



May-June 2016, Issue 67
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See all issues at the 503rd PRCT Heritage Battalion website:
http://corregidor.org/VN2-503/newsletter/issue_index.htm

~ 2/503d Photo of the Month ~



Paratroopers of the 2/503 arrive Bien Hoa AFB, RVN on 5 May 65 as the first U.S. ground combat force to enter the war.

[Photo by LTC George Dexter, (COL Ret.), Bn Cmdr 2/503. See more from the Colonel's '65/'66 photo collection on Pages 69-70]



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We Dedicate this Issue of Our Newsletter in Memory of the Men of the 173d Airborne Brigade We Lost 50 Years Ago in the Months of May & June 1966

"Dear soldier, I am writing this to express my undying gratefulness for your willingness to serve the Land of the Free. You gave the supreme sacrifice, being struck down in battle, protecting your country. Our generation has not forgotten you and the generations to come will not forget either. Thank you and God bless." Jordan Meiss

Darrell Wayne Martinson, A/2/503, 5/2/66

"The last picture I have of my nephew he is holding my newborn daughter of three weeks. Little did I know that it would represent the beginning and ending of life. He was a fine young man and served his country as his father did."

Birdie Bagley Westerdahl



**Leslie Cowper
NZN Nurse, 5/2/66**



John Edward McMahan, B/1/503, 5/5/66

"'Mac' was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade. He was killed on Operation Dexter about 20 minutes flying time from our Base at Bien Hoa. We were operating in a remote jungle area, away from any VN settlements; I think it was within 'D Zone.' We were honored to have served with him." Larry Dacunto



Richard Michael Patrick, B/1/503, 5/17/66

"My Grandfather (Richard 'Dick' Patrick) has passed Mike's medals on to me. I'm in the process of collecting and creating a shadow box memorial for our family. It's taken the family many years, but there is a renewed interest in Uncle Mike and his life and tragic death (now that we can more freely talk about it without tearful hearts). We remember him and wish he were here, but Providence didn't grant us that time. For all that remember Mike we hope the photos will bring back good memories of a truly courageous young man." Kirk Coppinger



Jimmy LaVerne Williams, B/1/503, 5/17/66

"I am very proud and honored to call this man my uncle Jimmy. He is my father's big brother. And I grew up with his images hanging in our house, but only as an adult did I begin to understand how important he was to our family and to our country. Named in his honor, my younger brother bears his name, and now my 4 year old nephew is also Jimmy L. Williams. Uncle Jimmy is not forgotten, and never will be. Not only do I honor my uncle, but all veterans who sacrifice so much for us all." Sylvia Williams



Allen Morgan Garrett, B/1/503, 5/17/66

"I remember you, the platoon and that day. It was very difficult for all of us. I wish you could have made it. RIP." Randy Cesani

**William E. Walters
B/1/503, 5/17/66**



Johnny Harrison, B/1/503, 5/17/66
(Virtual Wall states A/1/503)

Richard William Bullock, B/1/503, 5/17/66

"I looked up your name every time I went to the The Wall. You were near my machine gun position when you took hits from enemy fire on Hill 72 that late afternoon when we were ambushed by a regiment of VC and NVA. I remembered you when you said you used to include us in your daily prayers. I will never forget how you fought to stay alive, saying that the Lord will not let you die, because you believed in the Lord. You and my other brother Paratrooper Tony Dedman died that day on Hill 72."

A US Paratrooper of The Herd

(continued....)



Walter L. Burroughs, B/1/503, 5/17/66

"It was my privilege to serve as bugler, and to play 'Taps' at the gravesite services for Walter when he was laid to rest with full military honors at Maple Grove Cemetery, North Lewisburg, Champaign County, Ohio, in 1966. Walt was the first Champaign County casualty of the Viet Nam War. The town turned out in full force to pay him the respect and honor he deserved."

Ralph Lowell Coleman, Jr.



Felix Esparza, Jr., B/1/503, 5/17/66

"Even though mom was pregnant with me and she did not even know at the time, you were in Vietnam. You did not make it home and months later I was born. I am blessed because God chose me to be your little sister. I love you with all my heart and wish you were physically here with us, but I am so proud of you. We all love you and your legacy lives on through us. My beautiful brother my hero my love for you will never end." Mark Villalobos



Artis Wesley Anderson, B/1/503, 5/17/66



Edward Hamilton, HHB/3/319, 5/17/66



"This photo is of my Brother, Sgt. Edward Hamilton, 173rd Airborne, United States Army. My brother was KIA in Vietnam May 17, 1966, and was from Tampa, Florida. This is the best photo I have of my brother. Still missing him." His Sister, Cindy Underwood

Tony Dedman, B/1/503, 5/17/66

Kenneth Eugene Duncan
B/1/503, 5/17/66



Hosea Dennis Adam, B/1/503, 5/18/66

"What a special, joy-filled brother you were! Whenever, I needed a smile or even a shoulder to cry on, whenever, I needed a friend, there you were with some foolishness that would dissolve my woes into giggles. It was impossible to be with you and not have fun. I'll never forget that wild night Alice and I met you at Stillwell, or hanging out on the beach, dining at Oyama, all those nights you saw me safely home, goofing on the base bus, that time we 'ghosted' at the Hilltop in Fatema, the night you and the fellas made me an honorary member of E/17 Cav, all the Akadama wine we drank, all the movies we saw, all the games we attended, all the house parties, all the laughs! The war didn't become real to me until I read your name on the *Stars & Stripes* casualty list. Loosing you changed my entire perspective of the war and life in general. That was the day the Captain's little All-American girl went from gung-ho to 'Stop the war now!' Who'd have thought someone so young, so vital could be gone in an instant? Thought I'd never smile again, but I do. When I remember the sweet, funny, protective big brother I never had, I do. I smile whenever I remember those golden days on The Rock when we were young and invincible. And I'm still consumed with laughter at the sight of a Brazil nutre calling our private joke." Lona Maney Harris

Kenny Wayne Bullard
A/1/503, 5/19/66



"It is our job to remember."

~ Mark Carter
173d LRRP, E-17th Cav

(continued...)



Michael Raymond Kiehl, A/1/503, 5/19/66

"My brother Mike was such a kind and happy person, loving and loved by all who knew him. He believed in his country and he believed in God. He knew the evils of war, but he believed in his country enough to make this the ultimate sacrifice so that we could have continued freedom. May God bless all who read and remember my brother not so much as a hero, which he was, but as a loving and kind and genuine human being. Mike was my brother and also my friend. In his last year of high school, Mike played taps during a halftime performance with the marching band at an El Capitan High School football game, which became sadly prophetic a few short years later. To this day, my heart stops whenever I hear taps played. I miss you Mike, and I know you are with Jesus now, no longer in pain or want. Someday I am coming too. Say hi to dad for us." Ellen Thompson



Carter Redmond, A/1/503, 5/20/66

"Redmond. You were a very quiet soldier when I knew you. I think of you and Moore daily and keep both of you constantly in my heart. Rest now my brothers in the presence of our lord Jesus Christ."

Jesus Peralta, A-1/503 173 Abn



Gilliam Moore, A/1/503, 5/20/66

"Happy Memorial Day Dad. I know that although you never had the chance to meet me, I was in your heart as you are in mine. Our bond is beyond life, and indestructible. I pray that you're as proud of me as I am of you. Love - Your Son, Steve."

Steve Berlack



*"We were young,
they say.
We have died;
remember us."*

~ Archibald MacLeish

Jack Elroy Gardner, A/1/503, 5/20/66

"When we meet next in heaven, I want another hug. Love, your sister, Mary." Mary Vacalady



March 1966. Jack Elroy Gardner, holding his brother, Joel Wayne Gardner.



Robert Louis Guerin, A/1/503, 5/21/66

"My name is Henry J. Garcia. I knew Robert in Viet-Nam, he was my trainer and I was his replacement for our unit, A CO 1-503 Infantry 3rd platoon 3rd squad 173 Airborne. He was shot the same day I was wounded, his body was discovered the next day. On the 20th of May 1966 I tried to rescue Guerin and bring him back to safety but I was spotted by an enemy machine gunner and could not reach Guerin. I think of him often and live everyday with survivor's guilt." Henry J. Garcia



Walter William Phelps, A/1/503, 5/21/66

William Jeffrey Wilson
HHC/173 Bde, 6/3/66



(continued....)



Stephen H. Gaymon, B/1/503, 6/3/66

"Stephen was a true patriot. He joined the Army on his own accord. He wanted to be a Ranger, but did not qualify. He believed fighting the war was the right thing to do and paid the price only 10 days after arrival in Vietnam with a claymore mine. Did he die in vain?



Hell, no. The United States showed its resolve to fight and Communism is no longer a threat. Stephen was one of my best boyhood friends and news of his death was one of the most shocking events of my life. I remember him often and especially at Memorial Day, as his death occurred on June 3. America gave its best in Stephen Gaymon." Rick White

Debrow Dozier, C/1/503, 6/3/66

"He has sacrificed his young life and his entire future, so that we can embrace the freedom that is America. God bless you Debrow."

Richard Cumberland

Charles J. Wisniewski, Jr., HHC/2/503, 6/5/66

"Although I only knew you for 8 years of my life... you were my hero. I miss you and wonder how different life would be if you were here with us now. Love you, / little sister."

Cathryn Dolanc



Thomett Darthan Campbell, HHC/2/503, 6/5/66

"Thomas graduated from Magnolia High School, Thomasville, GA. His parents were Me and Mrs. Thomas L. Campbell of Thomasville. Thomas had four sisters: Ruth Virginia, Marilyn Lois, Shirley Jean, and Debra Anita; and three brothers: John Andrew, Calvin, and Richard Campbell; all of Thomasville. Rest in peace with the warriors."



Michael Patrick Donlon, HHC/2/503, 6/5/66

"Because there are not many 'messages', or 'memorials' left for Michael, is not to presume that nobody cares ... it is because we care so deeply. My brother is dead 36 years (1966-2002), and I can hardly write my feelings ... 36 years after his death. He was 23 years old



when he was KILLED by the leaders of our government ... He was CHEATED out of his life ... he never had a wedding, a child born, he wasn't here to comfort my Mom and Dad when they needed him, when we needed him. And, even today, at family gatherings, when my nieces and nephews, and my own children are together, I miss Michael, and his presence in our family. He was only 23 years old! I wish he hadn't died!" His Sister

Ward Warren Mills, Jr., C/2/503, 6/10/66

"To the boy I remember growing up beside. I still think of you as 'Billy'. Thank you for your gift to this Country. God Bless you and your entire family." Linda Hodges Helm



Gregory Thomas Buczynski, C/2/503, 6/10/66

"As the years pass, my memory of you never dims. I was one of the lucky ones that came back. The ultimate sacrifice you made in 'NAM' in '66 is again being carried out by yet another generation of kids just like we were...in another part of the world that is just as remote and far away as the one in which we were confronted with. They, like us, are warriors, infused with the 'warrior spirit' and like us, they go off to combat with the mindset that they are invincible. I pray, as our own families did forty years ago, that this conflict ends in victory and that our men and women in uniform return home swiftly." Wayne G. Brassell



B.F. Coupe, 5RAR, 6/10/66

L.T. Farren, 5RAR, 6/10/66

David Wayne Stewart, E/17th Cav, 6/11/66

Ralph Simon, C/2/503, 6/11/66

"Although my memories of my uncle are too few, I will always remember the dedication, honor and sacrifice he made for all of us and never take for granted the freedom we all enjoy today. Thank you Uncle Ralph." Michael Chiacchieri



(continued....)



James T. Lockridge
A/2/503, 6/12/66



Billy Williams, A/2/503, 6/12/66
(Virtual Wall states A/1/503)

Rene Cerda Lopez, C/2/503, 6/12/66

"Although I have very few memories, you are a very special man and Hero. I was only two with two younger brothers and one older sister. You will always be missed and be a hero to your children, Cora, myself, Rene Jr, Michael (Juan Miguel). Thank you for the brave sacrifice for our freedom and that of our countrymen. You will be forever missed." Irma C. Lopez Bustos, his daughter



Raymond Hoyt Hudson
E/17th Cav, 6/15/66



Terry Wayne Lorenz, A/1/503, 6/16/66
(Virtual Wall states B/1/503)

"Terry was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade. He was killed in a firefight in Phuoc Long Province, near Vung Tao in the final days of Operation Hardihood. We were honored to have served with him."

Larry Cacunto



I.R. Brown, 1DIVPRO (Aust), 6/21/66
Jesse Clarence Felder, A/2/503, 6/29/66

Richard Lee Hido, A/2/503, 6/29/66

"He died too early. I waited for him to return...and he loved me. Old age now makes my heart ache for the times we shared."

Jane L. Beecher



Tommy Roy Jones, A/2/503, 6/29/66

"Hi Tommy, I know God will bring us together again someday. The older I get, the more I think about all the fun we had while growing up in Corinth Community. I'll never forget the summer of 1965 when I drove to Raleigh to pick you up at the train station. You talked about how you hated that you couldn't get leave to attend William's funeral. I was thankful we had a few days together before you headed to Airborne training. We were all proud of you and thankful for your service to our Country. Miss you Brother. Never forgotten."



John Joseph Berthel, A/2/503, 6/29/66

"Hi, guy ... happy birthday on 5/17. We all miss you - family and friends. We still care for you even if we are not there. Love from Jim, Dee, Jo-Ann, and Samantha Jo ... she would have loved you."



Frank Graves, A/2/503, 6/29/66

"Frank, although we never met, I just want you to know you are not forgotten. You gave the ultimate sacrifice, your life for what you believed in. Sleep well my friend, and thank you for protecting the freedoms we have today."

Dave Kruger, 196th LIB. 66-67



Frederic William Fritts, A/2/503, 6/29/66

"Rest in sweet peace, Freddy. Thank you for your service and sacrifice for our family and for our country. You will never be forgotten!" Sandy (Pryne) Winters



Francis George Stevens, A/2/503, 6/29/66

"I recently came across your headstone in Surry, Maine...I too am a fellow army brother but from a different era. I am grateful for the sacrifice you made and will now always remember your name. Thank you." Allan

(continued....)



Paul Joseph Surette, A/2/503, 6/29/66

"I cried a lot today as I remember a beautiful life that was taken away! You were once with me all day as we laughed the time away in Holbrook High we had to stay! I want to thank you through my tears for your friendship so sincere, if you think I forgot you, your wrong for I carry your smile throughout my years."

Jean Levangie Reuther



Leslie R. Smith, A/2/503, 6/29/66

"It's been almost 49 years since you left us and I still miss you and think of you all the time. We lived together and shared a room and shared our dreams. I can remember all those nights when we talked until the sun came out. You were and still are not only the country's hero, but my hero. I always say that if you had lived, I know my life would have been different because I would have had you to share it with, but someday I will share eternity with you in heaven. Until then, I know you are still watching over me. I love you and we have birthdays coming up next month." My best cousin/brother



Robert Michael Bowman, A/2/503, 6/29/66

"As an American, I would like to thank you for your service and for your sacrifice made on behalf of our wonderful country. The youth of today could gain much by learning of heroes such as yourself, men and women whose courage and heart can never be questioned."

Curt Carter



Malcolm C. "Doc" Berry, 6/29/66, HHC/A/2/503

"(On a return trip to Vietnam) 'Von Ryan' (Mike Thibault, A/2/503) asked me if I'd like to accompany him to *Malcolm's Bridge*, a bridge Mike T is having built over a river in some small village in memory of Malcolm Berry, a friend of his who was killed during the war on 29 June '66, and where Mike nearly lost his life to severe wounds. I declined his invitation and Mike S (Sturges, A/2/503) decided to go in my place, as only a couple Americans could sneak into the restricted area where *Malcolm's Bridge* is being built."

Lew Smith, HHC/2/503, from
Soldiers Return to Vietnam

Albert Raymond Potter, A/2/503, 6/29/66

"Al Potter was my neighbor when I was 13 years old, shortly before he was killed. His wife Carrie and him treated me as a daughter and were very special to me. I will never forget either of them. God Bless his soul forever more." Pat Scott

David Allen Ferraro, A/2/503, 6/30/66

"And God said 'Whom shall I send?..
..I answered I am here, send me.'
Isaiah 6.8 Dave Avery



Sources:

U.S.

173d Abn Bde Society Casualty List

The Virtual Wall, www.virtualwall.org

The Wall of Faces, www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/

Australian

<http://thecasualtylist.com/casualtylist.html>

Our research found no Kiwi Soldiers KIA in 1966.

Note: Please send photos and any corrections to
rto173d@cfl.rr.com

We will forward photos to both KIA web sites.

The Young Dead Soldiers Do Not Speak

Poem by Archibald MacLeish



The young dead soldiers do not speak.
Nevertheless, they are heard in the still houses;
who has not heard them?

They have a silence that speaks for them at night
and when the clock counts.

They say: We were young. We have died.
Remember us.

They say: We have done what we could but until
it is finished it is not done.

They say: We have given our lives but until it is
finished no one can know what our lives gave.

They say: Our deaths are not ours; they are yours,
they will mean what you make them.

They say: Whether our lives and our deaths were
for peace and a new hope or for nothing we cannot
say, it is you who must say this.

We leave you our deaths. Give them their meaning.
We were young, they say. We have died; remember

us.

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~ 2/503rd Casualty Report ~

~ PRECIS ~

The first elements of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) arrived at Bien Hoa, Republic of Viet Nam, on 05 May 1965. The last elements of the Brigade departed Viet Nam on 25 August 1971. In the intervening six years, three months, and 20 days, 1,646 "Sky Soldiers" died ~ and 545 of those were members of the 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, about one-third of all casualties sustained in the Brigade.



"War is Hell"

The earliest recorded death in the Battalion during those six years was that of PFC Thomas Van Campen of Bravo Company on 24 June 1965, while the last was that of PFC Alan Goff of Alpha Company on 06 July 1971.

~ INTRODUCTION ~

The purpose of this "Casualty Report" is to take a look at the 2nd/503rd's losses: first year-by-year, then company-by-company. The primary source document is the "173d Airborne KIA's" roster maintained on the Firebase 173 website. These figures are my "best approximations"; no claims are made for complete accuracy.



"Remember Pappy"

The tables below are divided into "combat" and "noncombat" categories. Included under "combat" are deaths involving small arms, multiple fragmentation wounds, mortars and rockets. Included under "noncombat" are accidents, diseases, drownings, homicides, misadventure (i.e. "friendly fire"), plus helicopter and vehicular accidents.

It is also worth noting that only four Companies (*viz.*, Headquarters, Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie) served in Viet Nam for all six years. Delta Company was created in 1967 by "borrowing" troopers from the four original companies, and Echo Company was created in 1968 by "borrowing" from the other five companies.

~ THE RESULTS ~

The data speak for themselves, but several items deserve special mention:

- Deadliest Year: 1967 ~ followed by 1966, 1968, 1965, 1969, 1970, and 1971
- 1965 ~ Arrived in Viet Nam during May; III Corps, Bien Hoa, War Zone D
- 1966 ~ III Corps: Bien Hoa, War Zones C & D, Ho Bo Woods
- 1967 ~ III Corps: Bien Hoa, Combat Jump; II Corps, Dak To, Hills 1338 & 875
- 1968 ~ II Corps: Camp Radcliff, Tet Offensive, LZ English, Bong Son Plain
- 1969 ~ II Corps: LZ English, Bong Son Plain, Pacification
- 1970 ~ II Corps: LZ English, Bong Son Plain, Camp Radcliff
- 1971 ~ II Corps: Camp Radcliff, LZ Uplift; Departed Viet Nam during August

Most Hardest Hit: Alpha ~ followed by Bravo, Charlie, Delta, HQ, and Echo

"No-DEROS Alpha" had 179 of the Battalion's 493 combat deaths: 36% of total

"No-DEROS Alpha" had 191 of the Brigade's 1,646 deaths: 12% of the total

~ DATA BY YEAR ~

1965	HHC	A Co.	B Co.	C Co.		Total
Combat	02	01	27	11		41
Non-Combat	00	01	01	00		02
Totals	02	02	28	11		43

1966	HHC	A Co.	B Co.	C Co.		Total
Combat	07	41	20	15		83
Non-Combat	01	03	02	00		06
Totals	08	44	22	15		89

1967	HHC	A Co.	B Co.	C Co.	D Co.	Total
Combat	15	117	33	62	23	250
Non-Combat	02	02	01	07	01	13
Totals	17	119	34	69	24	263

1968	HHC	A Co.	B Co.	C Co.	D Co.	E Co.	Total
Combat	06	10	23	02	12	00	53
Non-Combat	00	00	07	01	00	03	11
Totals	06	10	30	03	12	03	64

1969	HHC	A Co.	B Co.	C Co.	D Co.	E Co.	Total
Combat	00	05	07	06	03	05	26
Non-Combat	00	03	01	00	03	01	08
Totals	00	08	08	06	06	06	34

(continued....)



1970	HHC	A Co.	B Co.	C Co.	D Co.	E Co.	Total
Combat	01	03	08	04	09	02	27
Non-Combat	01	03	01	00	01	01	07
Totals	02	06	09	04	10	03	34

1971	HHC	A Co.	B Co.	C Co.	D Co.	E Co.	Total
Combat	03	02	02	04	02	01	14
Non-Combat	00	00	01	02	01	00	04
Totals	03	02	03	06	03	01	18

Year->	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
Combat	41	83	250	53	26	27	14	494
Non-Combat	02	06	13	11	08	07	04	51
Totals	43	89	263	64	34	34	18	545

~ DATA BY COMPANY ~

HHC	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
Combat	02	07	15	06	00	01	03	34
Non-Combat	00	01	02	00	00	01	00	04
Totals	02	08	17	06	00	02	03	38

Alpha	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
Combat	01	41	117	10	05	03	02	179
Non-Combat	01	03	02	00	03	03	00	12
Totals	02	44	119	10	08	06	02	191

Bravo	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
Combat	27	20	33	23	07	08	02	120
Non-Combat	01	02	01	07	01	01	01	14
Totals	28	22	34	30	08	09	03	134

Charlie	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
Combat	11	15	62	02	06	04	04	103
Non-Combat	00	00	07	01	00	00	02	10
Totals	11	15	69	03	06	04	06	113

Delta	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
Combat	-	-	23	12	03	09	02	49
Non-Combat	-	-	01	00	03	01	01	06
Totals	-	-	24	12	06	10	03	55

Echo	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
Combat	-	-	-	00	05	02	01	08
Non-Combat	-	-	-	03	01	01	00	05
Totals	-	-	-	03	06	03	01	13

~ COMBAT BY COMPANY ~

Year	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
HHC	02	07	15	06	00	01	03	34
Alpha	01	41	117	10	05	03	02	179
Bravo	27	20	33	23	07	08	02	120
Charlie	11	15	62	02	06	04	04	103
Delta	-	-	23	12	03	09	02	49
Echo	-	-	-	00	05	02	01	08
Totals	41	83	250	53	26	27	14	493

~ NONCOMBAT BY COMPANY ~

Year	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
HHC	00	01	02	00	00	01	00	04
Alpha	01	03	02	00	03	03	00	12
Bravo	01	02	01	07	01	01	01	14
Charlie	00	00	07	01	00	00	02	10
Delta	-	-	01	00	03	01	01	06
Echo	-	-	-	03	01	01	00	05
Totals	02	06	13	11	08	07	04	51

~ COMBAT & NONCOMBAT BY COMPANY ~

Year	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
HHC	02	08	17	06	00	02	03	38
Alpha	02	44	119	10	08	06	02	191
Bravo	28	22	34	30	08	09	03	134
Charlie	11	15	69	03	06	04	06	113
Delta	-	-	24	12	06	10	03	55
Echo	-	-	-	03	06	03	01	13
Totals	43	89	263	64	34	34	18	545

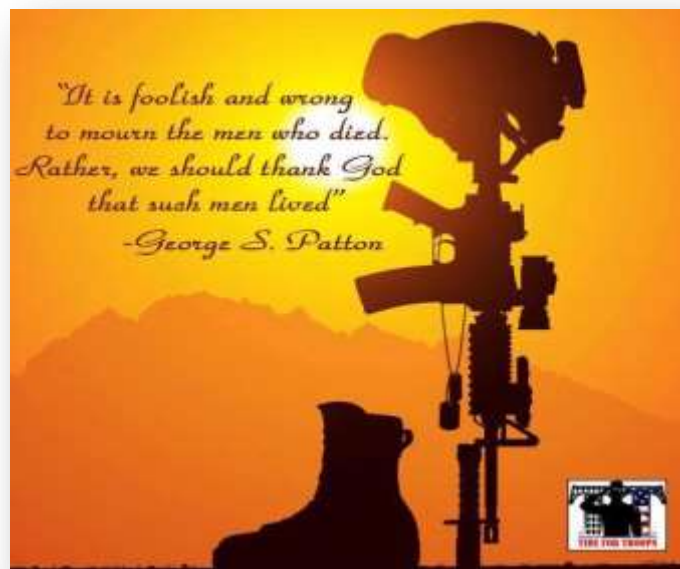
~ L'ENVOI ~

So, what do these numbers say about the fallen "Sky Soldiers" of the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate)?

Heroes? Patriots? Selfless Sacrifice? Valor? Terror? Horror? Anguish? Suffering? Senseless Waste? Fate? Destiny? Release? Ecstasy? Peace?

Perhaps you knew some of these men. Perhaps you were friends with one or more of them. Perhaps one or more of these men saved your life. Perhaps one or more of them died in your arms. Truly, what can we say about these "Sky Soldiers"?

Perhaps the last word belongs to General Patton:



Report produced and statistics compiled from Bde KIA list by Thomas Ayers, Col. (R), A/2/503.



About the 1/503's Operation on May 17, 1966

**Final Combat Action, Posted on 12/5/01
by Larry Dacunto**

In the event anyone wants to know about the combat action in which he (Allen Morgan Garrett) died, the following is offered.

On 17 May, Company B, 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade, airlifted into a new Area of Operations by helicopter, then air assaulted further north. Then we patrolled north toward a goose egg slightly north of Hill 72, planning to set up a perimeter defense, and the next day do some clover-leaving. When we were approaching the northernmost limit of our 105 coverage and would soon be stopping for the night, we engaged VC Main Force soldiers.

First platoon deployed on line engaging with rifles, M-60, and hand grenades, and second platoon maneuvered west to engage the enemy and develop the situation. Vegetation was very thick and it was not clear initially that the enemy were in trenches or bunkers. The enemy line was so wide, however, that both platoons became fully committed. To engage the enemy with indirect fire, the forward platoons were pulled back to establish a hasty perimeter, and artillery and tactical air strikes were called in. The VC disengaged and withdrew, leaving some bodies, but no weapons behind.

We kept firing air and artillery on the area they had occupied and along their probable withdrawal routes. Since it was late afternoon we consolidated and reorganized, and did not search the enemy camp area until the next morning when we found 16 enemy bodies; we heard later that the Brigade Radio Research Unit made communication intercepts indicating that the enemy had some 30 or more killed.

The VC use of automatic weapons, mortars and heavy MGs indicated at least a reinforced Main Force company if not a battalion.

We were honored to have served with him.

Source:

Posted on the *Wall of Faces* website.

[www.vvmf.org/Wall-of](http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/search/results/start/298/HOME_ST_RC/MI)

[Faces/search/results/start/298/HOME_ST_RC/MI](http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/search/results/start/298/HOME_ST_RC/MI)

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE
APO SAN FRANCISCO CA 96250
27 November 1966

AWARD OF THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL FOR HEROISM

EDWARD HAMILTON

Sergeant, E-5

13E4P – Cannon Fire Direction Specialist

HHB 3/319th Artillery

Attached to Company B, 1st Battalion

503d Infantry

173d Airborne Brigade (Sep)

United States Army

**Awarded: Bronze Star Medal with "V" Device
(Posthumously)**



Date Action: 17 May 1966

Theater: Republic of Vietnam

Citation:

For heroism in connection with military operations against a hostile force:

Sgt. Hamilton distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 17 May 1966 while serving as the Artillery Reconnaissance Sergeant accompanying the reconnaissance elements of Company B, 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry when contact was made with a Viet Cong sniper consisting of small arms and mortar fire. The company proceeded to sweep up Hill 72. Half way up the hill the company came under intense automatic weapons fire from three sides. The Artillery Forward Observer attached to the company immediately initiated a fire mission and Sergeant Hamilton remained with the observer under intense enemy fire to adjust artillery fire on the enemy machine gun emplacements and while in this exposed position Sergeant Hamilton was fatally wounded. Sergeant Hamilton's outstanding display of aggressiveness, devotion to duty, and personal bravery were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Race: Negro

Home: Tampa, Florida

Authority: By direction of the President under the provisions of Executive order 11046, 24 August 1962 and USARV I6695, AVA-S, 1 July 1966





INCOMING!



Thanks for the wonderful newsletter. I am now 84 ½ still trying to do the things for the 42nd IPSD that I started in 1970 but each year it becomes a wee bit harder. I lost my wonderful husband of 60 ½ years in 2013 and that was such a hard thing to accept. He was a WWII Navy Vet and we adopted the 42nd to show our support for the young men and dogs fighting this war to let them know we cared.

I hope you continue sending it to me as I read it front to back and over and over. I see how young the boys that fought in Nam are that are passing away and it breaks my heart.

To all of you I wish a healthy and long life and God Bless all of you!!

Jackie McIntyre
42nd IPSD Associated

~ 3rd Platoon, C/2 ~

On Page 4, Issue 66, **PFC Richard F. Smith** (KIA 3/16/66) was in 2nd Sqd, 3rd Plt, C/2/503 with me. Hope to see you at Columbus in June.

Jerry Patterson
C/2/503



L-R Front: SSG Earlie J. Butler KIA 14 Mar 66, and unknown trooper.

L-R Rear: SP4 Carlos E. Pagan, SGT Johnny Graham WIA early Jan 66, PFC Richard F. Smith KIA 16 Mar 66, and PFC Lawrence Wickstrom.

