

VGCA Visits Institute of Military Technology

By Rob Becker

At the end of October, a total of 22 VGCA members, family, and friends traveled south to Titusville, Florida. There they connected with Bernie Breighner, former VGCA President and current employee of Knight's Armament Company, who had graciously set up a tour of the Institute of Military Technology. It started on the evening of October 31st with an informal gathering at the Titusville Courtyard Marriott's rooftop Space Bar overlooking the Cape Canaveral Space Center (*below, with Bernie in the orange shirt at the back*). It was a fun evening with some adult beverages being consumed.



The next morning, the group (*below*) assembled in front of the Institute of Military Technology (IMT). IMT is the small arms (and some not-so-small arms) collection of Mr. C. Reed Knight, Jr. Started in 2009, IMT's mission is to Preserve, Educate, and Motivate by collecting and displaying historically significant items to help honor the history and evolution of arms and armed forces. IMT focuses on armament innovations as well as the technical and mechanical advancements, with an emphasis on those developments that took place in the United States. IMT is a private institution and as such, not open to the public. Being able to see this incredible collection is by invitation only.



After signing in, we met IMT's Museum Curator, Joe Fink. Joe would be our tour guide for most of the day. Joe has what most of us would consider the perfect job. He said he spends one third of time cataloging artifacts (mostly firearms) for the museum, one third of his time conducting tours, and the final third perusing auction sites looking for future museum acquisitions. How great is that!?!

The tour began in the Hall of U.S. Arms (*below*). This huge room featured American small arms – and some crew serviced weapons – dating back to the Revolutionary War. There were military muskets,



rifles, shotguns, handguns, machine guns, cannons, prototypes, trials guns, and various production models. We spent almost the entire morning in this one area and at one point, Mr. Knight himself joined us. A quick review of a collection of European cartridge conversions and early breechloaders (including Ferguson rifles from the Revolutionary War serial numbers 1 and 2!) in the Reception Hall and then we were off to lunch. Mr. Reed joined us at Sonny's BBQ, an apparent favorite of the Knights Armament folks. After some excellent barbeque, it was back to IMT!



The afternoon included the Hall of Modern Arms (*above*) with its recreation of Eugene Stoner's office / desk and early Armalite and Stoner 63 prototypes, the Culp Gallery (with Colt AR15 serial number 1 and the first Colt M16 made), and the International Hall of Arms. Mr. Knight (*on the left, in the maroon shirt*) shared innumerable stories of his friend Mr. Stoner. That experience alone was worth the trip!



In recognition of his efforts to preserve American military firearms history and for graciously allowing us to see it, Mr. Charles Reed Knight, Jr. was presented with an Honorary Membership in the Virginia Gun Collectors Association (*left*).

Unfortunately, for security purposes, we were unable to take many pictures inside the firearms portion of this peerless collection. However, we finished our tour checking out the armored vehicles where pictures were allowed. I guess the risk of someone stealing a 35-ton M4 Sherman medium tank (*right*) is much lower!



One of Reed Knight's many ventures is that he has a McLaren sports/racing car dealership. It was an interesting juxtaposition to see these luxury lightning bolts parked next to armored fighting vehicles (*above left*) which themselves were designed for anything but speed (*M7 Priest with 105mm cannon, above right*)!

A hallway lined with muzzle-loading cannons connected the firearms collection to the tank park. VGCA Director Ian Wulf (*right*) was impressed!



We ended a busy day with a group dinner as our last official function. Many stuck around Titusville for the weekend, taking in the sights, checking out the local gun shops, and even trying to watch a SpaceX Falcon 9 launch (unfortunately postponed at the last minute by a helium issue). All-in-all, it was a fantastic VGCA trip!

