



James A. Parker 2013

JAMES A. PARKER Command Sergeant Major (Retired)

The special memories I have of music and dancing began with my Dad who loved to dance so much that his nickname was "Jitterbug Man". Watching him practice his dance moves began my love for rhythm and blues and the fast dance we now call the Carolina Shag. Later, after Rocky Mount, NC sports games, we would head to places where we could dance. Those times were called the "Cat" age because of the way we dressed; pegged pants, ducktail hair, turned up collar and a key chain hanging out of our pocket.

During high school summer break, after burning tobacco all week, we would head to Atlantic Beach, NC where we would dance all weekend, day and night, at the Pavilion and the Idle Hour. My goal was always to dance with all of the girls. I've always admired female dancers for their smoothness and ability to so easily follow the lead of various partners.

Because we had very little money, we would sleep in our cars or on the beach at the fishing pier. We would take cold showers in a public bath house down the road. I made friends with a young couple from Greenville, NC who invited me to stay in the basement of their beach house. That was a treat after sleeping in my car and on the beach.

We would dance anywhere we could find a dance floor and a jukebox. After graduation from high school in 1957, I continued dancing in Atlantic Beach and other dance places in NC such as White Lake, Williams Lake, Hill View, Jolly Knave, Silver Lake, Gray Goose and Taylor's Pond just to name a few. I also migrated to Ocean Drive beach clubs including Fat Harold's The Pavilion, Spanish Galleon, Ducks and The Pad as well as Sonny's Pavilion at Cherry Grove.

Part of dancing was how you looked. With some of the money I made working in tobacco, I would head to Andrews Direct Tailoring Shop in Durham, NC to buy two pairs of tailor-made pants with pegged legs and scalloped pockets with my initials, "JAP", embroidered on the left pocket so it was visible while I was dancing. I also added a special right-hand pocket just for my comb. To complete our "look", Shag Alberty and I would sit outside The Pavilion spit shining our shoes until the door opened. Our shoes looked real good until after the first dance.

In 1961 I entered the US Army and continued dancing as much as possible during my 30-year Army Career. After completion of basic training, my first assignment was Fort Bragg, NC. I also served in Germany, two tours in Vietnam, Alaska and Southwest Asia including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. As a qualified Special Forces Soldier, I was trained conventional and unconventional warfare to include Master Parachutist, High Altitude Low Opening (HALO) Military Free Fall and Underwater Operations SCUBA Diver. I retired at the highest non-commissioned officer rank of Command Sergeant Major. Some of my most prestigious military awards include National Defense Service Medal with Bronze service star, Army Good Conduct Medal, 10th award, Army Commendation Medal, Civil Action Honor Medal(1st Class), Vietnam Service medal with four campaign stars, Bronze Star medal (2 Oak Leaf Clusters), Vietnam Campaign Medal, Combat Infantry Badge, Master Parachutist Badge, Master High Altitude Low Opening (HALO) Badge, Combat Divers Badge, Non-Commissioned Officer of Professional Development Ribbon 4, Southwest Asia Service Medal with Bronze Service Star-2, Kuwait Liberation Medal (Saudi Arabia), Kuwait Liberation Medal (Kuwait), and the Legion of Merit.

After my retirement from the Army, I again became very active in the shag community. I also fished professionally on both the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (BASS) and the F.L.W. Tournament Trails. While fishing, I found time to dance from North Carolina to Florida. In 2005, I retired from professional fishing which afforded me more time to dance including attendance at as many shag events as possible.

Throughout the years, I've enjoyed membership in the Fayetteville Area Shag Association, Florence Shag Club and Rocky Mount Shag Club. I've been honored with induction into the Fayetteville Area Shaggers Hall of Fame and the Atlantic Beach Shaggers Hall of Fame.

Whenever I travel to North Myrtle Beach, I feel like I'm taking a trip back in time. As I pass Hoskins Restaurant and Judy's House of Oldies I feel a curtain begin to rise taking me back to my youth. With the appearance of Fat Harold's and Ducks, the curtain continues to rise. Then I spot my long-time friends. They appear to me again as those young folks I shared the dance floor with long ago during wonderful times. These friends include Shad Alberty and Dan Denson, my running buddies, Harry Driver, one of the originals, Doug Perry, the dancing-est Marine I ever saw, Norfleet Jones, Doug's tail-gunner, and Bill Young, who told me he wanted to dance like me. Shaggers are special people. There's no other place on earth where a group of people can get together in such harmony and friendship as we do on the dance floor.

I consider my selection for induction into the Shaggers Hall of Fame a truly wonderful honor and surprise. When I started dancing as a teenager, I would never have envisioned induction into this Hall of Fame. I still dance every chance I get, doing everything I can to keep the music and dance alive.

What's important is not how good you are, but how much fun you have doing it. And when you're shagging, you should have a smile on your face.