~ Paratrooper Sailors ~

I enjoyed the article about Herbert Murhammer (Issue 66, Pages 19-21). I remember him from Jump School and the trip across the pond to Okinawa aboard the USS General Patrick during May 65.

Jerry Patterson
C/2/503

U.S.S. General M.M. Patrick



2/503 paratrooper sailors aboard the USS Patrick
(Photo by Jim "Top" Dresser, A/HHC/2/503)

***"PTSD isn't about what's
wrong with you.
It's about what
happened to you."***

Jim Davis, CEO
Veterans for Change

(continued....)



~From A 325th Airborne Trooper ~

I had your newsletter forwarded to me. Outstanding reading. Enjoyed it very much. Have forwarded it on to Herd Members I know.

I arrived to B/2/325th Abn Inf 13 Dec 73. All of my NCO's in Wpn's Plt were Herd Nam Veterans.

Just got commo back up with my Plt Sgt who retired as a CSM (William C. Allen), sent this on to him.

Keep Up The Great Work GBU.

ALL THE WAY AND THEN SOME!

Bobby Wingate

B/2/325

About Bobby's unit:

"The 325th Airborne Infantry

Regiment is an airborne infantry regiment of the United States Army, part of the 82nd Airborne Division.

Its subordinate units currently constitute the 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division. The 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment deploys anywhere in the world, within 18 hours of notification. The regiment conducts forced entry parachute assaults to seize, retain and defend airfields or other assets, then builds up combat power in order to control land, people, and resources."



Regimental Flag



LET'S GO! Troopers of the 325th Airborne, on the move.
(web photo)

~ Dustoff Medic & Sky Soldier Hookup ~

Dustoff medic Neal Stanley here. Wow what an awesome newsletter. Thank you for including my Veterans Day talk at the Vietnam Women's Memorial (see Issue 66, Pages 83-87). I am highly honored.

Yesterday afternoon I received a phone call from Val Estrello telling me he was wounded on May 18th, 1968 and wondered if I remembered or knew if I was the Dustoff medic that picked him up. He asked me if I had seen the new newsletter and I said no as I hadn't checked my emails in a day or two which is very rare. He said there was something in it about me.

I called him back after checking my flight records and told him I did fly that day...7 missions that took 5.1 hours but I could not know if I picked him up or not. We had a great conversation and I told him I'd send him a copy of the DVD I created from the photos that I took in Nam. At that time I still had not read the newsletter but I saw that I had received it.

Last night I opened the newsletter, found the article and was totally blown away by all the awesome photos etc. which were added to illustrate my talk. Wow, even a photo of the USS William Wiegley ship. I will be sending it to all my 50th Med Det guys.

Neal Stanley

Dustoff Medic

50th Med Det (Hel-Amb)

Vietnam 1967-68



Neal, next to his Dust Off chopper.



(Incoming continued....)



~ From a Casper ~

Hi. I reposted the photo of the Casper Platoon Huey at LZ Moon from your newsletter (Issue 66, Page 30, Col. Thomas Ayers' photo) onto my Casper Platoon Facebook page: www.facebook.com/pages/Casper-Aviation-Platoon/311488529595

Thanks for sending me your newsletter, I always enjoy reading it!

FYI, I recently rebuilt my entire Casper Aviation Platoon web site. It's full of good stuff!

<http://www.casperplatoon.com>

Take care, Ned.

Ned Costa

Casper Platoon Crew Chief, Casper 721

HHC/Casper Platoon, '68/'69

NCHuey721@aol.com

A great website, Ned! I recommend everyone check it out. Ed



Ned, by his ride.

We love them Caspers & Cowboys!!!



See Pages 49-52 herein for Ned's story:
"Casper 721: The Last Flight"

COLA RATES

Veterans always get the same annual cost-of-living increase as Social Security recipients. But there's no guarantee that will continue. Lawmakers are again pushing for new legislation that would permanently tie together the two rate increases, and thus avoiding a potential hiccup if congressional politics stalls normally routine business.

House lawmakers have adopted the "American Heroes COLA Act" to provide an automatic cost-of-living adjustment such as disability compensation and payouts for dependents.

Source: *MilitaryTimes*



173d troopers evacuating a village.

(web photo)



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Vietnam War

May 1965

173rd Airborne Brigade deploys to South Vietnam

“The lead element of the 173rd Airborne Brigade (“Sky Soldiers”), stationed in Okinawa, departs for South Vietnam. It was the first U.S. Army ground combat unit committed to the war. Combat elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade included the 1st, 2nd (and later) the 3rd, and 4th Battalions, 503rd Infantry; the 3rd Battalion, 319th Airborne Artillery; Company D, 16th Armor; Troop E, 17th Cavalry; and the 335th Aviation company.

Below: Camp Zinn, initial base camp of the 2/503d near Bien Hoa, Vietnam. B Company in foreground, HHC at right, A Company at left, C Company perimeter at top of photo.

Headquartered at Bien Hoa Air Base near Saigon, the Brigade conducted operations to keep communist forces away from the Saigon-Bien Hoa complex.

In February 1967, the Brigade conducted a combat parachute jump into a major communist base area to the north of Saigon near the Cambodian border. In November 1967, the Brigade was ordered to the Central Highlands, where they fought a major battle at Dak To against an entrenched North Vietnamese Army regiment on Hill 875. In some of the most brutal fighting of the war, the paratroopers captured the hill on Thanksgiving Day, winning (earning) the Presidential Unit Citation for bravery in action.

After more than six years on the battlefield, the Brigade was withdrawn from Vietnam in August 1971. During combat service, they suffered 1,606 killed in action and 8,435 wounded in action. Twelve paratroopers of the 173rd won (earned) the Medal of Honor for conspicuous bravery in battle.”

Source:

www.history.com/this-day-in-history/173rd-airborne-brigade-deploys-to-south-vietnam



(Photo by Col. George Dexter, Bn CO 2/503)



BACK TO WAR ZONE 'D'



"TACTICS DISCUSSED – Civic action projects are discussed by Brig. Gen. Paul F. Smith, commanding general of the 173rd Abn. Bde., a Special Forces advisor and the local Buddhist representative." (Photo by 173rd ABN-IO)

BIEN HOA, (173rd ABN-IO) -- The 173rd Airborne Brigade celebrates its first year in Vietnam by plunging again into an area near War Zone D.

The operation, called "Dexter", began on May 4, 1966, exactly one year after the arrival of the brigade at Bien Hoa, and one year after the monsoon, which the Viet Cong idly boasted, was to mark the beginning of the final victorious offensive.

Ninety-eight officers and 1863 enlisted men with supporting equipment, supplies and ammunition left Okinawa on May 5, 1965, on heavily laden C-130s and C-124s. The remainder of the brigade sailed from Naha Port May 7.

The brigade, less the 1st Battalion of the 503rd Infantry, established a defensive position at the Bien Hoa Air Base, an installation once controlled by the French and a vital target to the Viet Cong. The 1st Battalion established a perimeter at Vung Tau, and on its first night in the war-torn country, the 173rd Airborne Brigade began operations by sending out ambush patrols.

A history-making year began for the 173rd soldiers that day in May. They were the first Army ground combat unit to arrive in Vietnam, the first to enter the supposedly impenetrable Iron Triangle, the first American ground unit to fight in the highlands. They added to the list the first trip into War Zone D by an

American unit, the first trip into the Delta by an American ground combat unit. They became the first unit to conduct a joint American-Vietnamese combat operation, and they were the first ground combat unit in War Zone C.

Operation "Hump" produced the heaviest single day's fighting for the 173rd in Vietnam. It began on Nov. 5, 1965, approximately 15 kilometers northeast of Bien Hoa. In one of the most hard fought battles of the war, the 173rd Airborne Brigade virtually annihilated a Viet Cong battalion in War Zone D. Brigadier General Ellis W.

Williamson, who commanded the brigade at that time said,

***"This was the largest kill
by the smallest unit,
in the shortest time
in the war to date."***

The most successful operation for the brigade was Silver City in which the paratroopers killed 338 Viet Cong and had only minor losses themselves. Conducting the search and destroy operation near the village of Phouc Vinh, the brigade captured 156 weapons, 140,000 rounds of ammunition, 1,000 assorted explosive devices, 11,000 documents, truckloads of miscellaneous equipment, and 165 tons of rice, salt, and cooking oil.

There was Operation New Life, Operation Marauder in the Delta, Operation Crimp in the Ho Bo Woods, Ben Cat I and the Iron Triangle, the road convoy to Kontum, spearheaded by the brigades D-16 Armor, which relieved the beleaguered forces at Kontum, and which opened Route 14 for travel. There was Pleiku and Operation Smash



(continued....)





Dust Off, Op Marauder, 2 Jan 66. (Photo by LTC George Dexter)



Men of the 2/503 in APC crossing La Nga River during Operation New Life.

(Photo by 2/503 Bn Cmdr LTC George Dexter, Col., retired)

Not all of the first year was spent in battle and fighting, however. Highlighting the year was the visit to the brigade by Playboy Magazine's Playmate of the Year, Jo Collins. Miss Collins arrived at the brigade area in Bien Hoa in January, and in one short week gave a remarkable boost to the morale of the Sky Soldiers.



"Jo Collins (G.I. Jo) and LT Johnson"

The brigade was adopted by the city of Rochester, Minn. and the city invited a sergeant from the brigade to visit Rochester with his wife. First Sergeant William E. Workman of Co. A, 1st Bn, was chosen to represent the brigade back home.

The 173rd began conducting civic action operations upon its arrival in country. Its C-5 (Civic Action) section was not officially formed until September, 1965.

Currently the brigade Civic Action section has a strength of three officers and seven enlisted men.

During operations the civic action teams went into all the towns and villages visited by the brigade. Since operations limit time, high-impact short-term civic action projects were undertaken. The projects consisted of medical attention, clean-up, paint-up campaigns, and public works repair projects.

The brigade engineers have many times provided heaving equipment operators to improve roads and structures in the area.

The C-5 section has compiled an impressive list of accomplishments. They have built and repaired schools, bridges, dispensaries and roads. Tons of captured food have been turned over to GVN and hundreds of thousands of piasters have been donated for hospitals, orphanages, and scholarships for deserving students.

In February, 1966, command of the 173rd Airborne was assumed by Brig. Gen. Paul. F. Smith, who replaced General Williamson. Under new leadership the brigade continued to add to their list of firsts and successful operations.

Plain of Reeds, Marauder, Cu Chi, Ben Cat, War Zone D. Iron Triangle, Kontum, Vo Dat, Courtney, are all names of operations and villages. They are meaningless to many; to others they will serve as reference points for stories about a war, as Pork Chop Hill and T-Bone Hill and Salerno serve for other wars.

They remain to the men of the 173rd Airborne Brigade as solemn reminders of battles fought and lives lost and blood spilled.

These insignificant dots on a map mark the battles for men who slept in mud, bore the sweltering heat, shared their beds with jungle insects, remembered the men who died 10,000 miles from home in a steaming jungle or stinking rice paddy, and who could not say, *"this ground is ours, we bought it with our lives."*

One year after its arrival in Vietnam, the 173rd Airborne Brigade is again near War Zone D to seek out and destroy the running enemy. As the brigade begins its second year in Vietnam, it continues its mission: to seek out, engage, and destroy the enemy where he may be.

**Source:
The Army Reporter
May 21, 1966**

[Article sent in by MG Jack Leide, CO C/2/503]

(Except for photo of BG Smith, all other photos added to report)

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173rd: It's All Over But The Shipping Now

Story & Photos
By SPEC. 4 MIKE KELLER
S&S Staff Correspondent
August 7, 1971

CHA RANG VALLEY, Vietnam – A soldier scrapes rust from his M16 rifle and frowns at the stack of weapons he and his buddies still have to clean.

Bar stools, chairs and tables are carried from the NCO club, and the officers' club is closed altogether.

A nail is driven into a huge crate-to-be, while a mechanical saw buzzes nearby.

The 173rd Airborne Brigade is packing up to go home.

The brigade, whose "sky soldiers" were the first American combat troops in Vietnam, will make history again with its departure this month. It will be the first major U.S. unit in the Southeast Asia conflict to stand-down en masse.

Nearly all 173rd personnel – including those who have been in-country only two months – will make the trek to the unit's new home at Ft. Campbell, Ky.

The 173rd commander, Brig. Gen. Jack MacFarlane, said that *"only time will tell"* how well the South Vietnamese who take over combat responsibilities in the brigade's area will carry out this role. He had no doubts about the 173rd's performance, however, saying, *"They've done everything that's been asked of them – and then some."*

Of the brigade's Stateside mission, MacFarlane said, *"We'll have plenty to do. Not only will we be absorbing many new people, but when equipment has been on the seas for two months, as ours will be, it has to be shaped up."*

The 173rd Airborne "refresher school" at Cha Rang is being used as the out-processing site for brigade soldiers. Attendance at the school had been required for all in-coming members of the unit.

About 1,000 troops have been withdrawn to date, with unit integrity generally being maintained.

The mood of soldiers here is a strange blend of near-euphoria and anxiety. Although happy about returning to "the world," many fear that the Communists will stage "that last attack."

The Cha Rang compound resembles a fairground, with countless makeshift tents spotting its perimeter. Containing about 15 tightly-packed cots and an assortment of luggage, trunks and assorted bags, the tents provide housing for departing troops.



"A 'Skytrooper' steam-cleans one of his unit's trucks."

Although a few complaints have been heard about details – which include weapon-cleaning, carton-building, excess paper-burning, equipment washing and other jobs which companies may assign – the men have ample time for leisure.

Entertainment facilities include a swimming pool, service clubs featuring live floor shows, a softball field, crafts shop, steam bath and MARS station.

Lt. Col. Felix L. Early, who is in charge of the Cha Rang operation, explained the reasons for the wide range of activities: *"It's hard to concentrate on menial details when your mind is on that plane."*

Early said that while no extraordinary problem has arisen as a result of mass redeployment, sanitation was a slight headache at Cha Rang.

"Guys bring in more pounds of trash than they weigh," he said.

Except for vehicles and certain articles specified by the U.S. command, the 173rd is taking most of its equipment to Ft. Campbell. Equipment will be shipped to Qui Nhon by, among other means, an armada of two-and-a-half, five-and eight-ton trucks.

A majority of the items left in-country will be turned in to U.S. authorities. Buildings and hootches will go to whoever gets the installations.

Everything needed for the trip is accomplished at Cha Rang. Soldiers exchange combat-worn jungle fatigues for new ones and get to handle Green bills instead of MPC.

A urine sample is taken and sent to Cam Ranh for analysis.

(continued)



Poker-faced MPs conduct a rigid customs inspection, holding spot strip-searches, probing bars of soap with wire, checking the inside of men's collars and examining baggage with marijuana-sniffing dogs.

After this, all that is left is a helicopter ride to Phu Cat AB, where the troops board a commercial jet to the United States.



"A 173rd trooper works over a stripped rifle as his unit prepares to head home."

Reaction to their pending return varied among GIs, but the general feeling was summed up by a soldier who said, *"I wish I left yesterday."*

Some were not so eager to leave, however. One man argued that he has *"more freedom in Vietnam than pulling garrison duty in the States."*

A few others even seemed nostalgic or apologetic about departing.

One GI, devouring the last few morsels of a snack truck cheeseburger, was still telling war stories to friends.

"If we talk about it here, we'll get it off our minds and won't talk about it at home," he said.

Then there is Spec. 4 Murray Fields, who was bounced off his original plane for possessing something he should not have had. Fields was back for the next scheduled flight, but didn't show much interest in this one either. Of 165 persons in line to board the craft, Fields was the 165th.

[Article sent in by Thomas Ayers, Col. (Ret), A/2/503]

Two 1/503 Buddies Remembered & Honored

My name is Tracy Arnold. My husband's name is **Peter J. Arnold**. He was with 1/503rd. Frank Martinez (A/1/503) forwarded me a copy of your newsletter (Issue 66). On page 4 of your newsletter **Alexander D. Rodarte** is mentioned in your dedication section. He actually died in my husband's arms. We have two children together, twins, our son is named after his father Peter J. Arnold, Jr., and our daughter is named Alexandra after Alexander Rodarte. Our children were born in 1997.

My husband kept that young soldier's memory in his heart all those years and honored him by naming our beautiful daughter after him. She is very proud of that.

Pete died August 14, 2015, and his ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery was February 1, 2016. Alexandra was able to get an etching of her namesake from the Vietnam Memorial. He is listed on Panel 6E, Line 23 - good thing she is athletic.

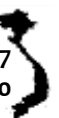
But the purpose of this email is to ask about the artwork on page 5. The 503 with the eagle, Flag and jump wings. Is that a poster that can be purchased? I am remodeling my basement and would love to have that for my "Freedom Wall". Thank you all for your service.

Tracy L. Arnold

Proud wife of a Sky Soldier



This fine piece of artwork (sans inscriptions & 173d patch) appears on Paul Whitman's *WWII 503rd PRCT Heritage Battalion* website. Paul approved of our producing two complimentary posters for Tracy and her daughter Alexandra (unbeknownst to them), then framed by Sky Soldier Frank Martinez of A/1/503 before he presented the posters to the ladies in memory of their two special Sky Soldiers. Thanks Frank!



Farewell to a Friend of the 173d



Charles (Chuck) E. Breit was born December 25, 1925, in Philadelphia, PA. He passed away on Saturday, April 9, 2016.

At age 17 he enlisted in the Army in May, 1943. He took his basic training at Camp Croft, SC, during which time he volunteered for the paratroops. Chuck started jump school at Ft. Benning, GA in early 1944, and upon completion volunteered for demolition training (at age 16 he had prior experience in demolitions working for the Cleveland Wrecking Co.

In October 1944, he shipped overseas to New Guinea where he joined the 503rd PRCT. He then went to Mindoro, Philippines, where he was assigned to the Regt. Hdq. Co., demolition platoon -- then the jump into Corregidor. Chuck's job there was demolition and he was a flame-thrower man. He landed in a shell hole right in front of the long barracks which was his mission to secure. Upon landing the demolition groups gathered together and did just that. After two weeks of bitter fighting the island was secured by the Rock Force.

Chuck was proud to serve as one of General MacArthur's honor guards along with his assistant flame-thrower, Johnnie Banks. He was there to watch (then) Col. Jones say to General MacArthur, ***"Sir, I present you the fortress Corregidor."***

After Chuck landed he marked the spot and later was able to retrieve his chute and sent it home with a wounded comrade, Cpl. Vincent A. Minkler. It now stands in the National Infantry Museum at Fort Benning, GA, where it is a memorial to all the members of the 503 who jumped on Corregidor Island. Returning to Corregidor 50 years later with his wife Dee, he found the shell hole still there. *"Cold chills and deja vu indeed,"* he thought.

After his discharge on February 10, 1946, Chuck joined with a 17th Airborne vet and formed an air show, "Bobby Ward's Sky Devils," which lasted about three years. Utilizing his paratrooper training he performed delayed drops, wing walking and other stunts at fairs and carnivals all across the country. His partner had been an automobile stunt driver prior to the war so that was added to their repertoire. They then joined "Kochman's World Champion Hell Drivers" performing head-on collisions, ice crashes and numerous other stunts. Chuck also doubled for Clark Gable in one of his movies.



Chuck, driving the girls crazy.

The show wintered in Miami, FL, and in 1952 Chuck met another ex-paratrooper from the European theatre who was working as a painter of radio and t.v. towers. Now ready to leave the road and wanting a warm climate, they joined forces and in 1952 he founded "Breit's Tower Service." BTS remains the oldest tower company in the southeast today under the direction of his son.

Chuck retired in 1996, and he and Dee were finally able to leave the Miami life in the fast lane to a place in west central Florida on a beautiful river.

He stayed very busy with home renovation projects and restoration of their 1940 45' ELCO yacht upon which they lived for 25 years in Coconut Grove, FL.

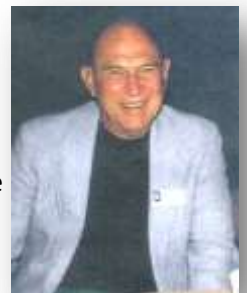
Chuck remained active and involved in the 503rd PRCT Association WWII, serving as national president from 1991-1993, and again from 2006-2008. He was also the Deep South Chapter president. Chuck and Dee enjoyed a contented life which included travel and visits from old friends.



L-R at 173d reunion in Myrtle Beach are Mike McMillan (A/4/503), Chuck, Mike Sturges (A/2/503) & Jerry Wiles (B/2/503)

Amusing anecdote about Chuck:

My wife, Reggie, was standing next to me when I opened the envelope with Chuck's brief bio and photos prior to the 173d Myrtle Beach reunion in 2010 when he and his wife were guests of our Brigade and where he spoke on a panel with other WWII 503rd troopers. Before reading his bio, she picked up his photos and looked at the picture (on left) of him in his chute and said, *"He looks like Clark Gable!"* We were fortunate to become friends with Chuck and Dee, and we will miss him dearly. Our thoughts are of Chuck, and our good wishes are with Dee and their family. Chuck, indeed, was one of the Greatest Generation. Ed



Chuck



Luck of the Irish in the “D” Zone jungle....

March 16, 1966

(Written March 20, 2016)

By **Thomas R. Goodwin, Maj., USA, Ret**
HHC, 2/503

At sunup, Chaplain Porter and I were standing close together, shaving out of our steel helmets, when all kinds of gunfire erupted around us. He asked me in that good Southern drawl, “Tom, what was that?” I replied, “Chaplain, I think we have been found.” We threw out the water and he headed for the nearest company and I headed for the Bn CP and the radios. I was the assigned communications Officer. The Assistant Operations Officer and the Chief Radio Operator and most of the radio operators were fighting as Infantrymen. One of my men came up to me and asked me for the M16 I was carrying and all the ammo, and all the ammo for my sidearm. He said to keep a loaded magazine in the .45 “JUST IN CASE”.

Later in the day I watched as the USAF LNO and the Artillery LNO huddled over a map. I thought, “I hope they are not lost.” About 10 minutes later I got the answer: Screaming jets coming in low and dropping big bombs while on the other side of the perimeter artillery shells started coming in in a long barrage. Then the helicopter gunships followed by slicks with resupplies of ammunition. One of our gunships got hit by enemy fire and sent some rounds into our own HHC. One of the casualties was the commander, Cpt Dan Buttolph, and after his evacuation the Battalion CO turned to me and said I was the “Acting CO of HHC”. We were running out of Captains.

There is no doubt that the coordinated attacks by our forces, aided in no small part by coordination and communication, turned the tide of battle and allowed 2/503 to stand victorious at the end of the day.



Tom at the Snakepit



**1LT Dan Buttolph, '65
in the rubber trees**

March 17, 1966

After darkness on the 16th, about “o dark thirty” the 2/503d started receiving artillery shelling that lit up the sky. Some of the troopers of 2/503 were hit by parts of the shell casings as they exploded and some were burned by phosphorus. A medic told me to call for med-Evac and within 5 minutes I had a pilot calling me saying he was inbound and FLYING WITH NO LIGHTS to my location based on my radio signal. A few minutes later a piece of shell casing hit me in the back dropping me to my knees and causing me to drop the radio handset. Looking quickly around and seeing no one, I found the handset and called the pilot back. He answered and I lowered the handset keeping it keyed and yelled for a medic.

A medic came over, with a red filter on his flashlight, lifted the back of my t-shirt and put on a small bandage. About 2 hours later I could feel something warm running down my back so I called the medic back and told him to take the red filter off the flashlight. He then put on a bigger bandage.

At sunup on St. Patrick’s Day the medic reappeared and we took off my t-shirt, buried it, and retrieved the large piece (5 1/2 x 3 1/4 inches) of shell casing that had hit me. The medic said I had lost too much blood to continue the next 5 k’s we had to go and ordered me to go out with the resupply helicopter that was waiting. I reported to the Bn CO, found a radio operator and gave him the radio, and started for the helicopter.

The helicopter was sitting there idling at a slow speed, and I noticed the crew chief on the ground about 20 feet away, watching me come towards him. When I got to about 15 feet away from him he came and took the rucksack from me and held me by the arm. He put me in the helicopter, fastened the seat buckle, threw my rucksack in and swung into his seat. Without any commands from the crew the pilot lifted off, and as he did I looked out the left door to where the Bn CP was.

As the pilot swung right to go back to Bien Hoa, I turned my head to the right and noticed 2 body bags strapped to the cargo floor. Faces you could not see, and names you do not know, but 2 members of 2/503 that had given their all.

Two KIA and one WIA. Why me? It was St. Patrick’s Day, and my grandfather Thomas had married Annie Long in County Tipperary, Ireland in 1866. Luck of the Irish or the will of the Lord to save me for better things? It is a question that I’ve asked myself frequently over the last 50 years, but when I think of the things I have accomplished then I know it was the good Lord with me that day. ###



As GIs Trek, Time And Insects Crawl

By Tom Tiede
Newspaper Enterprise Assn.
12 January 1966

BIEN HOA, South Viet Nam, Jan. 12 -- War in the jungle. Sickening suspense. Beyond each root a risk. The continuing curtain of thorns and saw-tooth vines which lay open a man's flesh, tear the cloth from his back.

And silence.

"How much more we got to go?" whispers a weary soldier.

"I dunno, kid," says his sergeant, "but it can't be too far now."



Men of Alpha Company, 2/503, humping the boonies.
(Photo by Freddie Parks, A/2/503)

This is the Viet Cong's balliwick. The troopers from the 173rd Airborne Division are awkward intruders, heavy-footed, white-skinned, noisy and slow, fighting the enemy's war on the enemy's terms.

That is, if the enemy chooses.

For where is the enemy? Visibility is zero. A man in front can be shot and no one be certain of it until they stumble over him.

"If you hear anybody," says Sgt. Ray Kriback of Brenham, Tex., "then they're our people. The VC, they don't make noise."

The columns of men hack away at the bewildering growth and inch on. Movement forward is punctuated by the muffled cursing and heavy breathing of insect-slapping GIs.

"Damn leeches," somebody says. "They're all over me."

"Pull em off," the sergeant orders. "The big ones are hell if they get to an artery."

A voice in the rear says, "It's the mosquitoes that get to me. I keep breathing them up my nose."

"How do they smell?" chuckles the radio man.

"All right you people," the sergeant growls, "knock it off."

They slip and slide for a few yards, then stop and listen as blood swells under their helmets. Finally, forward again, the salt from their sweat burning the scratches on their faces.



Men of Bravo Company 2/503, humping the boonies.
(Photo by Jim Robinson, B/2/503)

Late morning turns to noon and then early evening. A man looks at his watch a hundred times an hour and curses its sloth. Ants an inch long hook on his trousers' legs and search for openings to his skin. His cigarettes crumble and will not light.

(continued....)





Men of Charlie Company, 2/503, humping the boonies.
(Photo by Jack Leide, C/2/503)

And then a shot . . .

The soldiers stiffen and fall. Another shot. Two more.

"Where are they?" somebody squeaks.

Each man lies in his own world of seizure, damning the rushing sound in his ears that blots out everything else. Each wishing he could pull his helmet down to his ankles.

"Pass it back," a man in front says huskily. *"Call up the Chaplain."*

"Did somebody get hit?"

"How do I know? Just pass it back."

And then silence again. Everyone alone, wondering, thinking personal thoughts, thankful that the spot he landed on wasn't booby-trapped, retrieving his rifle from the muck of the jungle floor.

Moments pass. Apparently it's no ambush. At length each man rises from the dirt, adjusts his pack and begins, once again, to feel his way ahead. The heat begins anew, the insects return and the body starts to ache as it did before.

"How much more we got to go?" whispers a weary soldier.

"I dunno kid," says his sergeant, *"but it can't be too far now."*

Source:
The New York Times
(Photos added)

Rocky's Team Sky Soldiers **Post Another Tourney Win**



L-R: Mike Britt & Tom Sebastian of the Cocoa Beach VFW Post 10148 Men's Auxiliary; Olney Anthony, USAF; and Lew "Smitty" Smith, HHC/2/503 pose with their First Place winner's trophy at recent golf tournament in Central Florida.

Named in memory of the late Don "Rocky" Rockholt, A/2/503, *Rocky's Team Sky Soldiers* squeaked out a first place win at the *Wounded Warriors/Sanctuary Island** tourney held at Indian River Golf Course in Viera, FL on March 13, to help raise funds to assist vets in need.

In spite of contributing their fair share of golf balls to the water gods on this challenging course, our fearless foursome turned in a respectable 62 for the 18 holes, thinking they most likely failed to reclaim the title they had lost the previous year. But, those same golf gods were taking their toll on other teams as well, and Rocky's Team Sky Soldiers won the tourney by 1 stroke.

In addition to the nice trophy shown above, the team won a 7 day vacation in the mountains of the Carolinas, which they gave to another team in exchange for that team donating \$100. to Wounded Warriors/Sanctuary Island.

* Not affiliated with the "Wounded Warriors Project"



Rocky, on left, with his former battalion commander, the late Col. Bob Sigholtz, at a 173d reunion.





Office of the Honorary Colonel 503d Infantry Regiment

17 March 2016

MEMORANDUM FOR: Distinguished and Honorary Members, 503d Infantry Regiment
SUBJECT: Update

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since my last letter to you (June 2014), a number of events impacting the Regiment have transpired that may be of interest to you.

On 13 June 2015, the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation added the names of the two warriors to the Memorial's Medal of Honor granite panel. Kyle White and Ryan Pitts both received the Medal of Honor in 2014 for heroic actions while serving in Company C, 2-503d Infantry in 2007-2008. White was honored for actions on 9 November 2007 and Pitts for actions on 13 July 2008. The names of these two warriors became the 15th and 16th names on this panel and with MoH recipient Salvatore Guinta and are the second and third names added for actions in the Afghanistan theater.

Honorary Regimental Sergeant Major Richard Weik and I are pleased to announce (belatedly) the "2014 Class" of Distinguished and Honorary Members of the Regiment (DMOR/HMOR), the largest "class" in memory.

