 – City To Be Determined

We will probably decide at the Branson reunion in September

We've kind of penciled in a return to Stuart

But there's been some interest in Chicago, Nashville, New Orleans, and others

The decision will probably be made quickly and without a lot of deliberation

Our management company can help us avoid bad choices

By the way... We're not 100% pleased with the management company, but they know us very well and they've helped us a lot in the past. It would be very hard to replace them.

RECAPPING – The Ideal Hotel

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WHY Should I Be Interested in This Market?

We report, you decide...

One in four households has a veteran in it

There are thousands of military reunion groups

They meet all over the country

They often look for something or someplace new

They typically bring 100 people to your hotel for a 3-5 night stay during an off-peak period

Some bring SEVERAL hundred

They usually have a well-documented history, so they have a pretty good handle on their numbers

They are flexible about dates

They won't cancel because of changes in budget, changes in management, Arizona boycotts, etc.

They won't trash your property

And all in all...

It's a fun & rewarding market, without much downside risk

HOW Can I Participate in This Market?

Know the SMERF market

It's not hard

Assign a sales manager to it

Be able to accommodate the basic requirements of military reunions

Reasonable room rates

Reasonable food and beverage rates

Inexpensive local transportation

Reasonable—by their standards—contract terms

Be prepared to meet their special wants and needs

They ARE a bit special, but most hotels can deal with them

We will tell you what they are

Prospect intelligently

It's not difficult, but this is a special market that takes some special care

Network!

Help their planners

HOW? – Basic Requirements of the Military Reunion Market

Reasonable room rates

Usually \$79-\$99 or so

Maybe more if breakfast is included

Some groups are willing to spend more

Reasonable food and beverage rates

No hugely expensive breakfasts, please

No big food and beverage minimums, please

Inexpensive local transportation

Free airport shuttle, or at least an inexpensive one

Free parking on site, or at least a break on high costs

Reasonable contract terms

No attrition clauses – this market hates them, and has no money to pay for unused rooms

No cancellation clauses – there's little chance they'll cancel

HOW? – This Market's Special Wants and Needs

Contracts

Most groups have no revenue source except for their reunions, which usually just pay for themselves

Most groups have little or no money in the bank

If they have any, it was painstakingly accumulated and they DO NOT want to spend it

So they are EXTREMELY skittish about what they see as onerous contract terms, especially financial ones

Contract terms can be deal breakers – some won't even consider hotels that require attrition clauses

If you are creative, almost anything is possible, e.g., work with them on dropping the size of their block as the time for the reunion approaches

Food and beverage

They often want breakfast included in the room rate

Continental breakfasts may be OK, since they often eat heavily at lunch and dinner

Having an on-site restaurant can be important

Offer lunch and dinner discounts there

Hospitality Room

The Hospitality Room is usually a very important part of their reunion

They will expect you to provide it at no charge

It's more than a parlor between two sleeping rooms

More to come...

How? – This Market’s Special Wants and Needs

More about the Hospitality Room...

It needs to be In a public area, so people can flow in and out

It needs to have tables to sit and relax at – a mixture of small and large ones is good, since it is friendly whether there are five or fifty people in the room

The customer probably wants to bring in their own packaged snacks and refreshments

They may want you to provide coffee at a reasonable cost

They want to drink beer & wine there, and possibly hard liquor

They may want to display memorabilia there

They may want to sell merchandise there

They may want to have a business meeting there

They need to lock it at night or when on tours

Alcohol in the hospitality room

Many groups want to bring in their own alcohol

For some groups, it’s a deal breaker if they can’t

Some hotels just let them do it

For the reunion group, cost is really the key

If you have to serve it yourself, make it inexpensive. These solutions have worked:

\$3 self-service beer in an ice tub, managed by the hotel

Cash subsidy by the hotel, CVB, or well-to-do members

Drink tickets or special prices at an adjacent bar area

Separate “wet” hospitality room in a private parlor

How? – This Market's Special Wants and Needs

The Reunion Attendees

They are easy to deal with (Usually!)

Many don't travel much, except to their annual reunion

They appreciate nice people and good service

Some will have wheelchairs, walkers, oxygen, special diets, etc.

A few will cancel at the last minute for medical reasons (their own or others)

Some will want to stay a few days before and/or after the reunion, at the reunion room rate

Some don't drive, or are reluctant to – try to make life easy for them!

Others will come in RV's – help them find parking!

They want a calm and trouble-free hotel experience

Nightlife isn't important to them

They want a few quiet drinks with their friends

In the hospitality room during the day

At the bar or lobby later on in the evening

They'll be in bed before midnight

HOW? – Prospect Intelligently

Understand the market

Use lists of past and future reunions

Many reunion notices are published in magazines and on web sites

The Alliance has a guide to reunion notice publishers

Members get it for free

Do your homework – visit their web site

Be aware that some people you will contact are highly experienced, while others are totally new

Push their military buttons – EVERYBODY has a nice hotel, but not everybody can connect it to a military interest

Don't overwhelm them with data

They get tons of literature packages, with tons of DVDs

They are not particularly skilled at analyzing their contents, or even particularly interested

They probably don't care about your fifteen different menu packages

If your sales managers are graded on how much literature they send out, please have pity on our volunteer planners, and help us reduce the content of our landfills

HOW? – Network!

Get close to your CVB / DMO

Reunion planners often go to them first

Some of them focus strongly on this market

Many will circulate RFP's to hotels that seek military reunion business – if they don't know you're interested, they may not send you the RFP's

Join the Alliance of Military Reunions

We want to make it the best \$100 you've ever spent

Reunion groups will see you as being supportive of their market

You get a directory listing that will be seen by anyone who visits our web site

It has links to your web site and special landing pages

It has clever links to Wikipedia

You'll get invited to our special events, have access to our publications, etc.

Refer your colleagues to the Alliance

A fragmented market is becoming more united

Word of mouth is becoming important

Also refer your former Military Reunions

We are only one year old – they may not know about us

You'll be doing them a favor, and they will maybe want to return it

They aren't accustomed to joining anything, let alone having anything worthwhile to join

The more members we have, the better it is for all of us

HOW? – Help Their Planners

It's a relationships market – take your time to understand who you are dealing with

Most planners are volunteers

Their reunions are serious to them, but this is their hobby, not their business

Some have never planned a reunion, some have planned ten or more

Assist the former, respect the latter

Size up their qualifications before you get too far with them

Regarding the first-time planners...

They may have been pressured into the job, and will probably only do it once

Many are not familiar with business: contracting, negotiating, etc.

They may be frightened to death

Realize that, in their ignorance, they might make unreasonable requests of you

Be patient in explaining things, especially your contracts

Regarding ALL Military Reunion planners...

Facilitate their site visit

Treat them better than they deserve

Comp their room and possibly a meal or two

Think about reimbursing their travel

Offer help with tours and attractions

Make sure they're in touch with the CVB / DMO

How? – Help Their Planners

Treat your planners royally at the reunion

They have worked hard to make this happen

Often this is their only reward

It is the norm to comp the planner's room

Upgrade it if you can – make it a VIP room

Remember word of mouth – happy planners will never forget you!

Don't forget that the planner might not be the only VIP in attendance

He/she may not be the head of the reunion group

There may be some distinguished guests

The others don't need a comped room, but a bit of VIP treatment might not hurt

RECAPING Everything So Far...

We have shown you

WHO is involved in the Military Reunions Market

WHAT that market consists of

WHEN military reunions take place

WHERE they are held

WHY you might be interested in the market, and

HOW you can succeed in pursuing it

So in closing...

Here's to a Long and Happy Relationship!



The End