Those designated as Distinguished Member of the 503d Infantry Regiment were Colonel Matthew McFarlane, Colonel William J. Butler, Medal of Honor

recipient SGT Kyle J. White, Medal of Honor recipient SSG Ryan M. Pitts, LTC (Ret) Joseph E. Flesch, Henry Galindo, COL (Ret), Peyton F. Ligon, LTC Patrick Wilkins, LTC Robert "Todd" Brown, CSM Charles L. Burrow, and CSM David A. Dougherty.

Those designated as Honorary Member of the 503d Infantry Regiment were COL Michael L. Foster, CSM Richard Clark, and Debora Yashinski.

As compared to the "Class of 2014," only three nominees for the "Class of 2015" will be submitted to Infantry branch in the near future.

It is again time to solicit recommendations for the "Class of 2016" Distinguished or Honorary Members of the 503d Infantry Regiment. Those nominated as Distinguished Members of the Regiment must have served in one of the 503d Infantry Battalions. Those designated as Honorary Members of the Regiment can be soldiers, their spouses, or individuals who have made a contribution or provided a service to our Brigade or the Army but who have not served in any of the 503d Infantry Battalions.

The basic criterion for designation as a Distinguished or Honorary Member of the Regiment is service to the soldiers of the Brigade or the Army, of an exceptional nature, including those that perpetuate the history and traditions of the Regiment. The Regimental leadership will look at an individual's initial and sustained support of the Regimental Battalion/173d Airborne Brigade beyond any appointed/assigned duty position. AR 600-82, Chapter 5-3 provides detailed criteria for selection of these individuals.

If you wish to nominate an individual for designation as a Distinguished or Honorary Member of the 503d Infantry Regiment, send a letter outlining the accomplishments of the individual you wish to nominate to me at 124 Tugboat Lane, Summerville, SC 29483.

Honorary Regimental CSM Rick Weik joins me in wishing each of you peace, good health and happiness.

Warm regards to all!

Kenneth V. Smith
COL, USA (Ret)
Honorary Colonel
503d Infantry Regiment



Col. Ken Smith



503d Infantry Regimental Memorial For Infantry Museum Walk of Honor



The National Infantry Museum's Walk of Honor, the location of the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial, contains memorials recognizing numerous division and regimental units that have served with distinction throughout the Army's history. One distinguished unit's memorial, the 503d Infantry Regiment, has been missing, but that is about to change in the near future.

Honorary 503d Regiment Sergeant Major Richard Weik and Honorary 503d Infantry Regiment Colonel Ken Smith have initiated action to place an appropriate Regimental marker that recognizes the contributions of the members of this storied Regiment in conflicts dating back to its inception.

Weik and Smith have obtained the approval of the National Infantry Museum leadership to erect a memorial (depicted below) adjacent to the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial and have opened a dialogue with Columbus Monument (the builders of the 173d National Memorial) to undertake the project. The Memorial will be approximately 4 feet wide and 26 inches tall and constructed of Topaz grey granite. Estimated cost of the memorial, whose size is dictated by its available location, is \$12,000.00.

Construction of the 503d Infantry Memorial will commence when 75% of the funds are on hand. The 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation has agreed to collect donations for this cause. If 200 Sky Soldiers and friends or Association chapters contribute \$50.00 each in the next six months, construction of the 503d Infantry Memorial can commence.

Checks payable to the **173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation** – marked on the bottom with the words **"Regimental Memorial"** -- should be mailed to Ken Smith, 124 Tugboat Lane, Summerville, SC 29486. You may also donate by going to the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation website (<http://www.173dairbornememorial.org>) and using the paypal button on the "Funding" dropdown. Be sure to write "Regimental Marker" on the special instructions bloc.



Construction of this Memorial is long overdue. Please support this effort and make it happen.

Airborne...All The Way!



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RaRusso1962@gmail.com

Candy1540@yahoo.com

Escort Club Info/

reunionescort@aol.com

***"I finally found it! It really
exists! Just always knew it
was out there, somewhere."***



"I've been up it a million times, but
never knew exactly where it was. It's
just outside of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.
Now, if I could only find my paddle..."



Thanks to the keen eye of a
D/2/503 Trooper.

YOUR DD-214

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) has
provided the following website for veterans to gain
access to their DD-214s online:

<http://vetrecs.archives.gov/> or try
www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/

This may be particularly helpful when a veteran
needs a copy of his DD-214 for employment purposes.

NPRC is working to make it easier for veterans with
computers and Internet access to obtain copies of
documents from their military files. Military veterans
and the next of kin of deceased former military
members may now use a new online military personnel
records system to request documents. Other
individuals with a need for documents must still
complete the Standard Form 180, which can be
downloaded from the online web site.

Because the requester will be asked to supply all
information essential for NPRC to process the request,
delays that normally occur when NPRC has to ask
veterans for additional information will be minimized.

The new web-based application was designed to
provide better service on these requests by eliminating
the records centers mailroom and processing time.

[Sent in by CCVVA Chapter 982]



Aussie Soldier Asks About Presidential Unit Citation

G/day Smitty,

I recently sent the attached letter to several senior members of 105th Fld Bty members plus Ray Payne (1RAR) for their comments.

I was just thinking you may be able to assist with my questions. I would be thankful for your assistance with this matter.

Cheers,

Dear Paul and Greg,

First of all I would like to wish you both the best of health as many of us have been having bad days and we have to be more positive and get the drive in our actions, I know it is hard to find.

I received the attached article "Sky Soldiers 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE" newsletter (Jay is referring to Issue 66 of our *2/503d Vietnam Newsletter*, Ed). 2/503D was supported by 105 Fld Bty RAA during many conflicts during our VIETNAM tour. The time that I remembered the most was "Silver City" Operation as 2/503 were pinned down and they required support fire which 105th Fld Bty gave to them but it went on for 3 hours, adjusting Range continuously until the last hour and we were required to Fire at a very dangerous range as we call it a SUICIDE mission calling support fire within 25mm of their location.

On completion of this mission the 2/503 treated us like heroes, the word came down we will receive a medal and as we were only doing our jobs like good old Aussie Gunners in the Australian ARMY, you get just THANK YOU.

I see the heading on the second page (Issue 66)

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION,

President Lyndon B. Johnson. I do not see any mention of 105th Fld Bty RAA in this report.

I would like to know why have our SKY SOLDIERS sold us so very short, after all we did for them during their CRY for FIRE SUPPORT on that day as they were so close to DEATH and were crying for our help....Which we gave them everything and got them out, yes out of that "shit fight" as they were pinned down and were looking death in the eye, so we are once again overlooked?

Do you think they will rewrite their history books so 105th Fld Bty RAA members (will) be honoured for their Gallant efforts during the "Silver City" operation?

Yours Faithfully,

Jason W. NEVILLE
1RAR/RAA

Reply to Jason from our Newsletter Editor



PUC Ribbon

Hi Jay, thanks for your note.

As one of the 2/503 troopers who survived the battle at LZ Zulu Zulu on 16 Mar 66, I can assure you and your buddies of the 105th Fld Bty RAA, there wasn't a single trooper of our battalion or man attached to our battalion that morning who would ever "sell you guys short." In fact, in the March 31, 1966 issue of *Australian Army Forces* newspaper (see article on following page), it was reported our battalion commander, LTC John Walsh, commented after the battle, ***"Thanks for saving our lives. I have never seen finer shooting." "That was the radio message received by Australian gunners in War Zone D after they have fired in the heaviest artillery engagement of the Viet Nameese war on Operation SILVER CITY recently."***

We hope you and your men understand not one of us there had anything whatsoever to do with either composing the Presidential Unit Citation or selecting those units to be recognized. One can only suppose someone in the rear with the gear who most likely did not participate in the battle put in the recommendation to higher ups, and it appears they focused solely on those units *inside* that besieged perimeter; this seems evident, as you'll note the Caspers and Cowboys were not included in the award, nor were the Assault Pioneers, Anti-Tank Platoon, or the Air Force and Navy fighter pilots and their units recognized in the citation.

While the 'forward air controllers' of our own 319th Artillery are named in the award (who were inside our perimeter that day), the artillery battery itself, like your unit, also is not recognized. Now, 50 years later, it's doubtful the PUC will be rewritten and re-awarded to name the other units who supported us on the ground yet were not inside the perimeter.

But, I can assure you of this, every one of us of the 2/503 at risk of being overrun that day and who benefitted from the arty support of the 105th, owe each of you Diggers our deepest thanks and greatest respect.

Without the firepower of the 105th, our 319th, those fly boys overhead, and the ammo resupply and gunship chopper crews, as well as the 1/503 running and fighting their way thru the jungle to our aid, our 2/503 could well have been destroyed.

(continued....)



2/503d VIETNAM Newsletter / May-June 2016 – Issue 67

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With your o.k., I'll include your note and this reply in our next 2/503 newsletter inviting others, from up here and down under, to share their thoughts with us.
Airborne, All The Way!

Lew "Smitty" Smith
HHC/2/503, '65/'66
One of the survivors of Zulu Zulu

Note: Constructive comments are welcome by any trooper or Cobber on the ground or aviator in the air who was involved in the battle at Zulu Zulu, and will be included in our next issue. Ed

More From Our Aussie Buddy

G/day Smitty

Thank you for your support with this request and as always the outcome is not what one would like to hear or read.

As being part of 173D AIRBORNE Unit fighting with the group in "Silver City" operation and supporting was our main aim as directed by the Senior ARMED FORCES Command, the Gunners of 105th Fld Bty RAA did what we were ordered to do with 100%+ effort BUT our Senior Leaders did not SUPPORT us after our job was done as not been recognised in the outcome with this AWARD which we were DISCRIMINATED against (that is being "sold short"). We DID our best and you recognised this in your reply but this is totally unjust for the Gunners of the 105th Fld Bty RAA.

We received "The VIETNAM'S Cross of Gallantry with Palm" (VCOG) from 1965-66 just last year, yes 50 years after the award was awarded serving with 173d AIRBORNE Brigade.

We would be honoured to be fully recognised for our efforts which we completed during our service time with 173d AIRBORNE Brigade during our tour in "VIETNAM 1965-66".

Yours Faithfully

Jason W NEVILLE

Jay
1RAR/RAA



VCOG

Tribute after "cease fire!"

"Thanks for saving our lives. I have never seen finer shooting."

That was the radio message received by Australian gunners in War Zone D after they had fired in the heaviest artillery engagement of the Viet Nameese war on Operation SILVER CITY recently.



Above, Gnr. Ken Gann loads in the heavy gunfire against the Viet Cong.

The message came from the Commander of the U.S. 2/503rd Battalion, which had been under attack by two battalions of Viet Cong in the heart of War Zone D.

The Australian gunners of 105th Field Battery, and two batteries of the American 3/319th Battalion, went into action in support.

The American infantrymen were pinned down on an extensive Communist tunnel system and were running short of ammunition when the Viet Cong launched their attack.

From 7000 yards away, the Australian and American gunners fired 1500 rounds of 105mm gunfire into the attacking Viet Cong, between 0753 hours and 1145 hours on that day.

The Australians with six guns, fired 416 shells during the engagement.

At time the shells were bursting among the Viet Cong only 75 yards from the American infantry positions.

When the barrage ended, the Americans counted 363 enemy dead—more than one-fourth of the estimated enemy strength at the beginning of the attack.

Sweat – soaked, the gunners loaded and fired the 105's almost non-stop in 100 degree heat.

Source:

*Australian Army Forces, the soldiers' newspaper,
No. 21, March 31, 1966.*



In Memory of 2/503 Sky Soldier

Michael Broderick

B/2/503 Bravo Bull

Tribute

SGT Mike Broderick came from the Benning Jump School with several other young NCO's and joined Bravo Company in 1964. He was a standout because he was smart and knew his MOS (mortars) perfectly, drawing PRO Pay for his two(+) years on Okinawa and in RVN.



For the period in which he was assigned to the Weapons Platoon, that Platoon did not have a Platoon Leader knowledgeable of the 81 mortar. Mike filled that void in spades and would join me in every defense to plan the mortar concentrations.

Through his initiative, he convinced the Logistics Support Group on Okinawa that he would bring his mortar section to test fire lots of stored mortar ammo. Consequently, he had every soldier in the Weapons Platoon qualified on the 81mm and 60mm mortar before we deployed to RVN. He had the mortar firing tables committed to memory and often called out the charge and setting from memory, putting rounds on target unbelievably fast.

Like many young paratroopers, Mike drank heavily and caroused at random. This had a negative impact on his early marriages.

He returned to Fort Benning and to the Airborne Department and later went to Fort Polk's Vietnam Training Center which BG Williamson was sent to organize.

After retirement, he established an insurance company and finally met and married Ramona, who would straighten him out. We met for the first time, after his retirement, at a Bravo Bull Assembly at Valley Forge. We quickly became friends, until his death.

I wrote to his son, when he deployed to Africa and to his daughter-in-law. Finally, as his demise approached I wrote my bon voyage letter which was read by his son. I'm told that Mike clutched the letter until his end.

Good luck in your new assembly area.

**BDQ Roy
Roy Lombardo, LTC (Ret)
CO B/2/503**

Photo Found of Robert Michael Bowman

This is a picture of PFC Robert Michael Bowman, A/2/503, KIA June 29, 1966 at Xuan Loc, VN. There is a mark on it but it is better than nothing. AATW

Frank Dukes, A/2/503



ROBERT MICHAEL BOWMAN

Private First Class

A CO, 2ND BN, 503RD INFANTRY, 173RD ABN BDE, USARV

Army of the United States

Wilmington, Delaware

November 06, 1947 to June 29, 1966

Thanks to Frank, this photo has been submitted to the Virtual Wall and the Wall of Faces websites, and sent to Jack & Shawn Kelley for their possible use in the video they're producing about the June 29, 1966, battle (see Page 38). Ed



Morris “Moe” Berg



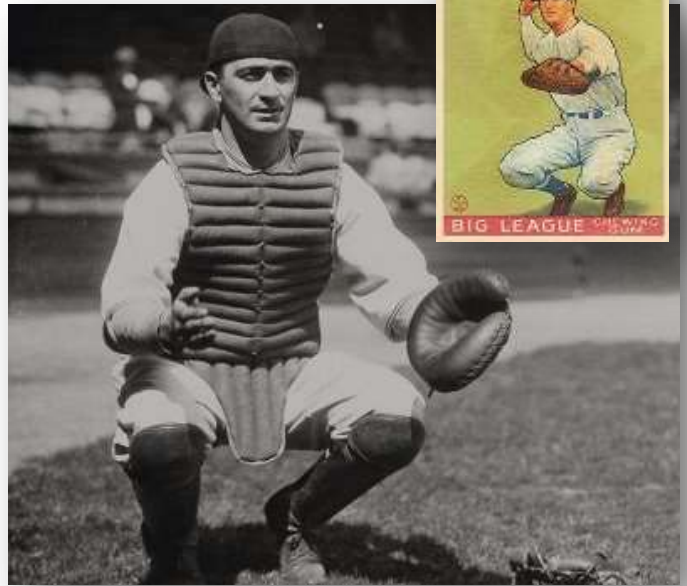
(1902 – 1972)

Moe Berg's life proves the adage that *“truth is often stranger than fiction.”* One of the best educated, intellectually accomplished and patriotic Jewish athletes in the history of American sports, Berg got his start in baseball in 1906, at the age of four, playing catch with the beat policeman in front of his father's Newark, NJ, pharmacy. Berg became an excellent linguist while an undergraduate student at Princeton University, where he studied Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, Italian, German and Sanskrit. He began his career as a spy on a hospital roof in Japan (more about that later).

After graduating from high school at the top of his class, Moe went to Princeton, an unusual accomplishment for a poor Jewish boy in the 1920s. He became the star shortstop of the college baseball team, graduated magna cum laude and was offered a teaching post in Princeton's Department of Romance Languages. Wanting to study experimental phonetics at the Sorbonne but unable to afford graduate study overseas, Berg accepted a contract to play shortstop for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Moe's hitting was below par and he was sent to the minors after the 1924 season. It was Moe who inspired a professional scout to coin the immortal baseball phrase, *“Good field, no hit.”* One teammate said, *“Moe, I don't care how many of them college degrees you got, they ain't learned you to hit that curve ball no better than the rest of us.”*

Berg returned to the majors in 1926 with the Chicago White Sox. At the same time, he attended Columbia Law School. Despite his hectic schedule, the brilliant Berg managed to finish second in his class at Columbia. That year, the White Sox asked him to play catcher, a position that took advantage of his strong arm and intelligence.

Casey Stengel compared Berg's defensive skills to the immortal Bill Dickey. Moe hit .287 in 1929 and received votes for Most Valuable Player but in 1930 he seriously injured his knee, ending his career as a full-time player. He played as a reserve for three more teams until he retired in 1939.



In 1934, Berg toured Japan with a group of major league all-stars, including Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. Still respected as a linguist, Moe was invited to lecture at Meiji University, where he delivered an eloquent speech in Japanese. Apparently, before the trip, the U.S. government had recruited Berg as a spy. While at a Tokyo hospital ostensibly visiting an American mother who had just given birth, he sneaked onto the roof and took photos of the city. Pilots reportedly later used the photos during bombing raids in World War II.

As a Jew wanting to fight Nazism, Berg volunteered to serve when America entered the war in 1941. He was asked to become a Goodwill Ambassador to Latin America. Before he left on his ambassadorial mission, Berg made a radio broadcast to the Japanese people over the radio in which, to quote his biographers Harold and Meir Ribalow, *“In fluent Japanese, he pleaded at length, ‘as a friend of the Japanese people,’ for the Japanese to avoid a war ‘you cannot win.’”*

(continued....)



The Ribalows report, *"Berg's address was so effective that several Japanese confirmed afterwards they had wept while listening."*

After his stint in Latin America, Moe returned to the U.S. to work for the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner to the Central Intelligence Agency. He parachuted into Yugoslavia and, after meeting Tito, suggested that the U.S. back him rather than his Serbian rival. Despite the fact that he was not a scientist, Berg was next assigned to help determine how close Germany was to developing an atomic bomb. In a few weeks studying textbooks, Berg taught himself a great deal about nuclear physics.

Traveling through Europe, Berg discovered that a factory in Norway was producing an atomic bomb component for the Nazis, and Allied planes bombed it. Berg then learned that the Nazis had an atomic research center at Duisberg, Germany, and it too was bombed.

Incognito, Berg managed to lure the leading German atomic physicist, Werner Heisenberg, to Switzerland to give a lecture on quantum theory. At a dinner afterwards, Berg heard Heisenberg imply that Germany was behind the U.S. in bomb development. President Roosevelt greeted Berg's report warmly. At great risk as a Jew, Berg spent parts of 1944 and 1945 in Germany, helping arrange for the capture of several prominent German atomic scientists by U.S. troops before the Russians got them. At war's end, Berg was offered the Medal of Merit, the highest award given to civilian in the war effort, but he modestly declined it.

Moe lived out a quiet life in Newark, where he died at age 70. Some of Berg's friends felt he squandered what could have been a brilliant career in law or academics to play baseball. His brother observed that *"all [baseball] ever did was make him happy."* His teammate Ted Lyons said, *"A lot of people tried to tell him what to do with his life and brain and he retreated from this . . . He was different because he was different. He made up for all the bores of the world. And he did it softly, stepping on no one."*



[Sent in by John "Top" Searcy, HHC/2/503]

(Photos added)

~Corrections~

Hi. I was on the clearing patrol in front of B Company that morning (16 Mar 66, LZ Zulu Zulu). Beauchamp and Zions were killed, they were killed on that patrol. They have Beauchamp and Gibson photos mixed up (Issue 66, Page 3).

Sam Grimes
B/2/503

Reply: You're correct about the photos, Sam, we transposed them in error. Our apologies to their families and friends. Ed



John Henry Beauchamp, Jr.
Corporal
B CO, 2ND BN, 503RD INFANTRY
173RD ABN BDE, USARV
KIA March 16, 1966



Robert Paul Gipson
Specialist Four
B CO, 2ND BN, 503RD INFANTRY
173RD ABN BDE, USARV
KIA March 16, 1966

See Robert's DSC citation on following page.

(Corrections continued....)



~ LTC Dave Milton's Birth Date ~

Just started reading the latest excellent issue. I believe there is a typo regarding Dave Milton's DOB (Issue 66, Page 7). He was commissioned in 1964 after already serving seven years in the Reserves, so he couldn't have been born in 1946. Aloha,



Sam Stewart
C/2/503

Reply: Hi Sam. Agree, he would have been a particularly young reservist. The source of the background information on Dave Milton says the dates as shown were as reflected in Dave's DD214. Thanks for the keen eye bro!! It may remain a mystery. Ed



(Then) 1LT Dave Milton, Recon Platoon Leader at Camp Zinn.

OOPS!

On Page 11 in our last issue (No. 66), I incorrectly stated Larry "Doc" Speed of 1/503, found his friend Jerry Mixon, when in fact it was our own **Larry Sword** of A/2/503 who located his buddy. When our mistakes begin to outweigh correct reporting I'll retire the position as Editor of our newsletter. Xin Loi guys. Ed

###

ROBERT PAUL GIPSON

Specialist Fourth Class

U.S. Army

Company B, 2d Battalion, (Airborne)

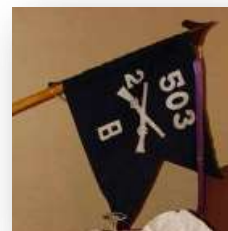
503d Inf. Reg.

173d Airborne Brigade, (Sep)

Date of Action: March 16, 1966

Citation:

The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Robert Paul Gipson, Specialist Fourth Class, U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations involving conflict with an armed hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam, while serving with Company B, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate). Specialist Four Gipson distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 16 March 1966 while serving as a member in a company conducting a search and destroy operation in the Republic of Vietnam. During the morning hours, Specialist Four Gipson's company was attacked by a large Viet Cong force employing numerous automatic weapons, small arms, mortars and recoilless rifles. Because of the intensity of the battle, available ammunition supplies were rapidly expended. At this time, Specialist Four Gipson unhesitatingly carried ammunition to the front line platoons. Moving up and down the heavily engaged front lines, he repeatedly exposed himself to intense hostile machine gun fire while resupplying the platoons with vitally needed ammunition. He then made a second trip through the bullet swept area to obtain additional ammunition, and again braved the intense hostile fire as he returned to the front lines with it. During the course of action, Specialist Four Gipson maneuvered to the battalion landing zone which was under constant .30 and .50 caliber machine gun fire. With complete disregard for his safety, he dauntlessly moved into the open while securing ammunition for the front lines, and then took up a firing position there. In the closing hour of the five hour battle, he was mortally wounded by a burst of Viet Cong machine gun fire. Specialist Four Gipson's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty, at the cost of his life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.



Home Town: Athens, Georgia



Geronimo Battalion Trooper Returns to Vietnam

The 2/503 Newsletter had someone talking about modernization of the country of Vietnam. Below is a set of photos from (Sgt.) Doug “Pete” Peterson, D/4/503, with his captions, who recently returned from his trip to Vietnam. These photos are people in the An Do Valley (east of the An Lo) living in the village of Phu Nong (where 1st Platoon, D/4/503 was located).

The grand mamasan recognized herself in pictures that Pete took along. “Kim”, who he references, was a little girl of about 9-10 years old when we were there. She was a character, and a true entrepreneur.

She used to line all the kids up outside the wire for candy, and then station herself at the head of the line, making sure she got hers first! She also had a small laundry empire going in the village. We’d give her 3 C-rats for washing a set of fatigues. We found out she marshaled all the little kids, and doled out the shirts to one, pants to another, socks to yet another, etc. She paid them 1 can of food for all their work, and she raked in the profits. Pete didn’t get to see her. She lived 8 to 10 kilometers away and they couldn’t get her there.

But, back to the point – Pete said that they now have homes of orange brick with tile roofs, electricity, and a road to the valley with overhead wires. I guess they’ve made progress over the years.

**Jerry Sopko
D/4/503**



The rice storage shed the morning after the VC destroyed it. Royce is in the background. The mother and daughter, who I found on this trip, are in front.



The mother and daughter now. The daughter is on the left in the green tunic. Kim’s older sister is in the middle behind the mother.



Looking NW into the valley. Could the distant hilltop right in the middle, not on the skyline, or the one to the right be where our Company CP was?



The mother holding the picture I gave her years before.

###



"Don, wishes to dedicate this Page to all Korean Veterans. THE NAMES ARE HIGHLIGHTED BECAUSE THEY DESERVE IT!!" *Paratroopers of the 50's website*

The Sukchon Combat Jump

By Don Martin



Today, 20 October 1950, was the day that we had all waited for since arriving in Korea. To do what we had been trained to do. Make a combat parachute assault behind enemy lines. We had been told that our mission (broadly) was to intercept and block a train load of North Korean high officials which had fled Pyongyang.

We were also told that there were allied POW's on the same train. On landing, we would block escape routes to the North. The 1st and 3rd Battalions would capture Sukchon, and block two highways and the railway leading North. The 2d Battalion would take Sukchon, block two highways and the railway leading North, and hold the high ground to the North.

There were to be two drop zones (Sukchon) and (Sunchon).

We had been issued ammunition and 3 days assault rations, had finished packing all our door bundles and had held our troop briefings for our unit missions. I was with Company I, 3d Battalion. The First Sergeant was **Cliff Strebe**, 1st Platoon Sergeant **Mel Strawser**, Mess Sergeant **John Fagg**, Supply Sergeant **John Worthington**. I don't remember the names of the other platoon sergeant's. I was in company headquarters in the supply section. Worked with Worthington, **Ashley** (KIA Inje) and Strebe. Fagg was KIA at Opari I think (can't remember).

We were formed into plane loads in stick order and shuttled to Kimpo Airfield. Due to delays we did not take off until around noon. I would guess that each man weighed over 250 pounds with all that we carried. Our basic load of ammunition, 3 days assault rations, canteen of water, pack, rifle, extra ammo,

grenades, our pistol and ammo and anything else we could carry that we figured we would need. Had a hard time walking after we chuted up and had to be helped into the plane.



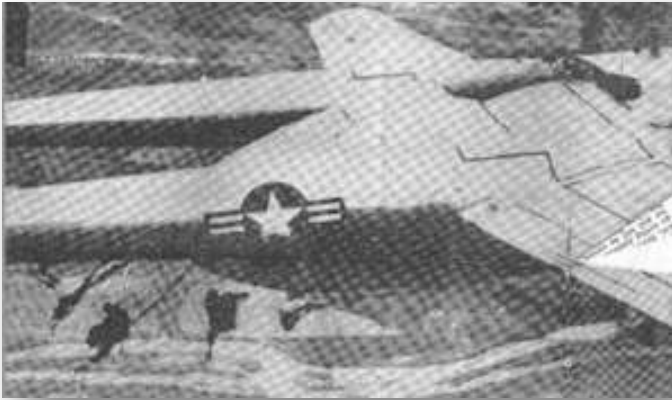
"250-LB. GROSS WEIGHT, a trooper barely able to lift himself, is pushed into door of plane at Tacgu."

We had been told that prior to the jump, the Air Force would execute bombing and strafing runs on and around the DZ. However, we might have some anti-aircraft fire so be prepared. I am happy to say that we did not experience any anti-aircraft fire. I will tell something that later I thought was amusing -- after we had been given the order to stand-up, hook-up and stand in the door, I was looking out a port hole and saw a big black cloud of smoke. I ducked instinctively, and thought to myself *"Oh my gosh, the Captain got it right in the face"*. After realizing that there was no shrapnel coming through the plane, I realized that the aircraft had back fired the smoke from its engine.

We were jumping C119s with T-7 Parachutes. I didn't notice anything different with the opening shock. We got a lot of cherry's on the neck and even bent helmets at times.

(continued....)





Front page of *NY Daily Mirror*, 10-21-1952

I don't remember what serial or plane I was in, but I think "A" & "B" Companies were ahead of us, because they were supposed to take the high ground to the northwest of DZ William.

I remember that when I landed (assumed the PLF position) it was on the edge of a rice paddy bank about three feet above the paddy itself. I landed on my toes on the edge of the bank, and fell straight back into the paddy on my back. It knocked the wind from me and I couldn't move to get out of my chute.

All I could hear was the sound of machine gun and rifle fire off in the distance, and with people running all around me. I was expecting a "gook" to come over the bank of the paddy and shoot or bayonet me.



"Sky blossoms with parachutes as US Paratroopers jump from planes behind N. Korean lines to trap fleeing Red troops."

Was I glad, when a friendly voice stuck his head over the bank and asked if I needed any help. He helped me get out of my chute, and when I started to walk, I found that I had sprained both of my ankles (I guess due to all the weight I had on me and landing on my toes at the edge of the paddy bank). He told me I should turn myself in to the aid station. I told him, I wasn't really hurt and they would be taking care of others who really needed it. I could shuffle along fairly well, and as the day progressed, the sprains got better.

By the next day, there wasn't much left of the ankle pain. As I remember it, the weather was very nice. Clear, fairly warm and the sun was shining. Just a nice fall day. I do remember also about running out of water, and my mouth was spitting cotton. Came by a small rut in a rice paddy with some water in it and filled my canteen from it. I think we were supposed to put 4 water purification tablets in it, and just to make sure, I put 8 in. I guess it worked, because I didn't get sick.

All in all, it was a very good jump. Weather was excellent, no flack, good formation of the aircraft, all of our door bundles and monorail bundles were found, no jump casualties, and light opposition to begin with.



By 1630 hours the Battalion had secured all its objectives and we were holding the high ground south of Sukchon. Company I was on the left and Company K on the right in a defensive position. We didn't have any trouble with assembly, mainly due to the time of our jump (daylight).

That night, "K" Co was hit at about 0230 by an estimated enemy company trying to break through their road block. The attack was repulsed.

The next morning, "I" Co. was given a mission of making a recon in force to clear the railroad. We went into Opari without any opposition, but at about 1300 hours we were ambushed by about two enemy battalions, using mortars and 40 mm ack ack guns. After about two hours, we were overrun and lost two platoons (about 90 men missing), and we pulled back to hill 281. The "gooks" didn't follow through and fell back to their former positions. This action was where Pfc. **Wilson** received the Medal of Honor.

There was a lot more that happened before the land tail arrived, but I think that is another story. All you wanted from me was about the jump, and I think I covered that pretty well from someone who was there.

Source:

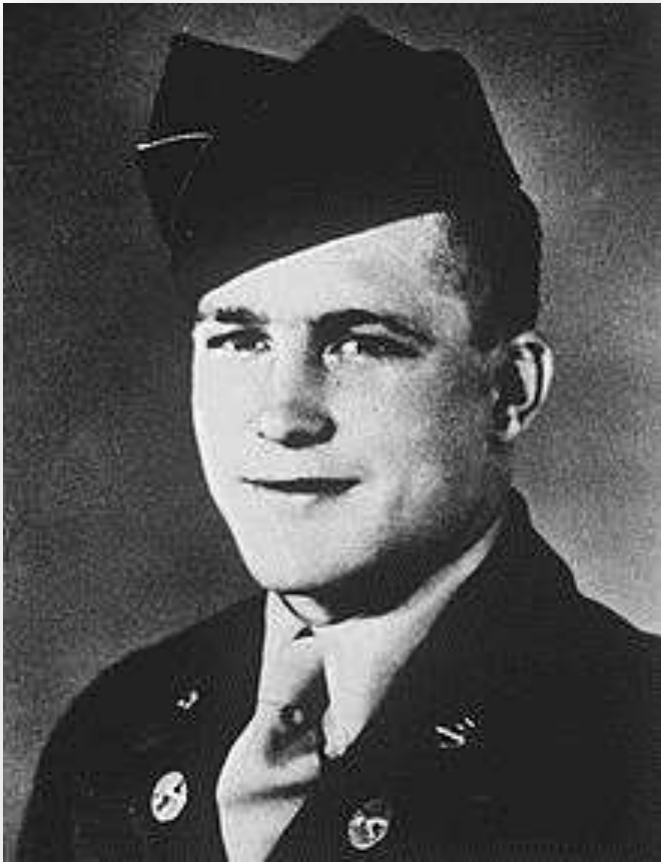
Paratroopers of the 50's

[Sent in by Ted Roybal, B/2/503]



Richard Gene Wilson

~ Medal of Honor Recipient ~



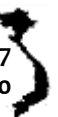
Born: August 19, 1931
Marion, Illinois
Died: October 21, 1950 (age 19)
Opa-ri, Korea
Burial: Cape County Park
Cape Girardeau, Missouri
Allegiance: United States of America
Service: United States Army
1948-1951
Rank: Private First Class
Unit: 187th Airborne Inf. Reg.
Battles/War: Korean War
Battle of Yongu
Awards: Medal of Honor
Bronze Star
Purple Heart



~ Medal of Honor Citation ~



Pfc. Wilson distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action. As medical aid man attached to Company I, he accompanied the unit during a reconnaissance in force through the hilly country near Opari. The main body of the company was passing through a narrow valley flanked on 3 sides by high hills when the enemy laid down a barrage of mortar, automatic-weapons and small-arms fire. The company suffered a large number of casualties from the intense hostile fire while fighting its way out of the ambush. Pfc. Wilson proceeded at once to move among the wounded and administered aid to them oblivious of the danger to himself, constantly exposing himself to hostile fire. The company commander ordered a withdrawal as the enemy threatened to encircle and isolate the company. As his unit withdrew Private Wilson assisted wounded men to safety and assured himself that none were left behind. After the company had pulled back he learned that a comrade previously thought dead had been seen to be moving and attempting to crawl to safety. Despite the protests of his comrades, unarmed and facing a merciless enemy, Pfc. Wilson returned to the dangerous position in search of his comrade. Two days later a patrol found him lying beside the man he returned to aid. He had been shot several times while trying to shield and administer aid to the wounded man. Pfc. Wilson's superb personal bravery, consummate courage and willing self-sacrifice for his comrades reflect untold glory upon himself and uphold the esteemed traditions of the military service.



You can't steal valor, but you certainly can try.

Litmus test: I've seen men in battle commit brave and selfless acts, but when they come home, they do not talk about what they have done, only what they failed to do. Civilians don't know any better, but we do.

Michael J. MacLeod
82nd Airborne Division



Yeah. What the All American said. Ed

Screaming Eagle, Ready to Blast *A.B. be smokin'*



"I just hooked up with the brother who took this photo, after 50 years!!!! Prior to a jump out of a C-119 over Ft. Campbell, KY in 1964-65." A.B. Garcia, HHC/2/503, '65/'66

Vietnam War Remembrance Ceremony

At 10:30 am, May 7th, 2016

The Airborne & Special Operations Museum Foundation with their presenting sponsor Select Bank & Trust will host the first Vietnam War Remembrance Ceremony in the Museum's Parade field.

Guest speakers include General (Retired) James Lindsay and **Colonel (Retired) Ken Smith**.

This ceremony honors and thanks all veterans, all services of the Vietnam War and will highlight one US Army Airborne or Special Operations unit.



The Ground Forces Band will provide the music for the event; the invocation/benediction by Chaplain Jon Cone Sr. from the Cumberland County Veterans Council; Color Guard from the Johnson County Vietnam Veterans of America; Missing man table from Rolling Thunder Chapter 1, NC; and a special pinning ceremony of all Vietnam Veterans present from the Cumberland County Veterans Council.

The highlighted unit this year will be the 173D Airborne Brigade (Separate) and the unit's colors will be on display from the local chapter of the 173D Association (Chapter 5).

To Register to Attend, contact:

Airborne & Special Operations Museum Foundation
100 Bragg Blvd., Fayetteville, NC 28301
(910) 643-2778 info@asomf.org

The Airborne & Special Operations Museum Foundation supports the museum with marketing, advertising and financial support for its programs and exhibits. Opening the doors on August 16th, 2000, the 60th anniversary of the original United States Army's Test Platoon's first parachute jump, the museum offers free admission, a main exhibit gallery, temporary gallery, four-story tall theater, video theater and a motion simulator ride. It is located in Historic Downtown Fayetteville on the corner of Bragg Boulevard and Hay Street, adjacent to the city's Freedom Memorial Park and the recently built North Carolina Veteran's Park. The main gallery is designed as a self-guiding tour, in chronological order, through the history of the airborne and special operations soldiers, from 1940 to the present. The temporary gallery changes throughout the year and displays a myriad of exhibits pertaining to the United States Army, airborne and special operation units through their history and conflicts from World War II to the present. For a nominal fee visitors can ride the 24 seat motion simulator.



A Day For Day

Well there was this person that gave so much to what needed to be done. A Shriner, a Skysoldier a neighbor, a friend and a Buckeye to say the least.

The story as told, there was this Southern Ohio Skysoldier, Buckeye, 173d Assn Store Manager and Chapter 17 member who spent so many hours helping others and celebrating life in deeds. Two-tour Vietnam Veteran Danny Day is his name.

Last year he held a tailgate party for those few Buckeyes that inhabit the southern bowels of Ohio, and they are few. It was a great house-tailgate party at the outpost and little was known about it. After a Saturday of OSU triumph and in the wee hours of the night, host Danny Day found his beloved home in a turmoil of flames and was cast to the streets, away from his fortress of solitude to make way for his repairs that would continue over the next 3 months. Yes, it hurt him deeply as he felt the loss in his life.

Saddened by his misfortune he was forced to seek refuge in the Florida Keys during Fantasy Week. Well that wasn't so bad. But when he returned he had no home still, and was forced to make do. Yep, a sad story of the loyal. But, alas, it was not unseen by all.

After his story circulated and made its way into the Athletic Dept of OSU, his sacrifice was made known. His dedication and love was soon recognized by some of the most powerful at Ohio's greatest University.

It was confirmed by unanimous vote that something should be done for this Chapter 17 Danny Day for giving so much support and sacrifice to the Buckeye Nation. Furthermore, the major components of OSU Athletics decided to show their official appreciation.

So on February 17th, 2016 at 2:47 pm, Lt. Col. Steve Matacia presented the coveted Black Helmet of the OSU Buckeyes, signed by Archie Griffin, Urban Meyers, Gene Smith, Miechelle Willis and several others, to the most deserving, giving, 173d Skysoldier Buckeye.

Thanks for all you have done and thanks for your service.



Skip Kniley
B/3/319th

Sister Looking for Buddies of Trooper

Dear Sirs,

I'm the Gold Star Sister of SPC4 **Lonnie Allen Floyd**. He served with the 82nd Finance Division and graduated from Jump School with the 82nd Airborne. He served briefly with the 82nd in Bien Hoa with the finance division. However, he volunteered for infantry with the 173rd Airborne shortly after arriving in country. He was serving with C/4/503 173rd ABN when he was KIA January 14, 1967. I don't have any info about his service with the 82nd ABN and I wish I could find any info about his service with the 82nd ABN.



I'm not sure if this is the place I should start to find his information or not and any help will be appreciated. I do have his information with his service with the 173rd except for the date he joined up with them in Vietnam.

I'm planning a trip to Vietnam the first of April and plan to visit Bien Hoa and other places that I have coordinates for later on with his service with the 173rd.

This is his jump graduation picture. His date of birth is 7-29-47. He was born in Chattanooga, TN.

1. Does anyone know about his service with the 82d?
2. When did he join the 173d and the 4th Batt?
3. Any ideas where Charlie Company had operations when Lonnie was in country?
4. Was he in Da Nang?

Sincerely,

Brenda Floyd Underwood
bfu@comcast.net



A photo found on the web.



173d Documentary Planned

Operation Yorktown 1966



Evacuating wounded of Alpha Company during Operation Yorktown in Xuan Loc, RVN, June 29, 1966.

(Photo by Jack Ribera, A/2/503)

It was June 29, 1966, approximately 37 miles east of Bien Hoa in Xuan Loc Province, when three platoons of A/2/503d Infantry engaged an enemy force between 75-100 strong employing 50 caliber machine guns and grenade launchers.

"An immense volume of small arms fire, including 50s erupted about one to two thousand meters to the north of my position, and the radio became alive with transmissions from the third platoon sergeant that they were pinned down under fire from a superior enemy force and needed assistance. The radio was completely jammed with transmissions between the third platoon and the company commander who was at a 3rd location.... We ran all out for about 1000 yards, dropped packs and encountered massive fire from the enemy that we suppressed by going on line and then my point men called to me and I saw a scene that I will never forget as long as I live....the gray mud was no longer just gray, but now had streaks of red everywhere in it....the forest was almost completely covered with gun smoke that hung there like a curtain, and there were bodies everywhere...one I saw was alive and looked like he was a man dying of thirst in the middle of the desert and we had brought him water.....I then turned my attention back to the pile of what I thought was the dead. I was sad to see Sgt. Morris dead and walked over to him and for no particular reason kicked him on the foot to make sure. I almost dropped my rifle when his eyes opened up, focused on me and very slowly his right hand made its way to his forehead in an almost perfect salute, and he said, 'All the way, Sir'....I was stunned, my god, he was alive! I yelled for a medic. I saw that his thumbs were full of hand grenade pins and that he had 'not one but two sucking chest wounds'. Barely alive, he called to me and said in a strong but typically polite voice,

'Just tell me where you want me to move, Sir, and I'll crawl there'". Bill Vose, A/2/503

For his heroic actions during this ferocious combat action, SSgt. Charlie Morris of A/2/503 would be awarded the Medal of Honor.



The late Charlie Morris.

(Photo courtesy of Jim Healy

A/2/503)

Remember Operation Yorktown, Vietnam in 1966, when Company A, 2d Bn, 503d Airborne Infantry engaged the 308th Main Force Viet Cong Battalion?

Men of the 2/503 who were there and who participated in this operation are planning to produce a video documentary to record that history for all time. If you were in the 2/503, especially Company A, we'd very much like to receive your comments, photos, and stories on what transpired that day. We will be doing some video-taping during the 173d Airborne Brigade Reunion at Ft. Benning during June 2016, as we begin putting together the documentary.

Please contact LTC Jack Kelley, CO A/2/503 during Operation Yorktown, at jacktkelley@aol.com or call him at (910) 488-0165 to become part of this important historical endeavor.

Hope to see you at the Reunion! *Airborne!!*



What's left of Alpha Company's 3rd Platoon following the battle on 29 June. (Photo by Doc Bob Beaton)



A DAY FOR HEROES

By Ronald L. Sedlak
A/2/503

This story provides the reader with one young soldier's account of the day and the events from my position. Men in a different position may have witnessed additional or different experiences on the day, June 29, 1966, the day and the events which are permanently etched in my mind. It would be thirty years before any of the survivors were to see each other again and share the events of the day when thirteen heroes gave their young lives for their country. Ron



Ron

We had received word of a Viet Cong regiment thought to be operating in the Xuan Loc area according to LRP (long range patrol) reports. The second battalion was going to look for them. We were sent out in company size units. "A" Company was chosen to break up into platoon sized units to search the area. The rationale for this decision was that we could cover more area better than an entire company, which is usually assigned.

When we found out that we were being split into platoons I became very nervous, my guts were in knots, I was smoking nonstop. We were choppered out to our AO (area of operations). We were about a thousand meters from each of the other platoons (a total of four platoons were in this operation). This meant in the dense jungle, if we were to stumble on to Charlie, it would be a long time before backup help would be able to reach us.

On June 27 choppers put down in the LZ (landing zone), which was to be our search area. We exited the choppers and headed into the dense jungle. By mid-afternoon the heat of the jungle was sweltering and oppressive. We were ringing wet as usual beneath our gear as we humped the jungle looking for Charlie. We stopped for our night laager (bivouac) area.

We stopped at the edge of the jungle near a rubber plantation. A rubber plantation is rows of rubber trees, similar to a fruit orchard in the states. The difference is that rubber trees are a lot taller. There are hundreds of these plantations dotting the Viet Nam landscape. I was thinking it's hard to believe that my country relied on this country for rubber until nylon tires came out in the 50s.

We set up our perimeter and settled in for the night. Part of preparing for the night included digging a foxhole to sleep in for the night. The size of a foxhole depended on whether one or two men were sharing it. At night you wrapped yourself in your poncho. It's hard to believe that after the sweltering heat of the day that 70-80 degrees felt chilly. We took turns on guard duty at night even though the night enveloped us in an inky black darkness. Most of the nights you couldn't see anything in the dark.

I was located in a foxhole near the edge of the jungle by myself, because my partner had contracted malaria. It was not uncommon to contract this disease in the jungle. Many of the troopers carried hammocks with them, which they would string between trees at night. It's difficult to sleep under these conditions, especially when you are frightened. One finds themselves not sleeping but catnapping. You try not to stir or make any unnecessary noise. In the middle of the night I was awakened by a start thinking I had heard something; nothing at all except the dense blackness of the jungle night. After a few minutes I pulled my poncho over my head and had a smoke. I drifted back off to sleep.

I awoke at daybreak to numerous explosions and the screaming of wounded men. I could hear cries for the medic. I saw our medic, Malcolm Berry, who was a tall, black young man heading for the wounded. He was a good friend. He was from New Jersey, full of life and fun to be around. My God, we're being mortared!

As I observed the scene from my foxhole, I saw the explosions were around the area of the rubber trees. Two troopers died in their hammocks, three others were wounded. Suddenly, everything became quiet. We ventured slowly out of our foxholes. They called in dust offs (medivac choppers) to carry out the wounded. We were left with 36 men in our platoon. What a hellofa way to start the day. I was soon to learn that this was Charlie's way of waking us up.

(continued....)



It's June 28th, the rest of this day proves to be uneventful. We stopped for our night laager area. We were a weary, tired group of GIs this night. We were awakened the morning of June 29th with the sun filtering through the jungle. As we broke up our morning bivouac and headed out for the jungle, we had no clue as to the danger lurking ahead. After approximately 20 minutes to an hour, we were approaching a swampy area. I noticed how deathly quiet the jungle seemed this morning. It didn't register with me at the time that this was unusual.



Site of the June 29, 1966 battle.

(Photo by Mike Thibault, A/2/503)

As we marched forward in single file, I was about three quarters back in the platoon. Suddenly we came to a stop. We dropped to a kneeling position, with every other man facing the outside (every other man facing the opposite direction). Sgt. Morris went ahead to the point people who had stumbled onto some blue commo wire, as well as other discards from the enemy, including a slit trench (latrine). Sgt. Morris and Leslie Smith advanced forward cautiously following the commo wire. An enemy 30 caliber machine gun opened fire on them at point blank range. Both men were hit and went down.



Charles Morris
1931 – 1996

Sgt. Morris was hit in the chest. He rolled over and raised-up spotting a Chinese advisor, he in his own words, *"shot the slope bastard in the head"*.

The machine gun continued firing. Sgt. Morris threw in a grenade and blew-up the rest of the gun crew. Barry, our medic, moved forward to bring Sgt. Morris and Smith back. By now heavy arms fire was all along our front. Under



Leslie R. Smith, KIA

a hail of gun fire, Barry, Smith and Sgt. Morris

made it back to our line. Barry started to administer first aid to Smith and Morris. Smith would later die. Sgt. Morris had a serious chest wound, but refused to stop fighting. The rest of the platoon formed an immediate perimeter. We were now under very, very heavy gun fire.

As I moved forward to my position, I felt a searing pain in my right hip. I was later to learn that I had a flesh wound. At that point my only thought was to get into position and start firing. As I settled into a position, in a swampy area, I heard a 50 caliber machine gun open fire. I thought,

"My God, they must be really dug in to have a 50 caliber machine gun".

We were on the right flank of the front of the perimeter. Sgt. Richard Hido was on my left and Ed Ball was on the Sgt.'s left. On my right was Ferguson and Shasteen with a M60 machine gun. Sgt. Fritts was down from them on their right. We could now hear several machine guns firing and a helluva lot of AK47s (a Russian rifle the Viet Cong used, which was very effective). Grenades were dropping all around us. All you could hear over the sound of the explosives were the screams of the wounded screaming for a medic. We were later to learn that we had stumbled onto the Viet Cong base camp with an estimated strength of over 500 men.

(continued....)



Our platoon sergeant, Sgt. Cooney, was in the middle of the platoon by a tree. He had been wounded and was hysterical. The RTO (radio operator) lie dead beside him. They had made contact with the other platoon, who were starting a forward march to our position. Sgt. Cooney was screaming for a radio.



Mike Thibault

Mike Thibault, our FO (forward observer for artillery) was on the left flank towards the front. He was calling for air support which was unavailable, and artillery, which for unknown reasons we never received. He called for gunships (specially armed helicopters) which never arrived. He later took his radio back to Sgt. Cooney who was still hysterically hollering. Thibault had been shot in the shoulder and he dropped his radio off to Sgt. Cooney. As Mike got up to move to a better position, he was gut shot.

Paul Surette, who was a close friend of mine from Boston, and Francis (George) Stevens, another close friend being close to the front, were killed in a deadly crossfire. We were now completely surrounded, with gun fire pouring in from all sides. With machine guns sweeping the areas everything in the area was destroyed, leveling every bit of underbrush in their path.



Paul Joseph Surette, KIA

I, like everyone else, was concentrating on keeping up our fire power, shooting at movement and muzzle flashes. The enemy made an assault on our position which we drove off. By now our medic, Malcolm Barry, had been shot in the leg, tending to the wounded. Sgt. Morris, despite his own serious wounds, was trying to care for the wounded and keep up the battle.

The gun fire was so heavy that I swear you could have walked on the lead between the two lines. By now our only thoughts were concentrating on getting out of here alive. The urge to survive took away the fear. I thought to myself,

“My God, how many of them are out there?”

A grenade had knocked out our M60 machine gun on the left flank. Billy Taylor was badly wounded. Sgt. Morris saved his life by tending his wounds and calming him down. Marshall sustained serious wounds to his

arm and his leg. He would later lose part of each of his injured extremities. He survived due to Sgt. Morris applying tourniquets to his injured limbs.

Sgt. Morris moved among the living and the wounded, calming them down and encouraging them to keep fighting. Malcolm Barry was giving him advice on how to handle the wounded when someone else screamed for a medic. As Malcolm moved to his position, he was fatally wounded. He would receive a Silver Star, posthumously.



I hear cursing and swearing on my right flank. As I crawled over to see what was wrong I realized that I did not hear the 60 firing. As I reached their position, Fergie cried out,

“The machine gun is jammed up!”

Shasteen was on his hands and knees with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, field stripping the gun to fix it. Fergie was lying on his back with a pistol across his chest hollering for him to hurry up. Shasteen reassembled the 60, put a belt in it and started firing.

The Viet Cong came at our position again, and once more we were able to drive them back.

Shasteen was hit through the leg and Sgt. Fritts was hit in the chest and in serious condition. (Sgt. Fritts did not even have to be there, having a father who was a Col. serving in Viet Nam).



We realized that he was mortally wounded and watched helplessly as he lay dying. He began screaming out loud asking God to spare his life. It was very unnerving and painful listening to him begging God not to let him die, and knowing that there was nothing you could do to help him.

Little did I know that I would carry the memory of Sgt. Fritt’s death with me the rest of my life. Each time he cried out, the Viet Cong would concentrate heavy fire in his area. We tried to keep him calm and quiet until he died in anguish.

(continued....)



Sgt. Morris continued to move about the perimeter, checking positions and gathering ammo from the dead to give to the living.

We now realized that they had set up a machine gun behind us. Sgt. Morris went back by Jones' position. Jones was hit up on the left side. As Sgt. Morris assisted him, Jones told him he could still fire with his one hand. Sgt. Morris would yell,

“Die you commie bastards!”

In response the Viet Cong would holler insults back to us.

There were still a lot of grenades going off inside our perimeter thrown by the Viet Cong. We could also hear them popping tubes and dropping mortars on us. Sgt. Morris even said he saw them firing RPG (rocket propelled grenades) at us. An explosion went off close to my left and I heard Sgt. Hido screaming, *“My God, I’m hit! My arm! My arm!”* I crawled over to his



Richard Lee Hido, KIA

position thinking he might need a tourniquet. As I reached him I thought, *“Oh my God!”* His arm was blown completely off and lying about 10 feet away. All I could see was a hole with ribs sticking out. He looked up as I reached him, and said to me, *“Please help me find my arm”*. Then he died.

As I crawled back to my position, I heard a machine gun open fire and I felt the bullets tear through my left shoulder and across my back as I had partially exposed myself. As I reached up and touched the hole in my back, I began to think that none of us would get out of here alive. I must have screamed out when I was hit, because Ed Ball came over to assess my injuries. As Ed put a field dressing on my wound I could see by the look in his eyes that he figured I was done for. As Ed crawled away he was shot through the buttocks.

On the left another explosion occurred. Sgt. (Albert Raymond) Potter was hit. Both arms were blown off and he died. The unrelenting Viet Cong tried another assault which we drove off. Sgt. Morris, among his wounds, had a badly wounded hand and could not pull the pin on the grenade. His thumb was good and he pulled the pins of the grenades with his thumb. He had such a big thumb that at the end of the fire fight, he had seven pins on the end of his thumb.

I felt pain in my right chest and realized that I had been hit again. As Ed Ball was lying on my left flank firing his M16, a bullet tore through the casing on the rifle, peppering my face with shrapnel. Ed, cursing, threw the rifle down and crawled over to get Sgt. Hido's rifle. I was getting weaker, barely able to squeeze the trigger let alone reload my rifle.

We could hear the enemy talking and yelling, and figured they were getting ready for another attack. We began to realize that with our casualties we could no longer hold them back. We had been in continuous combat for almost ten hours. When was this going to end? The gun fire had started to let up some. So many grenades had gone off in the perimeter that everyone sustained shrapnel wounds. Sgt. Morris had been wounded five times.

First and second platoon were getting closer and moving in behind the Viet Cong. As second platoon reached the Viet Cong perimeter, the platoon leader lined them up and they charged the hill firing their weapons as they came, driving away the remaining Viet Cong.

As I lay face down in the swamp, weak from the loss of blood and listening to the assault, I thought, *“The bastards are coming again”*, not realizing that the gun fire was coming away from our position. Weakening from blood loss, I pulled the pin on my last grenade and with it underneath me, passed out. My rationale was, if they roll my body over, the grenade would go off killing several more.

The second platoon made it into our perimeter. They witnessed the ghastly horror of dead and wounded everywhere. Thirteen troopers gave their all that day. Thirteen heroes. Most of the survivors had been wounded two or three times. Lt. Vose was checking to see who was dead and who was alive. He observed Sgt. Morris laying among the dead, not moving. He kicked Sgt. Morris in the foot and was shocked when he opened his eyes. As he leaned over Sgt. Morris, the Sgt. reached up and grabbed his fatigue jacket and told him to be sure to get the more seriously wounded evacuated out first. Sgt. Morris was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his valor on this day.



Charlie Morris, MOH

(Photo from Jim Healy)

(continued....)





"What's left of 3d Plt, A Co 2/503 Inf 173d Bde"
(photo provided by Bob "Doc" Beaton)

Ed Ball was taken out with the wounded. He glanced over and saw me lying with blood on my face and thought I was dead. I vaguely remember a medic saying,

"My God, this one is still alive with a grenade in his hand".

Because of the swamp they could not make an LZ for the dust offs. The Air Force sent in a different kind of chopper with baskets to remove the rest of the wounded to MASH units where we were patched up so we could be transferred to large field hospitals.

As I waited for evacuation via basket, I looked around me. I looked over at Surette and Stevens – my buddies – lifeless – the end of dear friendships. Both soldiers lie with their rifles in their arms, with the upper hand now supporting their heads. They looked like they had just laid down and were taking a nap with their rifles. As I surveyed the area around me, my gaze rested on the sight of Sgt. Hido's body and Sgt. Fritt's body on the other side. Everyone was covered with blood. Reality was taking over. Why did God let me live?? I felt guilty as I fought to remain conscious. I was so scared. I vaguely remember being put in the basket for evacuation. I lost consciousness.

My next memory is awakening in the field hospital, bandaged and taped up with IV's running in my arms. I thought, *"My God, I am alive! I made it!"* My moment of elation ended as the horror and deadly reality of what happened set in. How many times would I relive this memory?

I still remember the MASH unit, exactly like the weekly MASH TV series. I couldn't believe it when I saw

Sgt. Morris, despite his own injuries, dressed in clean fatigues and walking tall. If you didn't know, you would never guess that he was wounded too. He checked on each of us to see how we were doing and if we needed anything. He did have his hand bandaged up.

When I reflect on that day I always think of Sgt. Morris. Sgt. Morris was a true hero, in the tradition of Sgt. York and Audie Murphy. He didn't think he had done anything special – let alone extraordinary. He would say, *"I was just helping you guys out. Your combined efforts are what kept us going"*. When President Johnson awarded him the Medal of Honor, he said, *"This belongs to the guys who were there with me. They are the ones who really deserve this, not me. They supported me. I just helped them out"*. His words just reinforced what a true hero he really was.

A/2/503 Troopers Lost on 6/29/66 Not Named in Report



Tommy Jones



John Berthel



Frank Graves



Robert Bowman



David Ferraro



Jesse Felder

***Get yourself well, Ron.
We're pulling for you,
Buddy.***



In Memory of 2/503 Sky Soldier

**Sgt. (Ret) Scott,
Lawrence Steven**
C/2/503 Chargin' Charlie



June 1950 – January 2016

Tribute

Steve was born in Houston, TX on June 25, 1950 and passed away January 2, 2016 in Calhoun, LA. Steve, after leaving West Monroe High School, joined the U.S. Army to be a Paratrooper with C Co. 2nd Bn. 503rd Abn. Inf. 173rd ABN.BGE (Sep) which he did from August 1, 1969-June 21, 1971.



AWARDS: Combat Infantry Badge, Bronze Star Medal, Air Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Good Conduct Medal with Bronze Stars, RVN Gallantry Cross, RVN Vietnam Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Valorous Unit Citation, RVN Gallantry Cross Unit Citation, RVN Civic Action Honor Medal Unit Citation, but he was most proud of his Silver Parachute Badge (with 29 jumps).

He worked for the U.S. Post Office until he was disabled on the job. He believed in helping other veterans with VA claims until he died. Steve was a Life Member of The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. Post 3993 West Monroe, LA. He was preceded in death by his mother, Ruby Jean Goodwin, Aunt Lorraine Isaac Bruce "Aunt Rainey" and grandchild J.C. Paulman.

~ Rest Easy Sarge ~

"In the beginning of a change, the patriot is a scarce man, and brave, and hated and scorned. When his cause succeeds, the timid join him, for then it costs nothing to be a patriot."

Mark Twain

Lest we forget....

Leslie Estelle Cowper

Born 1932 – Died 2 May 1966

Lieutenant

Royal New Zealand Nursing Corps

Leslie Cowper was a member of the New Zealand Surgical Team based at Qui Nhon. On May 2, 1966, while working with the surgical team she died from illness. She is buried in Auckland, New Zealand.



Photo courtesy Luvern Mather

On 27 May 1965, following a request by the Government of the Republic of South Vietnam, the New Zealand Government agreed to send a four-gun artillery battery for service in that country. 161 Battery, Royal New Zealand Artillery was flown to Vietnam in mid July.

In March 1967 the New Zealand Government increased its contribution to the operations in Vietnam and sent V Company, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment and a medical unit.

The nurses who took part in this campaign were employed at 1st Australian Field Hospital in Vung Tau, South Vietnam and their presence was a great morale booster for the New Zealand troops.

Captain Daphne Shaw was awarded the ARRC (Royal Red Cross 2nd Class) for her services in Vietnam.

A New Zealand (civil) Surgical Team worked at the Provincial Hospital at Qui Nhon, South Vietnam from 1965 and had a number of Territorial Force nurses among their staff. One of them, Leslie Cowper died in Vietnam on 2 May 1966.



161 Battery TAC Sign



BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Ft. Benning, Georgia | June 2016



As the calendar counts down to 7 June 2016, our reunion committee will be busy planning and organizing a reunion we hope you will not soon forget. We have arranged for the hotels in our 'stay' list to provide a hot breakfast daily. We contracted buses to transport us to and from daily activities. For the golfers among us, we have planned a day of golf at the Ft. Benning golf course. Please check our website periodically for updates and our continuing events planning.

<http://www.173dreunion2016.com/>

From the rice paddies and central highlands of Vietnam;

from the sands of Iraq; from the mountains of Afghanistan; from Italy, Australia and New Zealand; from the fifty states and all points between – back to the beginning we go.

South Carolina Chapter 30 invites you to join us in Columbus, Georgia, home of Ft. Benning, for five days of R&R – back to where the Airborne experience began for the majority of Sky Soldiers – this time with less running, yelling, and push-ups.

We have planned trips to local historic sites and a day at Ft. Benning to revisit our airborne roots. We will visit the 250 and 34 foot towers and eat a meal in an Army dining facility. If the Army's schedule matches ours, we will view a training jump and pin wings on a graduating class. *And of course a trip to our 173d monument is a must.*

All reunion activities will be conducted at the Columbus Convention & Trade Center located directly across the street from the Marriott hotel.

SC Chapter 30
(2016 Reunion Committee)

Contact:

Phone: 803-237-3169

Email: bowway@aol.com





173D REUNION 2016

JUNE 7 ~ JUNE 11, 2016

South Carolina Chapter 30 invites all Sky Soldiers and friends of Sky Soldiers to join us in Columbus, Georgia to celebrate the 2016 Reunion of the 173d Airborne Brigade Association. We have planned five days of activities, site seeing and interaction. Reunion activities will take place at The Columbus Convention and Trade Center. Onsite registration will begin **Tuesday** morning, June 7, 2016.

Our Hospitality Room will open from 1700 till 2200 **Tuesday through Saturday**. The Hospitality Room will offer FREE beverages of your choice, light snacks, 60s & 70s era music provided by a DJ, nightly raffles and a few surprises.

Wednesday begins with a trip to Callaway Gardens followed by a stop at The Little White House, the summer home and death place of Franklin Roosevelt. (Trip cost: \$40.00 per person; includes lunch, bus fare and admission.) After those taking the trip return to the Convention Center, we will have an outdoor meal along the banks of the Chattahoochee River.

Thursday morning begins with a trip to Andersonville to visit a Civil War prison camp. (Trip cost: \$30.00 per person; includes a boxed lunch, bus fare and admission.)

Friday is Ft. Benning Day. We will bus to Benning for a 'windshield tour' of the fort. After that, we will spend some time at the Airborne Training area. The 34' towers will be made available to those with desire to JUMP. After our visit there, we will have lunch with the troops. We are working with the Public Affairs Office to observe a training jump and perhaps pin wings on a graduating class. Around 1700 we will head over to the Infantry Museum. They have agreed to remain open till 2000 for us.



A restaurant and bar is available in the museum. At dusk, we will walk over to the 173d monument for a twilight ceremony lasting about an hour. Afterward we will bus back to the Convention Center to close the night in the Hospitality Room. **TIRED YET??** (Trip cost: \$10.00 per person; includes bus fare and lunch.)

After sleeping in, **Saturday** will be filled with the Board of Directors meeting, the General Membership meeting and the Ladies Lunch. Our Banquet will be held from 1700 to 2000 at the Convention Center. Coat and tie is suggested for the banquet please.

Sunday morning we will close the 2016 Reunion with a brief service at the 173d Monument.



Our Memorial

Vendors will be available for those looking for souvenirs and 173d apparel.

Columbus has a verity of entertainment and dinning venues within walking distance of the Convention Center.

We have blocked rooms at the following hotels:

MARRIOTT (all rooms have been picked up)

DOUBLETREE (no longer available)

HAMPTON INN SOUTH, \$125.00 per night, hot breakfast included

HAMPTON INN NORTH, \$125.00 per night, hot breakfast included

HYATT PLACE NORTH, \$129.00 per night, hot breakfast included

HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS, \$109.00-\$129.00 per night, hot breakfast included

COURTYARD by MARRIOTT, \$99.00 per night, breakfast NOT included

HILTON GARDEN, \$119.00 per night, hot breakfast \$5.95

Buses have been contracted for pick-up and drop off at the hotels on our list.

The registration fee of only \$173.00 gets you daily hospitality room privileges, an outdoor meal, ladies lunch (for the ladies who pre-registered) admission to the banquet, and a registration gift pack valued at \$70.00 MSRP.

For more information please view our website at [or](http://bowway@aol.com) contact Wayne Bowers at 803-237-3169 or email at bowway@aol.com

We look forward to seeing you in Georgia!

(continued....)



BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Hosted by SC Chapter 30

7-11 June 2016 | Ft. Benning, Georgia

Name _____ Phone (____) _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Unit served within the Brigade _____ Dates served _____

Guests

Name _____ Male/Female _____

Name _____ Male/Female _____

Name _____ Male/Female _____

Registration and Activity Fees

_____ \$173 per Association member* (includes hospitality room, banquet, welcome meal, gift)

_____ \$173 per guest* (includes hospitality room, banquet, welcome meal, gift)

_____ \$100 per Gold Star Family member

_____ \$100 per Active Duty Soldier (NOT on orders)

_____ FREE - Active Duty Soldiers on orders (i.e. Command, Color Guard)

_____ \$30/person - Andersonville Civil War prison camp trip (includes transportation and lunch)

_____ \$40/person - Callaway Gardens and Little White House trip (includes transportation, admission and lunch)

_____ \$10/person - Day at Ft. Benning (includes transportation and lunch in an Army dining facility)

_____ \$35 - Day of golf (includes transportation, cart rental, and lunch)

_____ \$50 - Banquet only

_____ \$20/day - Hospitality room only daily pass

_____ FREE - Ladies Luncheon (must register to attend)

_____ FREE - Gold Star Luncheon - 173d Gold Star Families only (must register to attend)

_____ \$100 per vendor table

_____ \$10 - Raffle ticket for free reunion. Winner will be reimbursed registration fee, hotel cost (not to exceed \$800) and \$200 meal money

_____ \$15 - Reunion challenge coin

_____ TOTAL COST

To register and pay online, visit www.173dreunion2016.com

Make checks payable to: 173d Reunion 2016

Mail to: Wendell Satterfield, PO Box 525, Gray Court, SC 29645

For hotel reservations: Columbus Marriott - 706-324-1800

For additional information: Wayne Bowers, 803-237-3169, bowway@aol.com

* Registration fee amount before 13 May 2016. After 13 May 2016, the cost is \$199. Walk-ins welcome at \$199.

***You must be registered to participate in the 173d Airborne Brigade activities listed above.**



The Special Forces at....

Thoung Duc

By John Erskine, Col. (Ret)

1st, 5th & 6th SF

and avid 2/503 VN Newsletter reader

The Special Forces A-Detachment that adjoined the village of Thoung Duc was having a problem with the local villagers, who were being intimidated by the local VC. In an effort to win the "hearts and minds" of the locals, we decided to put together a week-long "Medicine Show" and invite all the local villagers to come in and bring anyone who needed to be treated for an illness, especially the children.



Aerial view with huge line of villagers waiting to be seen.



CPT Erskine with his men at a treatment tent.

The large turnout for medical treatment was working so well that the Camp was attacked by the VC at night on the third day. We successfully fought off the attack, killed many VC and captured large amounts of weapons and equipment.



One of my medics, Bill Buford, with captured weapons and equipment after the attack.



More souvenirs captured at Thoung Duc.

The Medicine Show turned out to be a huge success and the VC were no longer a problem in the Thoung Duc area of responsibility.

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Casper 721: The Last Flight

By: Ned Costa, Crew Chief

Casper 721
Copyright 2011



Introduction

"**M**ayday, Mayday, Mayday **Casper 721 is Going Down**" the pilot said as he radioed our present position. This was the last radio transmission he was able to give before our Huey helicopter crashed in the steep mountainous terrain of the Central Highlands of South Vietnam.

It was December 11, 1968. No different from any other day in the jungle, the sun was already blazing down on this morning. It was a hot humid day with sweat dripping off my forehead when we learned all of the details surrounding our mission. Little did I know that I would never forget this day for as long as I live. I was the crew chief of Casper 721. This is my Vietnam War story and my own historic recount of what happened on this day.

The Last Fight of Casper 721

It was December 11, 1968 when Casper 721 was shot down during a command & control mission in the mountainous region of An Khe. Our flight crew that day was the aircraft commander CW2 Walt Henderson, co-pilot 1LT Cliff White, door gunner SP4 John Steen and crew chief SP5 Ned Costa.

Our first mission that morning was to insert a 4.2" mortar and team to a mountain top position overlooking the LZ. Next, we flew to LZ Uplift to refuel our aircraft and have two large whip antenna mounted on the skids.



Casper 721

We then joined a column of helicopters waiting to lift off when the battalion commander of the 1/503d infantry, LTC Frances Percy, acting S3 1LT Jim Taylor, battalion sergeant major, radio operator, artillery liaison and two others hopped into Casper 721. It was approximately 10 am when we lifted off and headed for an area about 20K northeast of the An Khe Pass referred to as Happy Valley. This was the AO (area of operation) where the battalion was being lifted into, and it was our job to fly the battalion commander over the landing zone.

We learned decades later that during the S2 briefings the night before, the enemy situation was discussed and included the use of the long-reach guns the NVA had and were using in this area against U.S. aircraft. This information was not discussed with our pilots during their briefing prior to the mission, even after Walt had asked if there were any anti-aircraft guns in the area and was told no. However, our crew was already familiar with this area and had knowledge that Happy Valley was a very dangerous place to fly in. We also knew this area supported a large enemy stronghold that included an NVA infantry regiment.

As we approached the LZ, LTC Percy asked us to conduct a fly over so he could see and discuss this operation with his commanders on the ground. Everything went well, then



Ned at the ready

he ordered our pilots to make a second pass over the same area again. Walt was reluctant to do this as we were only flying between 1200 and 1500 feet through the valley. By now, the NVA gunners were probably tracking our every move and just waiting for the right time to fire on us... and they did. It happened when we were nearly through the second pass when I felt a large explosion and the ship started to bounce up and down. Seconds later, Casper 721 was vibrating and shaking violently as we began rolling to the left then started to spin and tumble out of control all the while falling downwards towards the trees. I shouting out over the intercom that we were hit and also said *God help us!*

While I could still hear the pilots trying to keep us in the air, I removed my M60 machine gun from the gun mount and tossed it and my ammo box out of the aircraft. I was taught this in training to prevent the gun from caving into my chest during an emergency situation like this. Within seconds, Walt began his series of mayday calls that Casper 721 was going down. After our pilots reported our present position, we crashed into the mountainside.

Our ship rolled over on to my left side as it slid very quickly down the mountainside. I will never forget all of the trees, dirt and jungle debris as it moved by my position. This was also the same time when "my life passed before my eyes" and I saw fast moving visions of me growing up with my mom and dad at our home.

(continued....)



Next, I saw what I could only explain as a lot of bright white light everywhere. Next, I saw myself standing in front of Jesus. I do not remember any words being said, but the visions from my near death experience have stayed with me since that morning and I can see them as clearly and unchanged now as I did then.



The remains of Casper 721.

After sliding down this 60 degree slope, Casper 721 was stopped by two trees at the edge of a cliff that prevented us from going over the side of the mountain. The landing skids, main rotor blades and tail rotor assembly were ripped off of the aircraft and the tail boom was broken in half and bent towards the bottom of the fuselage as you can see in this Air Force rescue photo above. Everyone on board was unconscious. When I came to, I was disorganized and trapped in the left door gunner area of the ship staring down at the ground. I was soaked in jet fuel and could hear the engine still running. All I could think of at that moment was getting out of the wreckage before it caught on fire and/or blow up... but it did not do either. Lucky for us we had just refueled the ship minutes earlier and the fuel tank was nearly full with very little vapors in it that might have caused a fire or an explosion.

I managed to free myself and crawl out of the wreckage and could not believe what I saw and, moreover, that I survived this ordeal. I did not realize it then, but I had been hit in my right shoulder with what looked like a piece of the carbon steel core of an armored piercing round. I was in a lot of pain and pulled it from my shoulder only to cause more bleeding.

I also had a smaller piece of shrapnel in my right leg, along with many cuts and tremendous back pain. I thought my leg was broken, but it wasn't.

Next, I quickly started looking for weapons and searched for other survivors at the same time. Cliff White had also freed himself and got out of the ship. I was glad to see him, but saw that he was also badly hurt with injuries to his left knee and right leg. He was also cut up. Cliff and I continued our search and found John Steen still in his seat and trapped by a large broken tree limb pushing on his armor chest plate. He was also hit on his jaw by the grip of his M60 machine gun when it collapsed towards him on impact. John's left leg was badly twisted causing the ligaments to be pulled away from his knee. Cliff and I helped him out of the wreckage.

Walt was still unconscious when I got to him. His armor-plated seat had broken from the floor mounts and slammed him forward into the instrument console. I could not see his face and immediately thought he was KIA, but he was still alive. Cliff and I tried to free him, but we could not move his heavy seat off him. Some of our passengers had been thrown from the ship on impact. All were still alive, some unconscious. Frances Perry was still strapped in his seat and trapped inside the wreckage. From my vantage point it looked like he had injuries to his right arm and shoulder. Jim Taylor was out of the ship laying on the ground with a back injury and some broken bones. We were unclear about the others and their injuries. All of this was happening very quickly.

Cliff, John and I got far away from what was left of Casper 721 and took a defensive position behind a group of trees. Between us we had two pistols, one M16 rifle, several frag grenades and some smoke grenades. What we didn't know then was that we crashed practically on top of a NVA regiment and division size hospital that were mostly underground and inside of the mountain near our crash site. The NVA also had three or four long-reach gun sites within this area with 37mm anti-aircraft guns and .51 caliber machine guns in place. We learned later that it was a 37mm round that took us down. The NVA knew that we were in their backyard and were headed our way to finish the job, but the steep slope and uphill distance between our two positions bought us a little time before they could get to us.

It is hard to say exactly how long we were on the ground before help arrived... but it did.

(continued....)



As the first UH-1 Huey helicopter came into our area, I remember throwing two smoke grenades to mark our position for the pilot. In fact, so did Cliff and John. We were not worried about the NVA seeing the smoke, they already knew our position.

As the Army Huey flew above us, they started to take small arms fire from the advancing NVA soldiers. This forced them to leave us. We found out later that was a Casper Platoon Huey with aircraft commander CW2 Larry Kahila at the controls, pilot WO1 Don McKeough, crew chief SP5 Terry Gallagher and SP5 Sal Sosa.

An Air Force HH-43 "Pedro" Huskie arrived next, but communist gun fire also forced it to leave us. But before it did, the pilot was able to take the last photo (*previous page*) of Casper 721. The NVA was below us on the slope and started to fire at us, but the distance between us was still working to our advantage.

Next we heard the familiar whop-whop sound from another Army Huey coming to our rescue. This helicopter was from the 189th AHC "Ghostriders" from Pleiku and we were glad to see them. As they hovered overhead, their crew chief was waving at us and pointing to an area on the other side of a nearby bomb crater that they wanted us to go to. Cliff and I headed to the area that was about 50 feet away from our position, but John decided to stay. The Huey was hovering above the tree tops and dropped what looked like seat belts that had been tied together or perhaps it was a longer door gunner's monkey strap belt.

Cliff had no problem getting across the tree that was laid over the crater and climbed up the strap into the ship. This wasn't as easy for me. I got across the log okay, but the wounds to my right shoulder made it difficult for me to climb up the strap. The crew chief started to help me by pulling on it. As soon as I got my right leg wrapped around the left landing skid, the helicopter started taking AK-47 hits on the tail boom just a few feet away and nearly hitting me. As I was still holding on to the landing skid, the pilots quickly got us out of the area. I turned and looked down to see my ship laying on its left side as I was being pulled inside of the helicopter. I remember looking up at the pilot and thanking him. I also recall the tail number of this Huey on the console... it was 711.

A few minutes later, a Huey from the 61st AHC inserted some of the elements of the 1/503d infantry to the crash site who provided security for the remainder of this rescue operation that was about to take place. Walt was still trapped in his seat, John and our seven passengers still needed help. We did not know it then, but it would take the next 7 hours for the Air Force firemen and the brigade flight surgeon to free Walt from the wreckage. In the meantime, Cliff and I were

headed to Phu Cat Air Force Base and happy to have been rescued.

When we arrived at Phu Cat, Cliff and I were separated. I remember being carried out of the helicopter and placed on a stretcher as a group of Air Force nurses and doctors surrounded me. I suppose I was in shock because one of them held a paper bag over my mouth while I was breathing. Another doctor injected a shot of something directly into my shoulder wound. Whatever it was, it was strong and everything started to look distorted to me while the pain disappeared. After they temporarily patched my wounds I was then medivaced by helicopter to the 67th Evac Army Hospital in Qui Nhon. As the Huey landed on the hospital tarmac, the medics took me into the ER.



Hospital at Qui Nhon

I remember them taking my pistol and knife, removing my boots and cutting away the rest of my clothing. After the x-rays, I was patched up and moved to a hospital ward. I never saw Cliff or Walt in the hospital, but I did see John Steen when he was admitted into the same ward as me. The next day, Brigadier General Richard Allen came to visit us and presented the Purple Heart Medal to John and I at our hospital beds.

Walt, Cliff and John were later transferred to the Army hospital at Camp Zama, Japan. After a few weeks in the hospital, I returned to Ghost Town in January 1968. The wounds to my right shoulder were healed enough for me to start back to work again... but I was a crew chief without a helicopter!....



Ned recuperating from his wounds.

(continued....)



....So I was assigned back to performing maintenance jobs on our flight line and filling in as a crew chief when I was needed. It was back at Ghost Town when I learned all of the details surrounding Walt's seven hour rescue.

On December 14, 1968, the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper published a story about our rescue on the front page titled "*Copters Rescue 11 Stranded GIs*". Beside the details of our mission, the newspaper reported an Air Force spokesman calling our rescue "*One of the largest rescue operations of the war.*"



A Western Union telegram was delivered at about the same time to my mom and dad's home. When my mother answered the door and saw what it was she immediately assumed the worst and started crying and would not open the envelope. When she finally did and read the telegram, it said that I was "wounded in action" when my helicopter was shot down in the Republic of South Vietnam. It explained of my injuries and said I was recovering in an Army hospital in Vietnam. Before I left the hospital, I was able to call my mother from the M.A.R.S. station in Qui Nhon. She was very happy to hear from me during this short five minute phone call.

Time Marches On



It was 36 years later when I would have the pleasure of seeing all of the Casper 721 crew members back together once again. This photo was taken at the 2004 Casper Aviation Platoon Organization reunion that was held at the New Frontier Hotel & Resort in Las Vegas.

###

Thanks to Ned for sharing his story with us. Ed



On February 9, the House of Representatives unanimously passed H.R. 3016, the **Veterans Employment, Education, and Healthcare Improvement Act**.

DAV strongly supports several provisions of this bill based on current DAV Resolutions. Because of the prevalent orthopedic conditions among ill and injured veterans, the bill would adjust the compensation of VA podiatrist equivalent to that of other VA physicians. The bill would also extend maternity care with post-delivery care services for women veterans and require the Government Accountability Office to evaluate VA's effectiveness of paying timely non-VA emergency care.

Additionally, the measure would create the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration to consolidate and improve employment and educational opportunities for veterans now managed by the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Department of Labor.

Also on February 9, the House passed H.R. 677. This bill contains a number of provisions supported by DAV Resolutions 013, 087, 091 and 104, all calling for improvements across a number of VA benefits and services for injured and ill veterans.

Both bills await consideration by the U.S. Senate.

As always, thank you for your support of DAV's programs and your advocacy for policies that improve the lives of America's injured and ill veterans.

[Sent in by Gary Newman, USN, VVA/FL]

~ We Love Our Diggers ~



"Ya see boys, you point the skinny end here at the bad guys. Oh, and you'll need to get some helmets." (web photo)



Vietnam 50 years ago. A salute by an Army paratrooper to an Air Force pilot from Anthony, KS.

“Get him out of there! Get him out of there!”

Maj. Robert B. Carmichael
(LTC Retired)

2/503 Bn XO on January 2, 1966
LZ Wine, Mekong Delta, RVN

HARLOW KENNETH HALBOWER
Captain, Bird Dog Pilot, USAF
KIA 1/2/66

By: D. Lewis Smith, Jr.
HHC/2/503, '65/'66



The young Bird Dog pilot, Hal Halbower

This young man was one of many who died in our war during combat action; 58,307 U.S. men and women was the latest count we found reported. So why do we select him to honor and remember here when tens-of-thousands of others are equally deserving of special recognition? One might wonder why this space is not being allocated and dedicated to one of our own, a 2/503 Sky Soldier of the 173d Airborne? What's so special about Captain Halbower of the USAF?

The time, I suppose, is unimportant, but it was in the early morning of January 2, 1966, 50 years ago, when this RTO (radio telephone operator), along with our battalion executive officer, then Major Bob Carmichael and other troopers boarded a huey heading out to who the hell knows where? Bob knew of course.

We learned Capt. Halbower's family or friends gave him the nickname "Hal", and we'll refer to him as Hal here, and "Cap", an honored tag we unwashed give only to those Captains we served with whom we believe earned it -- and most did.

Just the day before on New Year's Day (Bob told me years later) Carmichael had met with Captain Halbower to discuss the planned assault by the 2/503d into LZ Wine in the rice paddies of the Mekong Delta; the same rice paddies Sky Soldiers Steve Haber, A.B. Garcia, Craig Ford, and the late Dale Olson and I visited in 2001.



**LZ Wine in 2001. Today, peaceful, beautiful, and quiet.
The tree line in the background where Cap met his fate.**

Bob discussed with the Bird Dog pilot the planned LZ and surrounding terrain, particularly the paddy dikes and tree lines both Carmichael and Bn Cmdr LTC George Dexter requested he monitor and to report on any enemy activity which might warrant air and/or artillery strikes as well as our own ground assaults.

(continued....)





Anthony, Kansas, some years ago. (web photo)

Cap Halbower was born in Anthony, Kansas on December 24, 1936, a small rural city about *"55 miles southwest of Wichita, surrounded by beautiful wheat fields in the heart of Kansas."* The city was established on July 18, 1878, with a population of about 275, today boasting 2,240 residents, and includes their own 9-hole golf course -- modern trappings have come to Anthony.

Seemingly idyllic in its own Americana kind of way, the people and city of Anthony as well as the farmlands there might cause one to envision Norman Rockwell painting a magazine cover image of the region and its inhabitants on that December 24, when Hal made his appearance in the world, and to wonder if such an image of such a city and time could have moved L. Frank Baum to select this part of our country as Dorothy's home before she and Toto embarked on their colorful journey to a distant land of little people. Of course, we can suspect that's exactly what Cap did, except unlike Dorothy who was running away from something, Hal seemed to be running towards something; a career in the Air Force, a war which called on his unique talents and skills, and no doubt, a deeply embedded sense of duty and honor his career path suggests. Yet unlike Dorothy, Hal would not return alive following his time in this other distant land with different little people; there would be no wizard or good witch to rescue him from his destiny, no rainbow to sing about, only a solo performance of *Taps* rolling over those wheat fields of Kansas.

Having arrived to our battalion in mid-December of '65, this was my first drink of combat, nearly a very brief sip it was. Loaded down with gear for an extended stay, unable to hear any transmissions over the PRC25 radio strapped to my back due to the *whoop whoop whoop* sound of the huey, Carmichael and his contingent were in one of the first assault helicopters that morning, heading toward LZ Wine.

From what we've learned, Hal was a bright and ambitious young man, a man with many interests. Cap was graduated the Air Force Academy, no small feat indeed. His father Kenneth and mother Elma must surely had been proud of their young son whom,

eventually, would leave the farmlands of Anthony, to serve his country 'fighting communism' in a distant land of little people, many of these people farmers themselves. It was 1959, when Cap departed the Academy to embark on his military career; and the name *Vietnam* was known to but a few in the idyllic city of Anthony, to be found somewhere in the midst of wheat fields, no doubt over a rainbow.



Left is Maj. Bob Carmichael, (LTC retired), 2/503 Bn XO (later Bn CO), with his trusty though cherry RTO Smith at Bao Trai airstrip before boarding their huey to LZ Wine, and what would prove close to becoming their only combat operation together. (Army photo)

The day before, New Year's Day, 1966, we arrived the small, rural airstrip at Bau Trai about 20 miles northwest of Saigon where we camped for the night -- preparing our equipment and minds for what was to come the following morning. Good buddy Herbert Murhammer of Bravo Company recalls cooking an inedible duck which fatally wandered into their reach that night before -- I recall nothing of that evening, other than the anxiousness and fear of the unknown which one feels before going into combat for the first time, I suspect many feel it. Looking back, perhaps the greatest fear most of us FNGs had, was the fear of not performing under fire, letting your buddies down in life and death situations. Yes, that was perhaps the biggest fear of all, if we took time to think about it.

While in high school, Anthony High School to be precise, Hal excelled in tennis and football, he involved himself in student government, the school band and worked on the school newspaper. He earned recognition and placement on the National Honor Society, and from what we've learned, was respected and well-liked by his fellow students.

(continued....)



"Your Air Force Academy classmates in the Class of 1959 will never forget you."

Brian T. Parker

We were college classmates

Yes, Cap seemed to have all the essential ingredients to go far in life, to achieve, and to do well. He was 29 years old that morning after New Year's Day in the Mekong Delta when his O-1 Bird Dog lifted off enroute to LZ Wine and his date with destiny.

Most men of our battalion at that time were experienced combat veterans, the majority having been in-country since May the year before, some with Korean War and WWII experience, with only a small number of us having joined the unit during the subsequent months as replacements – they had seen and tasted combat before this early January morning.

About the same time in December when I joined the 2/503, so did George Eddie Geoghagen from Pensacola, FL, just 19 years old. Though I don't recall ever meeting him, we well could have shared that deuce ½ truck ride from the Repo Depot to to Camp Zinn in Bien Hoa just short weeks earlier. Of course, there were other young para-troopers who would call Operation Marauder their 'cherry mission' as did George and I. Sadly for George this would be his first and last mission. He would be killed by what was reported to be 'friendly' artillery fire, along with others killed and wounded by that fire. One of the wounded, good buddy Johnny Graham of Charlie Company, *"remembered that Geoghagen had said that he was married and was from Georgia."*

Hal attended Kansas State for one year. His AFROTC Academy experiences included intercollegiate fencing when he was the 3-year conference foil champion, and where he earned his Aero Club Academic Degree: Major BS-USAFA. He was young and fit and bright. A wonderful future lay ahead for this new aviator who was prepared to fulfill his six-year commitment to the Air Force and his country.

Under the command of LTC George Dexter (Col. Retired), on Okinawa, Carmichael had been to Vietnam previously to participate in the planning and preparation for the battalion's arrival at Bien Hoa. An 'old man' in his early to mid 30's, he was appointed to the position of battalion executive officer prior to this operation where he took his newly-arrived cherry RTO under his wing. Marauder would be his and his RTO's first but not last combat action together in Vietnam.

Hal married Anna Lee Galloway, known as 'Dee' to him and family and friends. And seemingly consistent with who and what this man was, and clearly his wife Dee as well, they adopted their daughter, Tiffany Ann.



George

We don't know this, but one can almost sense this was a spiritual family, certainly a caring family.

Bob and I along with other troopers boarded our huey that early morning of January 2nd at Bao Trai, a handful of us -- me and my PRC25 tucked in on the floor of the chopper, Bob sitting above as the bird took its running start to reach altitude along with other choppers ahead and behind us. There was some comfort in knowing I was surrounded by experienced combat veterans of the 2/503 as the huey found cruising speed and altitude, the scenery below spectacular, and green, and foreboding.

Hal's active duty assignments in the Air Force included pilot training, serving as a UPT instructor pilot, and Pilot O-1 in Vietnam. Who knows where this young man could have gone in life? Maybe following a career in the Air Force perhaps he would have transitioned to that of a commercial airline pilot, someone who would have flown us from here to there in a future lifetime, neither knowing we had ever so briefly crossed paths upon and above a faraway paddy of rice? Who knows.

Army intelligence (often considered to be a misnomer by those of us humping the boonies) rightly predicted VC units would be in the area, and it was the job of the 2/503 to hunt down these people, and kill them – I would have much rather been back in Southern California playing baseball. But in spite of that intelligence, and unknown to us, this happy band of brothers was heading into a hot LZ.

One can only speculate what Cap was doing at this hour. Prepping his plane for that morning's mission? Already in the air providing visual intelligence to the battalion and brigade's ground command back at the airstrip and elsewhere? Perhaps, unknowingly to him, he was gazing for the last time at a photo of his wife Dee, and their daughter Tiffany Ann?

We began to descend into the rice paddies, everyone on alert. I must have looked terrified, and this was confirmed when Bob leaned down from his seat as we neared the ground and yelled over the roar of the chopper blades....

***"Don't worry, Smitty,
this LZ is secure!"***



**Cessna O-1 Bird Dog, similar to
Hal's plane that morning**

(continued....)



Those words barely left his mouth when the inside of the roof of the chopper above our heads was torn apart by incoming fire – a trooper in another chopper was killed by enemy fire during that same assault. Bob's and my war came very close to being a very short war. None of us knew the LZ was *not* secure.

Scrambling under fire while bogged down in the wet rice paddies, we made our way with some other troopers to a paddy dike. Immediately, a few feet off to our side, one of our machine gunners set up on the dike and began laying down suppressive fire into a tree line to our front (the very tree line shown in the photo above, Hal's tree line). The gunner totally exposed himself, and we could see dirt on either side of him kick up from enemy fire. It was amazing he was not hit.

Some years ago I found myself exchanging email notes with an Aussie of the RAR (Royal Australian Regiment), Lex McAulay, author of *Blue Lanyard Red Banner*, a book about his time with the RAR in Vietnam; he was interested in my recollections of Operations Marauder & Crimp from Jan. 66. In one of my notes to Lex I told him about witnessing the FAC being shot out of the sky, and must have stated something such as *"when we got to him he was dead..."* It was poor phraseology on my part, as Lex interpreted it as *me* personally reaching the crashed aircraft (which he wrote about in his book), when in fact I was attempting to describe what Steve Haber of Charlie Company had told me *he* witnessed upon reaching the crash site – I never again saw the wreckage or the pilot after the aircraft was hit by our own artillery and crashed.



Lex

"In an unusual twist of fate, an Air Force FAC who was piloting his Cessna O-1 'Bird Dog' at low level along the line of contact accidentally flew into a volley of outgoing friendly artillery fire. There was a loud 'pop,' and the troopers looked up to see an artillery round strike the tail of the little aircraft. The Bird Dog dived into the ground, killing the pilot instantly."

Col. Tom Faley, C/2/503

*"Operation Marauder:
Allied Offensive in the Mekong Delta"*
Vietnam Magazine

It may have been RTOs Lee Braggs and Wayne Hoitt next to me when Carmichael saw the Bird Dog flying into the path of our artillery...

***"Get him out of there!
Get him out of there!"***

Bob yelled at us. But, before any of us could reach the pilot by radio, his life had ended.

RTO hootch buddies, Lee Braggs and Wayne Hoitt



Lee



Wayne

So, we honor here the memory of this young man of the Air Force, Captain Harlow Kenneth Halbower, whom to most of us for half a century has always been that unknown and unnamed unfortunate pilot. He was shot down at LZ Wine over the rice paddies of the Mekong Delta while operating his aircraft in support of the 2/503 on January 2, 1966, during Operation Marauder. It's good to finally know about him – it's evident, Hal, this young man from Anthony, Kansas, was a good man.



Cap

~ Rest Easy Cap ~

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AIRBORNE! ~~ALL~~ NO LONGER THE WAY?



In the beginning there was heaven and earth and paratroopers.

In the March 7-14, 2016, edition of *ArmyTimes*, the headline reads: **"DOES THE ARMY STILL NEED AIRBORNE?"** High cost, high risk & obsolete, critics say."

In the article, Mark Devore, a purported military scholar is quoted as saying, *"We've gone 38 years with it being tough to say any given airborne operation was necessary."*

For most paratroopers, we suspect, the proposition of disbanding the Airborne is a touchy subject, but that's only a suspicion. So, we asked a number of 2/503 Sky Soldiers from different companies and different years of service with our battalion to chime in. We also asked them to answer this survey question:

Please select one of these options, A, B, C or D, letting us know your preference.

- (A) Keep the Airborne as is
- (B) Only SF, Rangers & Seals etc. should be Airborne
- (C) Disband the Airborne entirely
- (D) Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn

Here's what some of our guys said:

**"My heart tells me 'A',
my brain tells me 'B'.**

**LTC Pat Feely
C/2/503**



Doc Feely

"Keep the Airborne as is. Certainly there is a need from time to time to adjust and reposition airborne units. But for the United States to maintain an immediate response to meet the crisis of today's and tomorrow's needs to position a force on the ground to counter terror or hostile threats against ours or our allies interest -- the only response we have is airborne or....delay with its consequence. How will we or our allies respond to a nuclear/chemical takeover somewhere in the world on an immediate need? What happens if terrorist take over a civilian population--a critical area, i.e. Suez Canal/nuclear/chemical facilities that have a strategic importance to the US and its allies. Delay in responding leads to loss of life, loss of the facilities, and resources of national strategic interest. What other recourse do we have to answer the call? Additionally, the need for Air Force special operations units is also needed. On a different need--does the Army community still need the *ArmyTimes*? Be blessed."

**Jack Kelley, LTC(R)
Former CO, A/2/503**



Cap at Zinn

**(A) "Keep the Airborne
as is."**

**Paul Littig
D/2/503**

Paul, taking it easy in his golf attire. A man after my own heart. Ed



(continued....)





They were some brave sonsabitches.

"A for Airborne. Hello Sky Soldiers:


I was in the 1st Platoon of Company A, 2nd Bat., 503rd Infantry Reg., 173rd Airborne Brigade (Sep) with service in Vietnam 1967-68.

I was held back in AIT for the OCS Board review and missed the Combat Blast. In Vietnam I was the last man alive to leave the perimeter defensive position during the Battle of the Slopes. The 1st Platoon's Leader was killed next to me during that battle and everyone around me. Nevertheless, I am proud to be a Sky Soldier.

In High School my friends talked about joining the Marines, but I dreamed of being a Paratrooper and volunteered after I graduated. I would have liked to become a Special Forces member but assignments did not permit that during my three years of active duty.

It would be better to have Paratroopers ready and not be used than to not have them and need them."

Best regard,
Sidney Clouston
A/2/503
From Michigan

"I would go with  with the addition that one battalion of infantry paratroopers always be kept for deployment in case they are needed for reinforcement. I spent 40 years in law enforcement after leaving the army in 1966, I was 2nd Bat 503rd HQ 173rd. During my career in LE I've seen amazing advancements in technology making many things in LE as well as the military obsolete."



All The Way
Rick Jerman
HHC/2/503

"I believe that the Army should keep the Airborne as it stands today. Beyond the additional cost of the Airborne units they consistently have the highest esprit de corps and readiness in the Army. Don't mess with success. All The Way, Luke."



Bob "Luke" Lucas
A/2/503

"I vote 'A'. There is more than just the insertion, and that is how the troops respond once on the ground.

The Airborne trooper has a different approach when in a hostile area, he brings the fight to the enemy in his own backyard if not at the front door. What are they offering in exchange. More armor which costs a great deal more and has to be protected by infantry from some little fellow with a shoulder-fired missile that will take them out. They also like the Marines with their amphibious landing which is even more expensive and less practical in most parts of the world. If they really want to save money they should do away with their high-priced toys and stick to things that work in combat like the A-10 for close support."

Bob Beemer
B/2/503



Bob at the 173d Memorial at Ft. Benning, GA.



The A-10 Warthog, making its presence known.

(continued....)



"Keep the Airborne."

**Bob Baker
A/2/503**

"Let's go with Option 'A'. As a Platoon leader and Company XO in the 1/501, 101st Abn Div, at Ft Campbell in 1966-1967, I had the great experience of being with that unit as it was rebuilt from one officer, a property book, and its colors into a combat ready battalion.

Following the Division FTX I was selected to be the ADC for BG Hank Schweiter, the Assistant Division Commander, and, later, the 173d Abn Bde Commander for the Dak To battles in 1967. BG Schweiter had jumped with the 101st in Normandy and Holland.

The value of airborne soldiers was in the discussion even back then. I remember BG Schweiter's response-

"Until they can find a way to drop troop carrying helicopters from airplanes to accomplish the strategic vertical assault mission, we will need airborne units."

All Special Operations Forces require airborne capability for their operational insertions, but if the mission is an airfield takedown deep in the enemy's rear, such as the 173d's mission in Iraq, it will require Brigade-sized airborne units to accomplish the mission and hold on till link up. We should not confuse the Iraq type mission with Ranger raids. It takes TO&E airborne brigades to take and 'HOLD' until relieved.

Now for a personal update. Following my retirement from active duty in April 1993, I accepted a position on the faculty of the U.S. Army War College. In November 2015, after 22 years with that great professional military education institution, I retired with a total of 50 years federal service. This year my wife and I are moving to Homer, Alaska to be near my daughter and new grandson. "

**COL Bernie Griffard
HHC & CO B/2/503, '67-'69**

"Are they crazy, what are they smoking? Keep the Airborne as is."

**Johnny Miller
C/2/503**



Cap in Alaska



"That is quite an article (*MilitaryTimes*), but I believe we need to re-think the whole thing and make use of what we have already and utilizing all the resources there is at hand. Sorry but I think there should be another option to A,B,C,D, and that is E as I state below:

**DOES THE ARMY
STILL NEED AIRBORNE?**

The world is changing yes, but war is still war. The Army needs to re-think all of the Airborne Divisions that encompass the Green Berets, Rangers and Sky Soldiers combining them to make one or two Airborne Strike Forces, training them as commando fighters that are versatile in the modern Urban, Desert and Jungle Warfare alike. The enlistment program should be a minimum of 4 or 5 years commitment with 3 to 4 years at ready call back if necessary (like the Seals because of their highly trained skills).

Train the soldiers utilizing the T-11 parachute that is versatile and delivers its troopers accurately and efficiently. It allows a trooper to glide relatively undetected from high altitudes, reducing the vulnerability of the aircraft to on-ground enemy forces. The trooper can also control his or her descent to establish a different landing point if necessary.

So yes my vote is for E (other) New Airborne Strike Force. Frenchy out, *Airborne All The Way.*"

**Leo "Frenchy" Pellerin
A/2/503**



Frenchy between ops.



(continued....)





Korean War paratroopers. *"Those few, those happy few, those bands of brothers."*

"Option A = keep the airborne the way it is. It is the MOST RESPONSIVE ARMY UNIT THE U.S. HAS."

**Thomas R. Goodwin
Major, USA, Ret
2/503, 1964-1966**



Tom, at the *Snakepit*, Bien Hoa AFB.

Note Tom's jungle fatigue shirt with the red, white and blue 173d patch and the white jump wings we were still wearing in the boonies which pretty much said, *"aim here"*.

And, of course, let's don't forget the white T-shirt. ☺

Tom would be wounded in action on the night of 15/16 March 1966. Hmmm. Ed

"Option A. Paratroopers are the only soldiers in the armed forces who can be picked up wherever stationed, flown quickly where needed in the world, and inserted ready to fight."

**Phil Blake
HHC/2/503**

"I choose (A). Believe you have a pic of me. Blessings, Mike."

**Mike Guthrie
A/2/503, '65/'66**

Mike, taking 5 on a hump, somewhere, sometime in Vietnam.



"Thank you for the Newsletter.

What should we do with the Airborne? I vote for choice A, or maybe A minus. It's probably true that large scale airborne operations are a thing of the past, but one never knows. Since we don't really know, we should keep airborne units in the US Army, but maybe decrease their numbers. One idea would be to keep only the 82nd. If a brigade is deemed sufficient, keep the 173rd.

There is another reason for keeping the Airborne. I saw an article somewhere, maybe on the Internet, that the US Marines should be disbanded, because the US Army could do the job. True or not, that idea is irrelevant. No congressman or woman, secretary of defense, or president would dare seriously suggest that change. It would be political and maybe actual suicide. There is too much history and tradition with the Marines. The same could be said for the Airborne.

If you know anyone who lives in southeastern North Carolina, near Wilmington, ask him to give me a call. Thanks again."

**Joe Day
Platoon Leader
C/2/503**



Joe, ready to move out

(continued....)





22 February 1967, a memorable date for Sky Soldiers.

“A AIRBORNE implies aerial insertion of a ground force, personnel and material assets organized to seize, provide security or reinforce a specific objective. Subject to scale and task, parachute or glider employment is an inherently complex, hazardous, potentially expensive endeavor, conceptually requiring substantial secondary, timely support.



There are unquestionably other ways to neutralize an objective or to interdict opposing force, usually with more predictable result and lethal precision. But in those instances where elements of surprise, distance and audacity conspire to advantage under measured means and risk, deployed in contact or control, this capability well executed may be the superior option.

Judgement at department or service level to train, equip, prepare and maintain such a capability to useful potential against considerations of cost and probable utility may be another matter entirely. But if you don't have it, you can't use it. And if you need it? There's the rub. Nothing about the quality and qualifications of modern military capability organized and ready for effective deployment is cheap or easy. And history is laced with loss from inattention to opportunity to turn an event or outcome for want of means. Wherever there's a DZ/LZ, a known threat, and a capable, ready force, theater commanders should have a tactical choice, a bold, practical option: **AIRBORNE.**”

Bob Warfield
HHC/A/B/2/503

“Keep the 173d fully operational as Airborne and reduce the 82nd and 101st to select battalions with this capacity. A reasonable compromise.”

Roger Dick
C/2/503



“What do the war fighters say? I believe airborne troops are needed not in division strength but brigade strength. There is no better surprise than to have some airborne troops dropped behind enemy lines to cause a huge amount of problems for troop and supply movements during an attack. Brigade size units are easier to control and supply.”

Ken Parrett
A/2/503



“I firmly believe the overall airborne capability be retained from training to actual operations.

Along with basic training and branch classes, Jump School provides another layer of basic skills and mental training for all. Jump wings are a long known piece of individual and unit esprit de corps plus a possible factor in survival in combat. Advanced ABN skills i.e., jump master and pathfinder courses prepared folks for the follow-on assignments and actual operations. Jump pay does cost money but also supports overall morale and retention. Service in ABN units is a selection base for other skill sets, i.e. Ranger and specops assignments.



“K”, back in the boonies

Having ABN units in place is a big piece of force projection and war planning. See both articles below.

* Military Strategy Principles ‘get there firstest with the mostest’:

www.easy-strategy.com/strategy-principles.html

* Recent Rand Corp study:

www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR309.html

Steve “K” Kubiszewski, B/E/Recon 2/503

USA (Ret), combat veteran, and WA State Veterans Advocate
Life member; 173d ABN BDE Association,
Special Forces Association, DAV

(continued....)





All Americans at DZ Gatun in Panama.

"Never stop airborne units from jumping! It builds confidence, morale, and teamwork! Nothing replaces the Airborne Soldier! I vote No!"

**David L Griffin
B/HHC/2/503**



"As recently as the 173rd jumping into northern Iraq, we never know when such a force will be needed and if we do not have such units, how long would it take to get new paratroopers trained, equipped and placed where they might be needed. The selective fighting forces mentioned do great work, but I submit that they would not be able to come up with a brigade or division-size unit to be dropped in a hot spot so quickly.

And while I cannot speak to all the young paratroopers in the photo below (and yes, they are *all* Airborne), I just think that some things really should not be messed with. Thanks."

**Don Ball
HHC/2/503**



~ Sky Soldiers All ~

Virtually every person in this photo is a paratrooper. You can tell because 1) they're smiling, 2) they look strac, and 3) they all have a drink in their hand. Ed

"We need to keep the airborne as is. Being airborne is more than a qualification, it reflects an attitude, the willingness to take risks, and above all, the ability to win. *Airborne!*"

**Carmen Cavezza, LTG (Ret)
Former CO, A/2/503**



(continued....)

"I pick (A) leave the Airborne as is. As we all know, the Airborne is a fast, first in strike, last out unit, that can establish an area and preserve that area until the regular infantry, arrives. If they eliminate the Airborne units, they are moving us, as a country, backwards. For the past seven years, I have watched our country being moved backwards, as if someone has an agenda to weaken us and attempt to destroy the USA. We cannot let that happen. We must keep our Airborne units as they are now and maybe even increase the size of those units. We need to make America strong again. Thank you, Forever Airborne, All the Way."

**Ronald A. Amyot
HHC 2/503, 1965-66**



"I was one of the original pilots of the 173d ABN when we deployed to Vietnam in May '65. I arrived on the Rock in March '63 as a leg and completed jump school on Okinawa in '63. What an experience that was. To me, the Airborne soldier is in a league of his own. He took that higher step to improve his skills and earn that parachute badge. My answer to your question is 'A'. To crowd 30+ people in a Chinook for a land insertion and be taken out by a rocket is no way to inflict injury on the enemy. To see 30+ parachutes in the sky descending on an objective affords a better chance of defeating the enemy. My thoughts as an Army pilot and paratrooper."

**Don Bachali
HHC/2/503**





"A can-o-whoop-ass."

"Keep the Airborne as is. It's earned its place of honor everywhere it goes. We are a brotherhood as strong as any the U. S. has ever put out. "

**Sgt. Ron Dearing
A/2/503**

**"Keep the Airborne as is!!!
Airborne is one of the ready
force to react to any situation
in the world. Have more
'watch dogs' on all the
contractors to stop all waste
of government money. We all
made a choice to go Airborne.
I am a proud individual to be a
paratrooper. AIRBORNE,
ALL THE WAY!!!!"**



**Jaime, on that long
walk back after his PLF**

**Jaime Castillo
C/2/503**



Jaime, touching his buddies.

"I vote to maintain as is."

**Mike Armstrong
C/2/503**

**"I think we should keep
airborne basically as it is
today. The Airborne is
greatly reduced from what
we had in WWII: the 82d,
101st, 13th and 17th Abn
Divs in Europe and the
11th Abn Div and the 503d
Pcht Inf Regt in the Pacific.
Today we have the 82d
and the 173d Abn Bde for
use in conventional**



Col. George Dexter

**warfare, plus several Special Forces Groups for
unconventional warfare. But we cannot rule out
that we will be involved in conventional warfare in the
future.**

**Today helicopter-borne troops can accomplish
many of the missions done by paratroopers during
WWII. However, many of the WWII jumps were well
beyond the range of modern helicopters-- Oran, Sicily,
Salerno and Normandy, for example. However, in all
of those missions helicopters from Navy helicopter
landing ships could have made the landings at the
designated targets, and the US Marine Corps/Navy
team has that capability today. However, there is one
type of mission which can only be done by parachute
troops, and that is the type of mission which the 173d
pulled off in Iraq in 2003. The objective, an airfield,
was well beyond helicopter range from friendly ground
troops or any helicopter landing ships. The 173d had
three objectives: (1) capture and secure an airfield
which could be used for resupply and reinforcement,
(2) prevent the Iraqi divisions in North Iraq from
reinforcing Iraq forces opposing the US invasion of
South Iraq, and (3) gain the support of the Kurdish
people in North Iraq. These missions were
accomplished!**

**We should retain this capability for deep
penetration, and only parachute troops can do it
now!"**

**George Dexter, Col. (Ret)
Bn Cmdr 2/503**



Prized by many, earned by few.

(continued....)



"In May of 1969, I was assigned to the 2-503d in Bong Son, VN. I was a CPT who had previously served as the Senior Battalion Adviser to the 5th Railway Security Battalion (an Infantry unit in Nha Trang with 200 miles of railway operating daily from just south of Quin Nhon to Phan Rang and then a cog railway from Phan Rang to Da Lat).



In the 2-503d, the Commander was LTC Zimmerman. Upon my arrival, he called me into his Bong Son office and asked if I had received training at Ft Benning's Infantry Officer's Career Course on the concept of Separate Brigades which I had just completed prior to my assignment to the 173rd Airborne. I gave him an affirmative and he asked if I would consider an assignment at the Company level to test what I had learned as he had also recently completed training on the concept of Separate Brigades at the Command and General Staff College. Again, I gave him an affirmative.

He had just received the assignment of two platoons from the 1-50 Mech Inf, 4th Inf Div, and was putting together a Company-Size Task Force (TF) with Infantry, Armor and Artillery capabilities and offered it to me as the TF Commander. The catch - I was to develop the Operations Orders and other field documents which he would report forward as the methods one would use in a combat situation mimicking the concept of Separate Brigades (A unit operating with Infantry, Armor and Artillery capabilities separately or in unison with other Separate Brigade size units). Of course, I accepted the opportunity.

My TF was then formed which consisted of two platoons of the 1-50th Mech. The APC's with 50 Calibers mounted were my Armor. The Infantrymen assigned were my Infantry. A 2-503rd Mortar Platoon was my Artillery. In addition, I was assigned an RTO and two Engineers from the 2-503d. Thus, I was in command of a separate Task Force with responsibility for protecting the Bridges at Bong Son and being a separate Reaction Force for the 2-503rd. During my command of this TF, all operations were successful and reported forward for consideration as examples of how a Separate TF with Infantry, Armor and Artillery capabilities successfully mimicked the operations of a Separate Brigade with similar capabilities.

Now, let's move from Vietnam into the post 9/11 period where the concept of Separate Brigades has been utilized to the maximum. What happened when Turkey did not allow the 4th Inf Div to move across its territory on trains to form a blocking force with the

Kurds in Iraq? The 173rd Airborne Brigade, acting with only two Airborne Infantry Battalions, was flown from Italy to Iraq, performed a Combat Airborne Assault into Iraq and were able to join the Kurds as a blocking force. Why? Because there was no other way to insert a Separate Brigade Combat Force. The site where the 173rd Airborne Brigade was dropped was an airfield. If the combined 173rd Airborne Brigade Force and Kurds was not sufficient to stand as a blocking force, the airfield offered the entry point for Non-Airborne units by US Air Force cargo planes on to the airfield secured by the Combat Airborne Assault to provide a more substantial blocking force in unison with the 173rd Airborne Brigade and Kurds already on the ground and in position. This action could not have been accomplished without the Combat Airborne Assault by the 173rd Airborne Brigade. Following that accomplishment, the 173rd Airborne Brigade has conducted three successful Separate Brigade deployments to Afghanistan with three Medal of Honors being presented to members during the 2007-08 Deployment.

What does that tell you? If there is no other possibility of inserting a force into a position, a Combat Airborne Assault is only possible with Airborne Trained Paratroopers. If you wish to have a separate Light Infantry Brigade operate as a Separate Brigade with Armor and Artillery assigned, there is none better than an Airborne unit such as the 173rd Airborne Brigade which was the most successful Separate Brigade which conducted operations in Afghanistan. The training and conditioning of an Airborne Unit develops an esprit and confidence that is not achieved by any other force.

So, if you're saying the Airborne is an old concept from WWII which does not fit the new Army, that just doesn't make sense. You've missed the mark by not examining the distinctive role the 173rd Airborne Brigade has played within our Armed Forces since 1963. While the *ArmyTimes* reviewed the service of the 82nd Airborne Division, it never mentioned the various roles currently being played by the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Europe, the mid-East and Africa as well as the only Airborne Combat Assaults conducted in Vietnam and Iraq. The *ArmyTimes* missed the mark. Go to www.armytimes.com/story/military/2016/02/29/does-army-need-airborne-operations/81118428/ and cast your vote for the Airborne!

Bob "Ragman" Getz, TF CO, 2/503

(continued....)



"Just a comment on this subject: To quote Gov. Mike Huckabee regarding the Benghazi attack on our Consulate there, '...The 173rd Airborne was only 2 hours away.'"

'Doc' Ray Camarena
HHC/2/503, LZ Uplift, RVN 1971



Doc

"My selection is A, Airborne all the way...Sky soldiers should never be grounded because we were trained to get into places other soldiers could not get to as quickly...The element of surprise when death from above starts to rain down on the enemy it confuses, scares and traumatizes the enemy...There is a very special pride to being Airborne, pride in our training, pride in those who went before us in Airborne units during WWII and Korea on down to those of us from Vietnam, Iraq, and now Afghanistan.

Airborne units are elite and train, fight and even when in public dress accordingly with our spit-shined bloused boots all the way to the Over Seas (KC's) hat we wear with our Airborne patch on it and our shining Jump Wings on our chest...

If the government was to research the records of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate's) Record along with other Airborne units from the beginning to now they would see that the Airborne units always got the toughest assignments and accomplished the mission.

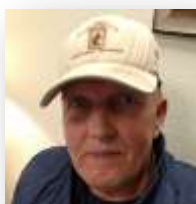
The Airborne way of life sticks with us until the day we leave this earth and proudly I must add...AATW!

Reverend William L Knapp Bravo Bull's Nam 65-66, AIRBORNE ALL THE WAY...May the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob bless each and every one of you... Bravo/3/1 out."

Rev. Bill Knapp
B/2/503

"Airborne will always be. They may disband a portion of it but how could they ever extinguish all of it."

Robert W. Evalt (Doc)
2/503rd 68-69



"One of the proudest moments of my life was after they pinned my wings on my uniform after completing Airborne training."

Takie Mandakas
HHC/2/503, 1967

"I believe that the Army should keep the Airborne as it stands today. Beyond the additional cost of the Airborne units they consistently have the highest esprit de corps and readiness in the Army.

Don't mess with success.

All The Way!"

Bob "Luke" Lucas
A/2/503



Luke at Camp Zinn

"(A) Keep the Airborne as is."

Kaare Patterson
A/2/503

"Good question. As I understand it, the Airborne was established as a 'rapid response' and the 173d Airborne Brigade (SEP) was formed on Okinawa to serve as such a unit. My uneducated guess is that a rapid response airborne unit is an even better idea today than it was in the 60s. I have no idea if we need to maintain entire airborne divisions.

You have several photos of me on file, please don't use the one of me passed out in the ditch behind our hootch. Thanks, RTONH."

Wayne Hoitt
HHC/2/503, '65/'66



RTONH, in front of our hootch in his John Wayne stance, cigar and all.

Reply: Couldn't find the ditch photo, RTO, but I surely would have used it! There's a good chance I was in that ditch with you hootch buddy! Ed

(continued....)



"It occurred to me that we haven't really used any of those nuclear devices that we've been stockpiling since WWII. Bet those cost a lot to maintain. But wait, they're a deterrent. How about all those Marine landing craft? Are we to assume that everywhere we need to get a military force will have a convenient beach? They are, in fact, another type of deterrent and another thing that potential adversaries must consider.



Do we really think it will be easy to getting an armored force (costing three times what airborne does) anywhere in the world within 24 hours? According to [Global Security.org](http://GlobalSecurity.org) the airborne forces with the Rangers and Special Forces would amount to about 10,000+ men. Seldom do those units function as a whole. They are much better suited to the smaller intense raid scenarios. Having another 20,000 to 30,000 more paratroopers creates infinitely more problems for the bad guys.

If we did nothing else in our jump in Nam we showed that it is still possible to get an entire battalion on the ground and combat ready in less time than landing a battalion in helicopters. This is especially helpful if you need to deploy troops beyond the reach of helicopters. Deterrent!Kraut."

Gary "Kraut" Kuitert
Recon 2/503

"How else would or could our military respond to a foreign enemy without the backing of a great Airborne unit? This is the only means of quickly responding to the enemy with haste and surprise, as surprise to the enemy is the difference between winning or losing the fight. As an Army Airborne Soldier of several years I feel the Airborne should not be disbanded, possibly reduced but not removed from our nation's inventory".



Top in the door

Jim "Top" Dresser,
A/HHC/2/503

"My option is keep the Airborne Units (A). For a fast deployment, these units are needed."

Wes Hardy
D/2/503

"My pick is "A". I feel this administration is already weakening our readiness."

David Maxey
B/HHC/2/503rd
Jan '67-Jan '68
Jul '68-Jun '69 Macv



Try telling no more Airborne to these
Blasters!



"STAND IN THE DOOR, JUNCTION CITY, 22 FEB 1967,
173RD ABN 2/503D"
(web photo & caption)



The 503 boys of Corregidor, February 16, 1945.



"Keep the Airborne as is as it's the main stepping stone for all the elite units i.e. SF, Rangers, Seals, etc."

Misplaced name of this 2/503 trooper. Xin Loi

"The Airborne operations have a higher level of risk, and those who are risk-averse, will not be in favor of these type of operations.

However, the unit spirit and cohesion are irreplaceable without Airborne Corps."

Stephen A. Emerson
B/3/503, 1970

"As a paratrooper who served from '65 to '68 with the 101st, 173d, and 509th, with 12 of 13 successful jumps under my belt (broke an ankle on #13, the final jump in the army with the 509th Abn -- hell, it was a pay jump, I had to do it!), plus having two older paratrooper brothers, one who was an All American, the the other having served with the 101st, and then the SF in VN, it pains me to come to this personal conclusion.



Ready to blast in Germany

Altho I missed the combat jump in VN by a couple months, I would have been honored to have been with those troopers on that nervous affair. And altho awed by those young Sky Soldiers making their combat blast in Iraq, I could find no justification for either of those combat jumps. In my view, technological advances in warfare have made mass combat jumps obsolete. Should that ever be proven false, large-scale Airborne units can be quickly reconstituted – I heard it takes about three weeks.

I suspect what a company or battalion of airborne troopers could accomplish behind enemy lines might not equal the capabilities of today's drones, long-range assault choppers, and outer-world war-fighting machines we likely know little about (hell, even RTOs like me are obsolete).

Small, rescue and strike-force type units such as the SF, Seals and a Ranger unit should remain Airborne.

Forever proud to be a paratrooper, and *All The Way!*"

Lew "Smitty" Smith
HHC/2/503, '65/'66

*"The silk from his reserve spilled out,
and wrapped around his legs,
He ain't gonna jump no more."*

"Airborne, All the Way!"

"I saw the article you refer to. The Airborne IS high cost, high risk and definitely NOT obsolete, and oh, the word 'expert' is now a word so over used and diluted that it has very little currency. Combat Arms folks, Infantry, Artillery and Armor have always resented Airborne and Special Operations people out of plain old envy, it would seem.

The same 'experts' who want to yell about cost effectiveness are the people engaged in wasting everyone's time and money with social engineering bullshit about gays in the foxholes, LGBT crap, gender-neutral nonsense and then compromising all the standards, dumbing down everything and generally rendering the whole essence of the military's reason for being—protecting the country, and generally rendering the heart and soul of our doctrine - THE MISSION - meaningless.

In the last 7+ years of this administration we have been forced to dedicate billions to welfare and entitlements, slackers, bums, unemployed, unemployables, Iran—on and on, ad nauseam.

My emphatic answer to all those miserable Liberal military haters and those 'Yes Men' in the Pentagon, I select answer (A), Keep the Airborne as is.

This as polite as I know how to be. We are gutting and shrinking the military. We are shrinking the defense budgets. To all you airborne grunts out there who have been there, done that and got the T-shirt, I say God Bless You and God Bless America! Lock & load!"

Michael Marsh
A/3/503 & C/2/503 '67-'68



Mike, tooling along the Florida Keys. Nice.

Survey results: 98+% say Keep the Airborne as is.



Local man visits Vegas to counter 'hate' in politics

By Joe Mahoney, Staff Writer
thedailystar.com

SHARON SPRINGS — It's a long way from Pavilion Avenue in this quaint Schoshone County village to the South Point Arena in Las Vegas. But Elliott Adams was willing to go that far to make a point at what was billed as the largest political rally in the state of Nevada.

Adams' point was succinct: Stop the hate speech and stop fomenting anti-Muslim bigotry.

When he gave the message 2,510 miles from home Monday, unfurling a large homemade sign scrawled on a sheet, he was an uninvited guest at a rally being staged for GOP presidential frontrunner Donald Trump. The outspoken billionaire has been defying the political odds in the early phases of the primary race, and came out on top Tuesday in the Republican caucus in Nevada. One day earlier, Adams, clad in a **173rd Airborne Brigade** baseball cap, drew attention at the Trump rally with his sign.

"Veterans to Mr. Trump: End hate speech against Muslims," the sign urged.

Within minutes security guards rushed to Adams' side and whisked him out of the building. But his point had been made, and he was not the only protester to register dissent.

Noting some in the crowd disagreed with his message, Trump announced to cheers that one of the protesters had been "throwing punches," then drew even larger cheers by declaring, "I'd like to punch him in the face," according to video recordings of the rally. Trump also said, "You know what they used to do to guys like that in a place like this? They'd be carried out in a stretcher, folks." Videos of Trump's rant went viral on the internet, and photos of Adams and his sign ended up in the European press.

Adams said Thursday he didn't think Trump was referring to him, as he had been standing behind the candidate when he displayed the banner. But he said the angry tone of the rally made him uncomfortable. "It was like being at Kristallnacht," he said in comparing the raucous rally to the murderous rampage carried out

by Nazis against Jewish families in Germany in November 1938.

Adams and Trump, it turns out, have a couple of things in common: Both are 69-year-old men born in this country. Both have dabbled in politics. Adams called it a career after serving 15 years as mayor of the village of Sharon Springs. Trump, after never competing for local or state office, set his gaze on the highest office in the land — the presidency.

And that's where the similarities end.

While Trump used family money to build his first business, Adams made a living cutting lumber in a sawmill.

While Trump's parents sent him to an expensive military boarding school, Adams enlisted in the U.S. Army and engaged in combat missions in Vietnam. Trump received deferments from the draft in 1964, 1965, 1966 and 1968.

Adams said his focus isn't Trump but what he considers the need to raise awareness about hateful messages and the fear that ripples from them. "He is promoting hate and that is not a productive process," Adams said. "Whether it's Trump or someone else, that kind of thinking is dangerous. I try not to blame Trump and instead put the blame on the people who accept it and to recognize that buying into that hate and fear is to lose the America I fought for."

Adams suggested it is not only a violation of civil and human rights to whip up hatred against Muslims, but irrational, arguing that "Islamophobia" has become a way to demonize a group of people and create a pathway to more war.

Noting he himself is a Christian, he said militant Christian fanatics pose a far greater security threat to law-abiding Americans than Muslims. As far as adherents of the Islamic State, which has been implicated in the butchering of vast numbers of innocent civilians, Adams said the Muslims he knows view the teachings of ISIS as "a desecration of Islam." "We have this belief that we can wipe out a philosophy by bombing it," said Adams. "That's hogwash. It's totally wrong to hate a religion and very dangerous if we fall into that. If someone can make you afraid, they can make you do anything, because you are disengaged from your intelligence."

Land of the free -- home of the brave. A Sky Soldier who once fought for his country and freedom for all during war, now speaks out against hate in his country.

Airborne Elliott, and All The Way, brother! Ed



**Thanks to Col. George Dexter, Bn Cmdr 2/503, for Sharing These Photos
Taken in Vietnam From His 1965/66 Collection**



LTC Dexter during unloading at Bien Hoa, 5 May 65.



2/503 troopers ready to move out in '65.



Clearing fields around rubber camp.



Bn motor pool in rubber trees.



Camp Zinn at the beginning.



(The late) 1LT Dick Eckert, July '65.

(continued....)





SGM Mish with RTO in jungle, Phuoc Tuy, '65.



Troops emerge from jungle, Phuoc Tuy, '65



Carmen Cavezza with A Co. loaded in trucks at Camp Zinn.



Fr Kennedy says Mass in the Field, Pleiku, Aug. '65.



Westmoreland visits A Company in Pleiku, Aug. '65.



SGM Mish briefs troops going on pass, Bien Hoa, Sep. '65.

Note: More of the Colonel's photos will appear in future issues.



Point...

We Should Heed The Voices Of The Infantry

January 11, 2016

By Col. James McDonough, U.S. Army (Ret.)
Best Defense guest columnist

From Antietam, Meuse-Argonne, Anzio, Okinawa, Pork Chop Hill, the Ia Drang, Falujah, and countless bloodied American battlefields before and since, ghostly voices call out to American women, *"Welcome to the infantry... but beware!"* Though proud of their heritage and sacrifice, the voices know too well the hardships and horrors that come with the rough duty of direct combat. They wonder how such duty will elevate American womanhood.

"Listen," they say, "this is not about promotions, nor equality, nor pride in individual ability to compete physically with men. This is not a gentleman's club whose barriers you are crashing, nor a prize to be won. Infantry warfare means closing with and destroying the enemy, with all the suffering and hardship that is entailed on both sides of that conjunction." Each from his own era can recall the falsely reassuring words: *'It will be over by Christmas.'*

'Why one of us can defeat ten of them.' *'They will flee in terror.'* *'We control the air and the seas — they will be frozen in place.'* *'It will not be that bad.'*

But it has always been 'that bad' — and worse. The warm weather turns cold, then freezing; hands stiffen, feet get frost bitten, equipment fails at many degrees below zero, morale sags, spirits break. Mobility is nullified, the 'lightning' campaign becomes a drawn out slog — mud and filth cake the infantryman's clothing, extreme fatigue becomes his natural state. There is no respite from the elements — jungles envelope, rains soak, winds howl, deserts parch, sores fester, insects bite, leeches chew, bodies smell, minds haunt. Closing with the enemy is not merely a matter of hoisting a heavy pack, passing a physical fitness test, withstanding the comparatively small stresses of pre-combat training. It is total commitment to enduring misery, discomfort, pain, exhaustion, and privation.

And then comes the combat. What does it mean, after all, to destroy the enemy? The voices know that war has not changed its nature; they do not believe that hand to hand, face to face fighting is no more — a theory so glibly stated by those who will never have to test it themselves. Close combat remains deafening explosions, desperate dashes through onslaughts of cracking bullets, screaming rockets, exploding grenades,

and crushing mortars seeking to tear flesh, splinter bones, and shred organs. It is probing through minefields and booby traps designed to disembowel, the violent eruption of a close ambush, and patrolling all night to snatch a prisoner, probe a bunker complex, or steal a march. It is rushing headlong into enemy trench lines or bursting into occupied buildings, numbed indifferent by fear and adrenalin to smashed ribs, broken teeth, and concertina wire gashes. It is holding a position against heavy attack when air power, artillery support, and reinforcements are withheld for reasons known only to those above your pay grade. It is firing your weapon until your eardrums burst, tossing grenades to just the other side of the dirt mound to your front, using any means at your disposal (rifle butts, bayonets, entrenching tools, rocks, hands) to kill until there is certainty that your enemy cannot kill you back. It is living with what you have done and then doing it all over again the next day. Direct combat is savagery, gore, violence, and death — all of it up close and personal.

"Why," the infantrymen ask of the women, *"are you being drawn to this? Why does American society wish you to do this? Are there not enough men who will fight? Will your joining us increase the chances of victory or lessen the loss of life?"* They will welcome women to their ranks if so ordered, support them in combat as they would any other fellow soldier. They ask only that the women carry their weight, support them in return, and do their duty — no matter what. Nonetheless, the voices wonder at the wisdom of it all. They know that close combat can brook no modified standards, offer no second chances. In truth, they regret that the gender they have been raised to cherish and protect will now share in the horror — not only those who have eagerly pursued the 'opportunity', but very likely those as well who would have preferred to avoid it. And they wonder how our society will look back upon this decision when the casualty lists again extend many pages and we note therein that the genders are equally represented.

James McDonough is a recipient of the Combat Infantryman's Badge and a Purple Heart. His book, *Platoon Leader* is a memoir of his time in Vietnam.



Col. McDonough

[Sent in by Bob Fleming, A/D/2/503]



The Voices of History Tell a Different Story

If we're gonna make war, everyone should play

March 16, 2016

By Sp4 D. Lewis Smith, Jr., Civilian Soldier

Today marks the 50th anniversary of the battle at LZ Zulu Zulu in the "D" Zone jungle during Operation Silver City when our battalion was at grave risk of being overrun by enemy forces reported to be three times our size. Those of us who were fortunate to survive that encounter, as well as countless other battles during our war such as but not limited to fights in the rice paddies of the Mekong Delta, the rubber tree plantations of the Ho Bo Woods, the valleys and hills of Dak To, as well as countless other locales with smaller skirmishes where our buddies suffered and died, know first-hand all one would ever care to know about combat. Combat is not about glory and flags, it's about killing, it's about anguish and death and the forever after torment it leaves the survivors to recount over and over throughout their lifetimes. This we know.

I despise war. War does not discriminate, it claims a bounty of lives and limbs of men and women and children alike, whether or not they are combatants. It's a fallacy to assume by excluding the 'fairer sex' from joining in the fray will somehow protect their well-being; throughout all of history and man's endeavor to make war, women have served valiantly in combat alongside and oft times in front of their male colleagues. It would be far better, though unrealistic, to ban war from the earth than to think somehow we can prevent our mothers and daughters and grand-daughters from sharing in its ugliness and hellishness, whether as combatants or spectators.

"And they wonder how our society will look back upon this decision when the casualty lists again extend many pages and we note therein that the genders are equally represented," says the good Colonel. Yet, he misses the point. The sadness and remorse one might feel while viewing those many pages of dead men and women produced by combat speak not so much to the result of a dual-sex military force lost, but more to the sickness of humankind in making war in the first place. Perhaps those very men who make war might be moved to unmake it knowing their daughter's name might find its way onto one of those pages, with their son's?

Lew Smith is a recipient of the Combat Infantryman's Badge and the Bronze Star medal with "V" devise. He wrote *The Battle at Bau San*, a memoir of his battalion's participation in Operation Silver City in 1966.

Those Dainty Ladies With Their Parasols

"Deborah Samson Gannett, from Plymouth, Massachusetts, was one of the first American woman soldiers in 1782. She enlisted under the name of her deceased brother, Robert Shurtieff Samson. For 17 months, Samson served in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. She was wounded twice. She cut a musket ball out of her own thigh so a doctor wouldn't find out she was a women. Also during the Revolutionary War, in 1776, **Margaret Corbin** fought alongside her husband and 600 American soldiers as they defended Fort Washington, New York.

In the Mexican War, **Elizabeth C. Newcume** dressed in male attire and joined the military at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. In 1847, she battled Native Americans in Dodge City.

In the Civil War, several women disguised themselves as men to enlist and fight for the Union. **Sarah Rosetta Wakeman** enlisted as Private Lyons Wakeman. She died during the war in New Orleans at the Marine General Hospital.

During World War I, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps allowed women to enlist. More than 12,000 enlisted and about 400 died during the war.

In World War II, a total of 350,000 women served in the U.S. Military. 67 Army nurses were captured in the Philippines by the Japanese in 1942.

Women continued to play more active roles in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2005, **Leigh Ann Hester** became the first female soldier to receive the Silver Star for exceptional valor in close-quarters combat. Serving in Iraq, Hester led her team in a 25-minute firefight. She used hand grenades and an M203 grenade launcher while maneuvering her team to cut off the enemy. In 2008, **Monica Lin Brown** also received the Silver Star. After a roadside bomb was detonated in Afghanistan, Brown protected wounded soldiers with her own body and ran through gunfire to save their lives."

Source:

www.infoplease.com/us/military/women-history.html



U.S. Army 1st Lt. Audrey Griffith points out an area of interest during a force protection drill to Spc. Heidi Gerke along the perimeter of Forward Operating Base Hadrian in Deh Rawud, Afghanistan on March 18, 2013.



Tunnels in Nam

1966

By A. B. Garcia

4.2 Platoon, HHC/2/503, '65/'66



PFC George Pappas, B/1/503, 1965, preparing to enter and search VC tunnel complex. (web photo)

We were on some operation prior to "Operation Silver City" with the Brigade when we came upon some tunnels enroute to our most famous day in 1966, on March 16th. One of our Sergeants asked the troops if we would like to go and have a look in them. Like an idiot, I volunteered. In the Army, they tell you NEVER volunteer, but I didn't heed the advice and took on the task.

Always an adventurer I, the "Cherry" (a new guy replacing wounded troopers) and two others, Wayne English a Georgian fella and my other brother Truman Ray Thomas a Texan, went in. It was pitch black so we needed flashlights (torches) and .45 caliber pistols along with some extra ammo if required. We also carried extra batteries.

People often ask me when I relate this story how dark it was. I tell them that close their eyes hold your hands to them and that's exactly how pitch black it was.

In we went, me leading. It was a very complex tunnel system with bamboo poles hollowed out stuck into the

ground protruding in the tunnels with chunks cut out to aerate the tunnels. It was rather cool and with plenty of ventilation. We crawled on our stomachs and elbows, and at times the tunnels would become extremely tight and it took some effort to contort our bodies to get through some sections. I held the torch in my left hand as I'm right handed, holding the pistol with a bullet in the chamber, but not cocked. I don't recall being scared, and I felt that nothing would happen as I carried this thought throughout my tour there -- for I thought that if there was a bullet/bullets, or piece of metal with my name on it, so be it. My parents had 5 other children that would take up the slack and it was part and parcel of being a Grunt.

The tunnels were long and at times would come to an abrupt end. There would be a concrete cap either on the floor or on the roof. After having a chat with my two tunnel brothers, we decided that I would remove the cap slowly. God only knows what was on the other side of those caps. Slowly removing the caps, there was a gap of about 2-3 feet. There was no sound other than our breathing. I thought that I would flash the torch around trying to draw fire which never came. My pistol would be cocked at this stage and ready for whatever was about to happen.

We either crawled up or dropped down to the next level. We'd crawl again for what seemed like long periods gasping for breath while moving steadily forward in these parts of the complex.



L-R: Ray "Tom" Thomas, Rick Fred & A.B. Garcia

At one point, I saw a "Y" at the tunnel with a set of eyes which just absolutely scared the living shit out of me. I never expected to see anything like this. I turned off the torch, and mentioned to my brothers what I had seen....

(continued....)



....On saying this, something whizzed past my head and ears. The terror I felt was indescribable to relate my absolute fear of not knowing what it was. At first I thought it was a cat as the eyes reflected like one. In fact, it had to be a bat.

We continued after this scare and came upon another end. Again the same scenario of removing the concrete cap and then continuing on. More hollowed out bamboo with chunks cut out. After about a couple of hours, we surfaced with nothing sighted.

At night we held out listening posts again as we did every night in the Jungles. These were 3 man positions under a hoochie with one stick to our right and one to the left so as not to fire on our troopers' positions to either side in case we got attacked. The nights were cold and we shivered all night as we got rained on and had no extra clothing other than maybe dry socks. The nights in Nam were cold and the days extremely sweltering.

The listening posts had to be outside our perimeter to safeguard from enemy attacks. The shifts were two hours on guard, and four off. This was so hard as we were exhausted at the end of the day's operations. It was difficult trying to stay awake for that time. I used to bite on my tongue, pinch myself and inflict pain to stay awake.

The next morning after breakfast, in we went again. Same thing, on our bellies and elbows. On the third day of crawling them, I came upon a rifle with the trigger guard stuck into the mud floor. I motioned to English, and Thomas of my find. They warned me not to touch it as it might be booby trapped. I checked it out thoroughly and on the side of the tunnel, I could see a small mud ridge with some string visible. At the end of this string on the roof of the tunnel was a fragmentation grenade with the pin three quarters of the way pulled out. It was an old WWII frag grenade -- like a pineapple type. I got my bayonet from my side pocket of my jungle fatigues and cut the string. English, Thomas and I decided to call it quits at this point. We crawled out with the rifle which was a sniper rifle CHICOM 7.62 mm bolt action. It had a bayonet affixed onto the barrel which was easily extended for hand to hand combat where as our bayonets had to be taken out of our scabbards and affixed onto the barrels of our M-16's for this purpose.

The rifle was handed in with my name on it for intelligence to clear it so as I could claim it as a war trophy after the war. I can't remember at what point it was returned to me, maybe at the end of my tour? This rifle today sits in the Vietnam Veterans Museum in Cowes/Phillip Island on display for all to see with an explanation as to how it was obtained.

The Aussino is One Crazy Dude Haber Too

When a small squad of us from the 1st & 2nd Battalions returned to Vietnam in 2001, we gave good buddy A.B. Garcia the nickname *Aussino*, in honor of his being an American-Chicano-Aussie. We found it fitting, and our 4-deuce brother has even grown to kind of like his new moniker. But that is not what I'm writing about here, this is about that same crazy dude willingly going down into the VC tunnels and how some of us didn't.

Often, when we came upon tunnel entrances in the boonies, and this was before we had dedicated 'tunnel rats' (who were even crazier than the Aussino), a number of us would mill-around the hole in the ground, smoking cigarettes, talking, and glad for a brief respite from the day's hump; that is, until usually a young captain (they were all young) approached, randomly pointing at one unlucky soul, then ordering the trooper to enter the tunnel system to see what kind of exciting things he might find down there. The poor bastard would then trade his M16, helmet and jungle fatigue shirt for a flashlight and a .45 pistol. Being ever sensitive to my surroundings, I learned something very important the first time this ritual occurred.

During future ops, whenever we came across these scary caverns and finding ourselves milling around as usual, when the officer tasked with selecting a *volunteer* to enter those dark and ominous places approached, I would ever so slowly move myself behind the nearest, tallest, biggest G.I., making sure not to make eye contact with the captain of the day, also hoping the PRC25 on my back might help exclude me from *volunteering*.

Unlike these heroes A.B. and our 2001 traveling buddy Steve Haber of C/2/503, both of whom seemed to enjoy burrowing underground during our war, I can proudly say I never once entered a VC tunnel until 2001 when we visited Cu Chi, recognizing there was a reasonably good chance no bad guys, snakes or bombs were waiting to greet us. No hero here, and ATFW!

Lew "Smitty" Smith
HHC/2/503, '65/'66



**L-R in Cu Chi tunnel 2001,
Craig Ford, A.B., Mike Sturges**



~ The 2/503, Second to None, because We Try Harder ~

We all know about the ugliness of war, but that's not the only thing war is about. We know it's also about hurrying up to wait, and boredom, and burning shit, and R&R and KP and running from MPs. We also know about the lighter side of war. We asked our 2/503d buddies to send in their *most amusing tale* they recall during their time in the war zone. Enjoy here that lighter side of paratroopers at war.

~ Funny? Or Dangerous? ~

It was my first week in Nam at Camp Zinn with A/2/503. The battalion had just returned from Zulu Zulu a few days before, and I still hadn't been outside the berm. It was mid-morning and my stomach told me it was time to tend to business out back at the ten-holed library, so I didn't hesitate.

As I entered the open-aired, roof-covered establishment the first of ten holes was occupied so I immediately took the third hole as to not crowd the very large man (which will not be named) at the first hole.

As soon as I settled down I realized I had forgotten my cigarettes and I said, *"Shit, I left my smokes in the tent."* At that point the very large GI at the first hole offered me the cigarette he was already smoking. Thankful to have a cigarette while I relaxed, I accepted. I took one puff of the cigarette, stood up and threw it into the receptacle below saying something like, *"That tastes like stale shit!"*

Before I could finish that statement the very large GI stood up, leaned over and said, *"Have you lost your f***ing mind?! That was my last blunt (I think he called me) you #%***#££*# f***ing new guy!!"*

So not only did I have my first taste of marijuana that day, I also learned my first new acronym, 'FNG'."

Terry "Woody" Davis
A/2/503, '66/'67



Alpha's 10-holer library.



Woody, no longer an FNG, but now a hard-core trooper.

~ Two Quickies ~

We had been busting brush for many days and came upon a VC camp. Lo and behold they had a rooster staked out as a warning system. No VC there, so I liberated the rooster, went to laager for the evening. Killed the rooster, filled a pot with water and started cooking him. Just about then choppers started coming in. What did they have but hot meals with fried chicken. Ate the rooster anyway!!

Secondly, when guys come in with jungle rot, I, as platoon medic, would have them drop fatigues in front of everyone, draw a bullseye with methyrate, and hit the target with a big dose of penicillin. Most still came back as needed.

Wako "Doc" Cotney
B/2/503d, Apr-Nov. '67



Doc with new Herd Lady
Kinga Kiss-Johnson

(continued....)



~ The Goldbrickers Were Saved ~

It was November, 1965, and I was a medic with B/2/327 of the 1st Brigade, 101st ABN Division. We were in the middle of a nine day OP somewhere in the area of An Khe. The company arrived at a wide, nearly dry riverbed. Crossing it would expose us to a possible ambush, so the CO opted to recon by fire the opposite shore with 4.2 mortars we had in support. While the mortars began their fire mission, the company went on line next to the riverbed and waited for the CO's next orders.

I was with the two-man M-60 gun crew, and we flopped down under a nice shade tree a few yards away from the riverbank. Within a minute or two, all three of us took advantage of the situation and dozed off. During my catnap, I felt someone kicking my foot. I woke up with a start and saw that the kicker was none other than our platoon sergeant, who was less than pleased at finding his gun crew and medic catching some unauthorized ZZ's. In no uncertain terms, he ordered us to get our malingering butts up on line with the rest of the company, or he would think up some work details for us to do when we set up the perimeter that night.

We hustled up to the riverbank to join the rest of the company, but just a few seconds later a massive explosion shook the ground behind us. When the debris stopped raining down on us, we looked back and saw that a 4.2 short round completely destroyed the shade tree we had been dozing off under. The only part of the tree that was left was a jagged stump. The platoon sergeant came running to see if there were any casualties, and when he saw what happened, he started grinning from ear to ear.

"You three goldbrickers owe me!" he said. "If it hadn't have been for me, all three of you would have been blown up and scattered all over here in pieces so small we never would have been able to find enough to bury. And when we get off this OP, I expect the three of you to repay me for saving your worthless lives by buying me beers until I get tired of drinking them!"

John Taylor
HHC/B/2/503

John, on right, being treated for an injury he sustained while jumping on Okinawa.



~ Another Day of Eating C's ~

We got a hot meal delivered to Charlie's backyard. Lo and behold, roast beef! Well, everyone ate their full. The mess cook yells out *"Come and get them before the chopper leaves!"*

Although full, I grab a handful and stuck it in my empty ammo pouch to eat later that night while standing guard. Well, this 19 year-old paratrooper failed to take into consideration the temperature of the jungle! I pulled out the roast beef, with the silver shine, and stuck it in my mouth, immediately remembering the bodies and the smell! Needless to say, all that roast beef from the noon meal came up. I couldn't go near roast beef for 20 years!

Jack "Jackattack" Ribera
A/2/503, '66

On a warm night in 1967 as curfew descended on the strip in downtown Bien Hoa, rather than return to the drab company area at Camp Zinn I ended an evening of bar hopping in the quarters of what I thought at the time was a very attractive young lady. After a night of, uh, conversation and a few 33 Beers I was starving when the sun came up.

Being the ever gracious host, babysan offered to retrieve breakfast for us, at my expense of course. After going out for a few minutes she returned with Po Boy looking sandwiches (bug laden French bread with mystery meat) for both of us. Just as I was taking my first bite, babysan exclaimed *"#1 rat"* as she bit into her sandwich!

I have no memory of what happened next but over the ensuing years in order to spare folks around me, I have pushed my plate away numerous times while having flash backs of that episode. The very site of a mouse (even plastic) destroys my appetite for days.

Johnny R. Jones
C/2/503

The Chargin' Charlie's Babysan? Roasted rat, a Vietnamese delicacy. Sorry Johnny. ☺



(continued....)



~ The best laid plans do not always go well. On occasion they go south. ~

Now this ain't no Bullshit.

When my time in the field with the 2-503d came to an end, I was assigned to the Brigade S4 shop. One of our responsibilities was to provide Brigade Transportation. The 4-503d was returning to the Brigade from another assignment outside the Brigade's Area of Operation (AO). It was scheduled to land at the Nha Trang Air Force Base and be trucked to the southern sector of the Brigade's AO. The Brigade Commanding General Cunningham and his senior staff flew to Nha Trang to meet the returning Battalion. Unfortunately, the Air Force Commanding General at Nha Trang had not been informed through channels that the 4-503d would be landing at his air field and diverted the flights to the LZ English PCP field.

At the time, I was having lunch when the senior S4 NCO came by to inform me the Battalion was on its way to LZ English and I had to make arrangements to deploy the battalion to their assigned area. I told him to get me every vehicle that was operational to the PCP Field and went up to organize their forming into convoys as they deployed from the C-130s.

At the field, I grabbed hold of whoever walked by and had them help me line up the various trucks as they arrived. As the first plane landed, I went up to the rear ramp and saluted the Battalion Commander and welcomed him back to the Brigade. I advised the diversion of his flights were ordered by the Air Force Commander-in-Charge at Nha Trang and advised we had transport for his men and equipment to his new area of operation. He moved off and we offloaded and provided transport for the remaining units which were transported to the new AO.

Unfortunately, one planeload of Sky Soldiers had a mechanical malfunction. As a result, it was allowed to land at Nha Trang. It contained the Battalion's Recondo Unit. Upon landing, they found the air conditioned EM Club on the Nha Trang Air Force Base. So, they had a beer or two and relaxed at the bar. This was not acceptable to the Air Force and they were asked to leave. The Recondos refused and ordered more beer. Air Police then arrived outside the EM Club. The Recondos put a couple of grenades on the bar and ordered another beer. By this time, my Transportation 2nd Lieutenant got hold of me and advised of the situation, I told him to get up front with the Recondos and use every swear word he knew to direct the Recondos to leave the EM Club and re-board their C-130 for the flight to LZ English. With some reluctance, an extra beer in hand and a finger to the Air Police, they

left the EM Club, boarded the C-130 and joined their unit at their new AO.

Bob Getz

2/503 Task Force CO

When I was there our platoon was broken into 5 to 6 man hunter/killer teams and given a grid square to work for 3 days. On the fourth day the Lt. would give us all coordinates where to meet for resupply, rest up for the day and get assigned a new area to work and run ambush on.



Bud in the boonies, snickering?

The resupply chopper finally came about the middle of the day and I helped unload it. On the floor of the bird was a great big yellow onion rolling around so I grabbed it and stuck in one of my leg pockets. It just so happened that I received a care package also that day and in it was some tortillas and a can of chili.

Sometime that day I chopped up the onion, mixed it with the chili, heated it, and passed the tortillas around smeared with my concoction on it. It just so happened we had a cherry Lt. with us and he asked where did I get the onion? I pointed to a spot about 10 meters away full of half-tall grass up to the knees and weeds of some kind, and said I dug it up over there, *"They are all over the place if you know where to look,"* I told him.

A couple of hours later I saw the cherry Lt. over in that area with a knife of some sort just digging away looking for more onions. Never did tell him any different.

Bud Sourjohn

A/2/503

Bud's onion story is one of my favorite 'war stories' of all time so we're running it again here in addition to his story below! Ed



Vietnamese onions. Here they are LT!

(continued....)



~ Never Trust a Leg ~

Most people don't know this and I try not to tell anybody, and as a matter of fact I don't know why I am putting this in print for everyone to read, but here goes.

When I enlisted, and on my "gospel" enlistment card was put airborne training and DUTY, but when I did get to RVN the army totally screwed up and sent me to a leg unit and it was the 198th Light Infantry Brigade under the command of Lt. Col. Norman Schwartzkoff, or however in the hell you spell that last name. Anyway, he was not the teddy bear that showed up in the gulf war, no, he was just the opposite if you get my drift.

When I was finally assigned to my company they had just come in for a three-day stand-down but the C.O. didn't let the replacements join them until the last day before moving back out to the field. So now I meet the people I'm going to be patrolling and fighting the NVA within I Corps and we are on bunker guard the last day and night. Well bunker guard is very boring around a very large well-defended rear area so we make sure one guy is always on guard and the rest of us in the bunker decide to play poker. I never really liked to play but I knew how somewhat so I sat in until I lost about \$5. I kept wondering how these guys kept showing at least three of a kind and sometimes four of a kind to win all the time. Being a poor frugal guy from a small town in Texas, I quit, not really knowing that where I was going in the jungle there wasn't any place to spend any money anyway.

So I took a walk to stretch my legs and came back and decided to just sit and watch the game and found out how they kept winning. Those sons-a-bitches would reach into the discard pile and make a good hand out of that, all the while I was studying my cards intently trying to make a hand.

After a month and a half the army figured out their mistake and sent me to my good airborne unit and the rest is history I guess. But I never trusted a damn Leg since then!

Bud Sourjohn
A/2/503

~ Lucky to be a Blond ~

We were digging in on a small hill when natured called. The guys had not gone out to set trip flares and claymores so I felt reasonably safe leaving the line. So without telling anyone I went out and backed-up to a blackberry bush outside of the perimeter a few yards. An enemy soldier about 100 yards to my right decides to fling a green tracer round at me. I think he waited for me to turn my head in his direction so I'd see it coming. The tracer came about eye level and a foot in front of my face. I jumped back and fell into my

own business while rapidly pulling up my pants in that thorny bush.

One incoming round puts everyone on alert, and our guys on-line heard me thrashing around in the BlackBerry bush. I finally got myself together to go back in the perimeter when I looked up to see about 5 guys on-line ready to blow me away. One of them said, "*Doc, you are so lucky you have blond hair.*"

Bob "Doc" Evalt
B/2/503, '68-'69

~ Never Burn Your Special Purpose ~

Many of us remember not wearing underwear when in the field. I still don't wear underwear tops under a shirt.

You machine gunners remember that you were supposed to change the barrel every so many rounds, otherwise basic physics would take over and the barrel would get white hot.

One day we got into a firefight in a bamboo thicket. Our machine gunner, who was not wearing underwear, tore his fatigue pants from knee to knee. He also neglected to change the barrel. Guess what he burned with that overheated barrel? He got a purple heart for it too!

When he returned to duty, he notified everyone that it still worked. No one thought to ask him for what function it still worked. Hopefully it still works, and he has had the opportunity to tell many good stories about it over the past almost half century.

I just thought of another one:

One night I got a call from a squad leader on the other side of the perimeter. He said "*We are being attacked by 1000 VC all smoking cigarettes.*" I wanted to ask what *he* had been smoking, but I rushed over to see for myself. Sure enough, we WERE being attacked by 1000 VC smoking cigarettes.

My brain told me that was impossible, but my eyes told me it was true. We decided not to fire until they got closer, but they never got closer. You probably know the answer to the mystery. The "cigarettes" were caused by jungle phosphorus glowing, possibly because of the moonlight.

Joe Day
C/2/503, Jan.-Jun. '67

(continued....)



~ Cough....Snore....Squeak ~

One night we were dug in and I was on guard duty. The 4 of us were manning a foxhole on the company perimeter. About an hour into my guard duty noises erupted from those sleeping behind me. One trooper was coughing, one trooper was snoring and one trooper was having a wet dream on his air mattress. The sounds were like a weird swan song as the coughing, snoring and squeaking filled the night air. This continued for about 15 minutes as my ass felt like a Hoover vacuum even though I was nervously laughing inside. If the enemy didn't know where we were they did now.

As my guard ended I kicked the guy snoring because it was his turn on guard duty. The other ones had quieted down but I just couldn't sleep as the cough, snore and squeak still played over and over in my head.

Steve Welch
C/2/503



Steve



~ Combat Assault ~

As a "draftee" I came to Nam in May of 1968 after graduating from 05B (Radio School) and 05C (Radio Teletype), and received my orders to join the Herd's 2nd Batt at LZ English.

Since Headquarters did not use teletypes, most of the Radio Teletype grads became radio relay operators at fire support bases (FSB) and ARVN compounds.

The officer in charge of the 2nd battalion signal corps group was Captain Jim Dwyer. Captain Dwyer chose me in August or September of '68 to be the designated radio operator and join the infantry in a combat assault to begin a new FSB.



Whip, RTO extraordinaire

Early one morning about six or seven Hueys picked us up on the LZ English tarmac and landed us on top of a mountain several clicks to the west. Fortunately, there was no enemy on the mountain top, but we landed in typical "elephant grass" about chest high. I have forgotten what we named that firebase.

When we stepped off the choppers, several of the infantry were walking quickly through the grass, and suddenly there was much cussing as we realized that "Charlie" had planted many punji sticks loaded with defecation. We all heard quite a few "medic" shouts. I had large feet and was able to knock several punji sticks to the side without injury.

Only a few minutes after leaving the Huey a couple of wasps or hornets flew into my steel pot and stung my head, which hurt like hell. As we all know, anything that stung or bit you over there had some kind of venom they liked to share with us. Needless to say, I dropped down to the ground and looking up into the sky on my back, I saw the clouds through my psychedelic eyes. The stings must have bothered my eyesight and brain, because as I saw these clouds I felt like I was tripping out. The first thing that came to my mind was the Beatle's big hit "*Lucy in the sky with diamonds*".

So I'm lying on my back with the PRC25 and a 15' whip antenna underneath me, thinking what kind of a RTO am I?

After a few minutes, I was able to get back on my feet. We were able to get a perimeter established and the concertina wire, explosives, water, claymores, cannons, shovels, sand bags, steel girders and cooks came in the next couple of hours and we worked for several hours to get our underground bunkers done so we could spend the first night in them.

A few weeks later we took some sniper fire from the mountain next to us. The Air Force was called in and dropped a bomb very close to where we thought the sniper was located. Never had any sniper issues after that!

All in all, it was a great experience for me. I enjoyed the adventure of leaving the safety of LZ English to be the conduit between the infantry and Headquarters. If any of you 2nd battalion guys were a part of that "combat assault" that day, please let me know!

Airborne, all the way!

(Sgt) Rich Whipple
HHC/2/503, '68-'69
rekjwhipple@yahoo.com

(continued....)



~ The Wandering Buddha ~

I can't think of much that was humorous, but here's one possibility.

Shortly before we got the word on Okinawa we were heading to Vietnam, some short-timers due to rotate back to the U.S. had to scramble to get their affairs in order. It was always assumed we were "going south" and some of the guys heading home were disappointed they wouldn't be going with us.

One of my friends in B Co., 2/503, second platoon was Joel Heinz. He had bought a large wooden Buddha in Koza and was having a box made for it so he could ship it home. It wasn't going to be ready, so he gave me a few bucks and said he had to leave but maybe it would be done and I could get it shipped to his house in the U.S. He flew home and I checked on the box from time to time and it wasn't ready.

Finally, when we got word we were moving out to Vietnam almost immediately I went to our platoon sergeant, Alvin Ku, who was from Hawaii, and told him my plight about the box. He said, *"Don't worry, I'll ship the Buddha back with my personal belongings and see that Heinz gets it."* I figured, problem solved.

Then one day at Camp Zinn outside of Bien Hoa, Ku walks into the orderly room and shows me pictures of his house in Hawaii. In one of them, there on the front porch, was Heinz's Buddha.

I never knew how to contact Heinz to tell him what happened.

Larry Paladino
B/2/503, '65/'66



Larry



Briefing by Sgt. Ku before patrol. Pleiku, Aug. '65.
(Photo by Col. George Dexter)

~ Those Tasty Chicks ~

We had been humping for, well, forever, until we came to our night laager position where a small unit of ARVN were camped. Having eaten only C-rats for many days, a buddy and I were surprised when we came upon a couple ARVN squatting on the ground boiling eggs. *Eggs!!!*

None of us could speak the others' language but the ARVN made it clear they wanted to share their bounty with us and we readily and excitedly accepted their invitation. Once the eggs were well-boiled, the two Vietnamese soldiers extracted them from the pot, our eyes widening in anticipation of the upcoming feast; that is until they cracked the eggs open to expose the ghastly-cooked embryos inside. At this point we let them know we really didn't like eggs all that much, and they proceeded to suck the dead, boiled chicks from the shells.

Hearing the crunching sound of beaks and bones we did our utmost best to hold down those wonderful C-rats we had eaten earlier in the day. But the story doesn't end there.

Cut to about 10 years later, early in the a.m. with a different buddy at a diner in Miami following a night out drinking. We decided an early morning breakfast would act to sober us up. Of course, I ordered eggs, over easy. With the combination of too much liquor, the sliminess of the eggs, and a flash-back to the meeting with the ARVN, I almost made it outside before spilling my guts. It was years before I ever ate eggs again.

Lew "Smitty" Smith
HHC/2/503, '65/'66

Balut....a delicacy they say.



Smitty



"Balut is probably most repulsive going by its looks. It's slimy, yellow, grey, and something you wouldn't put in your mouth unless you were really the adventurous kind. A balut isn't even an egg really, it's the fertilized embryo of a duck."

(continued....)



~ Remembering the Elite ~

This last week I have been thinking about the Elite.

A while back I ran into a New Mexico Veterans Cabinet Secretary for Vets. He told me after I had mentioned to him I made the combat jump during Operation Junction City that he had dinner with 2nd Bat Commander Col. Sigholtz. He was told that General



Bravo Bull, Ted Roybal

Westmoreland and Colonel Sigholtz were very good friends. General Westmoreland wanted to create the most elite units in Airborne history, which he sure did.

In the jungle humping for months at a time and returning to camp for one or two days and out again, I never experienced your EGG flash back. After my 12 month tour as a draftee I had 5 more months to go. I sure as hell did not want to come back to the States and be assigned to another unit. I believed at that time I was going to Ft. Bragg to help train new recruits on jungle warfare. So what I did, I heard that you could extend, and get an early out. I did, and requested to be on a security company in Saigon. It happened to be on General Westmoreland's honor guard security. Duty was parades whenever General Westmoreland had a full review to present medals to soldiers, Silver Stars, Bronze Stars, etc. Talk about gravy duty, man it was great!

Loved those hot meals and showers every day. Had Mamasan do your housekeeping for 300 P a week, WOW! Shined shoes, scratch your balls which was very common, then you went into town. Every day worked 3 hours on 3 off, one shift for a week then swing then graveyard. Holy Mackerel, gravy gravy, it was good.

During formation before going on guard duty we had inspection. The new arrivals, Lt's, Captains, were assigned to view us on inspection, and I remember how proud we were, wearing our jump wings with the Gold Star embroidered on our wings, well, the new arrivals really looked up to me and would ask how it was out there fighting in the jungle. By this time they all knew about the combat jump and they had high respect for me -- what a feeling coming from big boys, even Generals would love talking to me. How elite can you get.

The Generals we guarded were in a compound, each had a double-wide trailer house to live in while us Infantry had a hootch for housing (smoke that in your pipe). The Generals had maids, drivers, etc., all the

amenities. I am not knocking them because they also earned their rank to be able to sit on a comfy chair.

Getting back to your elite situation about the eggs, I also experienced this scenario but mine a little different. I was in Saigon and off-duty when I went into a firehouse on base. I really do not know why but as I entered the receptionist, a young pregnant Vietnamese girl, was eating a boiled egg, and as I watched her I saw the feathers. I immediately told her, *"There's a bird in that egg!"* Her reply was, all pregnant women eat this egg for good protein. I will not mention a side of dog or monkey meat hamburgers etc., maybe even boiled rat.

One night while on duty I saw a shadow in the dark and as I watched it come closer to me, it turned out to be a big rat. My first thought, being of the western cowboy style, was to catch him and saddle him and ride him back to the USA! Talk about homesick then! This dude was big like a horse, he also walked with a limp -- maybe he had arthritis by our standards.

Now writing about burning shit. I also did that but I think mine was when we first arrived to base camp. We had to burn smelly shit alright. Remembering our survival mode, one day as I was thinking about taking dump while humping the jungle, but I do not remember ever doing it at all then; it came to me about survival mode.

When you pull one night on listening post and the next night on ambush patrol and experience the pitch dark of night when you cannot even see your hand in front of your face, and then have a Viet Cong shot and moan all night a few feet from you, definitely puts you in another frame of mind...survival. That night the V.C. would try to get their wounded buddy. It was dark and all night we exchanged tossing grenades.

A veteran friend of mine who is a fur trapper today and knows all about wildlife explained to me he's like a bear when he goes into hibernation during winter months. This is how intense your life is when you do not know where the bullet is coming from. I realized then all you ate was C-rations for weeks and it only produced enough energy to survive. My friend thinks about it, and the often resultant constipation. HA! HA!

Only the Elite of the elite experienced this. How many infantrymen saw the egg incident and what we went through. The big experience was survival and what it did to our mental state. Think about it.

Ted Roybal
B/2/503

(continued...)



~ Snakes in the Grass ~

Little Tiny Snakes: In the rubber plantation, before we moved to Camp Zinn, one sunny day in '65, I noticed some of the troops of one of the rifle squads of 3rd platoon, C/2nd, were fiddling around with a tiny five-inch green snake. Checking it out, I watched them playing with it with sticks, but no one would pick it up. So, to show how it was done, Sgt. Jack Rose picked it up and twirled it around his fingers and hands. He really knew how to communicate with animals. Then it bit him. One of the guys said you'd better have the medic examine it. So he bopped it on the head, killing it, and went to see the doc.

About 15 minutes later I noticed a chopper landing on the other side of the plantation; so I asked around to find out what was going on. When I asked one of the troops from the same rifle squad, he said, *"Oh, they came to pick up Sgt. Rose, to transport him to a hospital in Saigon."*

"Why?" I asked.

He looked down, shook his head and said, *"That snake was a poisonous bamboo, and Jack has only a couple of hours to live."*

After that Sgt. Rose became known as Jack, the snake charmer.



Andy, along the C Co. line after battle at LZ Zulu Zulu on 16 Mar 66.



Bamboo Viper of Vietnam

Big Giant Snakes: I was running a patrol through the bush, which was normal duty around Camp Zinn in '66. We were going through the old rubber plantation, and being at the end of the patrol – where I can best monitor the troops, I heard a bunch of small arms fire going off in front of me. I didn't hear any round whizzing by me, so I was wondering what my guys were shooting at. I rushed up front and arrive just at the edge of the plantation when I saw the tail of a snake and a bunch of dudes in the thicket. As I stared at the snake I could see that it stretched across the road and

the clearing on the other side into the bush. I decided to pace it off.

The thing got fatter and fatter to a point where it could easily carry a man and his buddy. When I got to my fifteenth pace, I was in the bush and at the head of the snake. It was a least 40 feet long! The guys had shot hundreds of rounds in it. There was excitement galore as they all stood around, gaping at it, and chattering loudly. One of the troops unlocked and pulled open its jaw and we could see that it could efficiently swallow a man whole. What a monster!

I was thinking, 'They heard small arms fire back at Camp Zinn and are going to question us.' *"We got to have evidence of what we were firing at. What'll we do?"* I asked.

One of the guys suggested, *"We can't haul it back; so let's cut off its head put it on a stick and show 'em what we were shooting at."*

The head was as big as a small child's with a long snout; so it took a while to cut it. When we returned to the camp, no one would believe the size we told them it was. It wasn't until years later that I found out that it was possibly the biggest snake in the world!

**Charles "Andy" Anderson, Maj.
C/2/503**

The *Second* Biggest Snake in the World?



Not Andy's snake, but a "photo of huge snake, (claimed to be) the biggest snake in the world. Photograph purporting to show a 55 ft snake found in a forest in Indonesia has become an internet sensation. The huge snake is really a monster and has never been seen before." (web photo)

Which poses the question. If Sgt. Rose is the *snake charmer*, does that make Maj. Andy, the *snake wrangler*? We think so. Ed



~ The Fighting Naked Paratrooper ~

Can there be humor in a serious potentially deadly event? I'll attempt to describe here a scene you may need to have been there to believe. You'll also need to use your imagination to create a mental image of this action.

It was April 1967, somewhere in the jungle of War Zone C, or was it D? Second Battalion 503, Recon Platoon is starting a two to three day search and destroy mission. The platoon is a mixture of a few old timers (me one of them), with the majority being new arrivals, including our platoon leader, (the late) David Milton.

Around noon, we encountered a VC machine gun. The exchange of fire is loud and furious. My squad attempts to give fire support, using my M16/M79 rifle and the squads' two M79s. After some time during this furious exchange, we begin feeling vulnerable, so we decide to take cover behind a tall dead tree trunk. One by one, my squad moves towards and behind the potential cover, I'm the last to scale the trunk and land behind it.

Instantly, I feel excruciating pain all over my body. I had landed on top of a big mound of large black killer ants. The constant stings caused me to focus on how to stop those nasty little creatures from causing such terrible pain. I stood straight up, dropped all my gear, took my fatigue shirt off, unbuttoned my fatigue pants which dropped around my ankles (remember, most of us always went cammo, as I had), and began to use my fatigue shirt as an ant swatter.

After a short frantic time, I was free from the ants and began to return to normal. Meanwhile, I'm standing tall, head and shoulders above the tree trunk, with my fatigue pants bundled around my ankles; no helmet, fatigue shirt in hand, completely naked as a new born baby, with bullets flying above my head.

Take a few seconds to visualize this scene. *"A naked US Army paratrooper, standing tall, during a fire fight in nothing but his birthday suit!"*

You can't make this up. **AIRBORNE!**

Augie Scarino

Recon/C/2/503, Jan. '67 - Jan. '68



Forward, march! Come on guys, we got one!



Augie

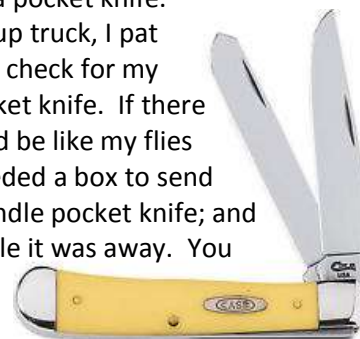
OVER THE HILL, OVER THE WALL, TAKE ME HOME MOMMA TAKE ME HOME

By Tom Conley

HHC/C/2/503, '65/'66 RVN

I bought a new case knife today. *"I was country before country was cool"*. Case knives are made in Bradford, PA. They've been made there *"back before Elvis or Vietnam or Nixon lied to us all on T.V."* The knife I bought was one like my friend John carries. I had never seen a case like his. It has a bone handle and a way to open it with your thumb. It's lite and only three inches and it locks. I was passing through Quemado, N.M. I stopped there at the True Value hardware store. They sell case knives. I needed a new knife and the box. I needed the box to send back my old knife to see if 'Case' would tighten the blade. I bought a new case knife today. I got one like my friend John and I got a box. I need a pocket knife.

When I get out of my pickup truck, I pat my pockets. I pat, not just to check for my keys but to check for my pocket knife. If there wasn't a pocket knife it would be like my flies were down. That's why I needed a box to send back my clip blade yellow handle pocket knife; and a new knife in my pocket while it was away. You see as a youngster and through the service I'd preferred and carried a brown handle clip blade case knife. I liked to go brook trout fishing when I got back from that "crazy Asian war". It was a natural high, walking in those mountains of home. Fishing those cool, clear, clean little mountain streams. I fished a fly rod and 'garden hackle'. I'd creep up under the rhododendrons to find those fish and poke that fly rod through the flowers and let the bait drop up stream of the "Holy Grail". I was searching for a native with a hooked jaw and orange flesh. There is a God; those mountains streams are the church without a roof. When I caught a keeper, I'd clean it at the bank. Then I would cut a small stick with a 'Y' in it. I'd use that stick for a fish stringer. I'd do all that with my brown handled clip blade knife. I'd sometimes be in rapture and leave my knife on the side of the stream.



Maybe like this one?

(continued....)



Later, I'd get that feeling like my flies were down and go back to where I caught the last fish. Well one time I couldn't find that brown handle case knife. It was like not having a songbook in the church with the roof. That was more than thirty years ago and I have been carrying and wearing out them yellow handle cases ever since. When I put them down on the moss I could see them. They didn't get lost.

Well I boxed up my old yellow handle knife to mail it to Bradford, Pa. It made me think of a case knife I had lost along with my youth back in "Nam" nineteen and sixty-six. They called them search and destroy missions. They were not. They were bait and switch. We were the bait. The switch was an airstrike.

The boys in the band (as in band of brothers) were returning from one of those missions -- returning back to the rubber plantation outside Bien Hoa airbase. Back to where second battalion of "The Rock" had their base camp. The officers knew not to give us grunts (average age 19) anything other than 3.2 beer. Rios (rifleman), Tabor (rifleman), Deacon Jones (machine gunner) and me (R.T.O., no hero just a target) went over the wall to the airmen's club for some salty dogs.



Tom, at Camp Zinn, wearing a target on his back, coming from a 'bait and switch' operation.

The airman who bounced at the airmen's club did not really like us to be there. We were listening to music and consuming when Rios stood at his seat and "*come on baby*" did the twist. The bouncer told Rios that there was no dancing in the club and he had to go. Deacon Jones hit the bouncer an uppercut that opened a nice cut on his lip. Tabor threw every glass on the table into the crowded club and got the crowd in the mood for a "Donnybrook". Tabor then jerked the phone off the wall. Let the festivities begin. I started dancing with a barstool and cut in on the bouncer's dance with the Deacon. Tweet! Tweet!

The Air Police and their "stinking badges" had a cure for our frisky behavior. The cure for frisky behavior ended with transport back to base camp but it began with a frisk and that's what happened to the case knife I carried in 'Nam'. It was appropriated by the allies. It had a brown handle - I probably would have lost it in church. "C'est la vie say the old folks." C'est la guerre.

SHOT AT AND MISSED. SHIT AT AND HIT.

"We were hungry we were barely alive." I carried a target on my back. Somehow, some way, the bullets missed. The fevers and the fungus didn't. Down with the fevers and chills, mother medic came to me. He had an earring in his ear. Was I delirious? It was a little silver cross. That medic explained to me that he was a witness. A witness of the best and worse. A witness to a man laying down his life so that others may live. It made me want a little silver cross in my ear. I had to make due with a very small silver wire circle in my earlobe. *"If you want to hear God laugh, tell him your plans."*



"173rd Airborne Brigade troops leave Bien Hoa Air Base, 1965." (web photo)

(continued....)



My big plans were to go back to the “real world” with a pocket full of accrued leave money and no pocket knife. *“This land is your land and this land is my land”*. Oh Lord! I want to bus through the Southwest all the way to New Orleans. I want to ride a barge up the mighty Mississippi. I want to drink a beer in Chicago that *“hog butcher for the world”*. Get on that ‘Ole Lincoln Hiway’ and head east through the hills of home and hug my Mom.

Arriving at Oakland Army terminal with the clothes on my back, and only “Nam” money in my pocket. The separation papers in my hand. I *“got the news”*. My back pay paperwork was lost. Funny, they lost paperwork of guys they sent to “Nam” but they sure got there. My big question was how am I getting home? The best they could do was reassign me to the closest base to my home. No money, no transportation. They were concerned that I was out of uniform. They stared at that little ring in my ear. They didn’t realize that I had been dodging bullets not the draft. They gave me an order. Report to be fitted with the uniform of the day.

A “WAC” major in all her lady-like drill sergeant manner braced me while I was being fitted for the uniform. She said, *“Soldier! What is that in your ear?”* I replied laconically, *“It’s an earring Ma’m”*. With flushed face and tightened jaws she says, *“I know it is an earring soldier! What is it doing in your ear?!”*. My reply, *“It has Religious significance Ma’m”*. I’d hit her with the First Amendment. She got purple with rage. She took a step closer and got in my face. I know she wanted to punch me. Instead she hit me with her last question. She shouted, *“What religion are you Soldier?!”* I thought about my big plans, I thought I heard God laughing. I replied, *“I’m a Gypsy Ma’m.”*

With the admonishment that I had 15 days travel time to cross “our land” or I’d be A.W.O.L. A deserter if it took too long. They escorted me off their base and I hadn’t even been ‘frisky’. The only thing they put in my hand was that order paper that said where (2,853 miles away) and you know the when, 15 days. Less than 24 hours out of ‘Nam’ I was hungry but fully alive. I knew I was alive because I could smell shit. I checked my feet. I hadn’t stepped in it. You know it! I had been hit with it.

They didn’t give rest to my weary. They didn’t feed my hungry. They did clothe me. They threw me out onto the huddled streets of Oakland. The uniform they gave me didn’t have my patch, my brand. The brand I “rode for”. The brand for my ‘band of brothers’. On my chest was a tag that told my name. There was nothing, nothing that told who I was. Where I’d been and what I did. In a daze, I walked and hitched hiked. A good

Samaritan explained to me that rides would be hard to share with someone wearing that uniform. It must have smelled like shit. Welcome home son.

I can’t remember. Was it at a dumpster or was it a box at a laundromat? Somehow, some way, I was issued the returning Nam Vet’s uniform of the day, “ropas usada”, used clothes, worn out tennies, no jacket. Don’t you know me I’m your native son.

Somehow, some way in the middle of Nevada, on a dark and cold night, two ‘Hip’ students picked me up in that new uniform. It was the first time in my life I rode in a “foreign car”. They were going cross country to their duty station, a university in Baltimore. I hadn’t eaten in days, they bought me a wedge of lettuce salad. It was the first time in my life I had an iceberg lettuce wedge and store-bought dressing. I was not hungry and I was happy to be alive. Promising them if they got me home I would get some money to pay them back. They drove me to the door.

Hi Mom! Your grown son is home. Can I borrow some money?

You know I was thankful for the ride and the salad. I didn’t mind that my first home meal was “humble pie”. I just hated that it smelled like shit.

“C’est la vie say the old folks.” “C’est la guerre!” You gotta laugh or your gonna cry!



Tom, with a very special young lady of the family.

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A SMALL PIECE OF WAR

By Robert W. Armstrong



Few of us who were seniors at Dartmouth College in 1940 were much concerned about war. That was something on the other side of the Atlantic. Germany had attacked Poland and France and England. It had little to do with us. There was no television and our only sources of information were radio and newspapers. We were involved with our studies and sports and looking forward to graduation in June and finding a job.



"The 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment was activated at Fort Benning, Ga. on March 2, 1942."

Because I had majored in English and spent a summer as a cub reporter for *The Greenwich Time* in Connecticut, I looked first for a writing position, starting with *Life* magazine, where I talked with the editor. He seemed more interested in what was going on in Europe than in American affairs. He did not offer me a job.

Next I tried the Associated Press and, for reasons I have forgotten, didn't take the job offered. Eventually I went to work in my home town of Worcester as a sales engineering trainee for the Norton Co., a large manufacturer of grinding machines and grinding wheels. For \$75 a week, good pay then, I spent time in each department, learning the manufacturing process, and writing a report on what I had learned.

Early fall merged into winter. I spent some free time skiing on a nearby hill and very little time wondering about either my career or events in Europe. That changed in early 1941. The nation had passed a draft law and on March 1, I reported to a large building, along with several hundred other young men. We stripped and lined up for physical examinations. I remember

being somewhat shocked at the poor appearance of many of my fellow draftees. They didn't look like athletes — and they were not. Some were skinny, some a bit twisted, some unhealthy looking. They were of several nationalities, as one would expect in New England; lots of Italians and middle-eastern countries. Maybe that was why one of the doctors examining me said, "Boy, you're in the army." One doctor did find a defect in my body. He remarked to another that I had 'pes planus moderatus'. Thanks to four years of Latin I knew he said I had slightly flat feet.

A few days later those of us who had passed the examination boarded a train for Camp Edwards on Cape Cod. Four of us who thought we were superior specimens of young manhood sat together and played bridge, hiding our fears and uncertainty behind jokes and idle talk. When we pulled into the camp we were greeted by shouting soldiers who hurried us into some form of order and marched us off to draw uniforms and be assigned to barracks. I remember that one of my fellow draftees asked why the soldiers had to yell angrily at us to get us in formation. We found out later; that was the army.



Perhaps 40 or 50 of us were assigned to Service Co., joining regular National Guard soldiers who had been mobilized some months earlier. This was a new world, one of discipline and commands and learning, everything from how to make a bed to close order drill....

(continued....)



For the first three months we were free of regular duties like kitchen police and the driving of trucks. We were learning to be soldiers, days and days of rifle instruction, dry firing, basic sanitation, close order drill, long marches. A never-ending series of new experiences.

Perhaps because I was one of the few recent college graduates among my fellow draftees I was sometimes called upon for special activities. I was one of a small group taking classes in military intelligence. In preparation for the regiment's eventual travel somewhere, I gave a slide lecture on the loading of vehicles on railroad cars -- a subject about which I knew only what I read in a manual. I even found myself an acting noncom, marching small groups to functions or directing skirmish training, again something about which I knew little.

Came the fall of 1941. Our basic training was over. We were doing all the normal jobs in the company -- driving trucks, dumping garbage, delivering supplies. Our leaders even made me the company guidon bearer, a function performed only in parade and requiring only the ability to hold aloft a small flag and dip it when required. Even so, I must have done something wrong, because shortly after a regimental parade, my captain was chewed out by the colonel. Since he was a kindly gentleman, he never told me the nature of my error.

Now came serious military training. The 26th (Yankee) Division traveled to North Carolina for large-scale maneuvers. I remember little about them. As an unofficial noncom I was responsible for getting kitchen trucks to the right locations in time to feed the troops of the 181st Infantry. We spent hours upon hours moving from one place to another, never knowing why or where. During one day of idleness I was summoned to regimental headquarters. It appeared that Massachusetts Governor Saltonstall was visiting the regiment and had asked about me. By the time I got to headquarters he had moved on. I guess he made the gesture as a favor to my father, then the emergency commissioner of public welfare for the state. In any event, this high-ranking interest in a lowly private did nothing to ease my burdens or enhance my standing. I was still a truck driver.

Then the mock war ended and we began the long drive back to our base on Cape Cod, arriving in early December.

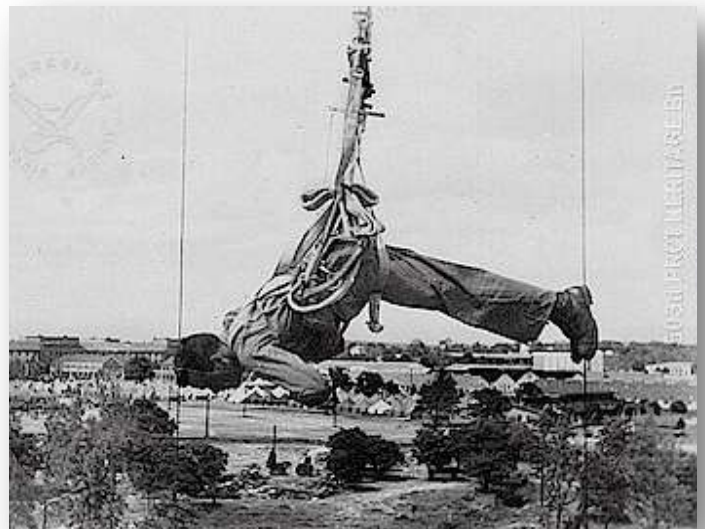
Then it all got serious. On Sunday, December 7, some of us were sitting in the barracks, talking and joking and cleaning our rifles. We had a radio. We heard the voice of President Roosevelt. He said the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands, *"a day that shall live in infamy."* One of the

guys put on his helmet, shouldered a rifle and marched out the door, declaring death to the Japs.

It looked like we would be in the service of Uncle Sam for a long, long time. A few weeks later I applied for admission to the army's Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia. My appearance before the screening committee was uneventful except that I failed to identify the squad as the basic infantry unit. They approved my candidacy anyway and in early March I arrived at Fort Benning. There followed three months of training, much of it similar to the basic training I had undergone as a draftee. We did get more chances to fire on the rifle range and to practice with bayonets and to improve our ability to read maps. Then, of course, there was a lot of spit and polish and, believe it, instruction in the giving of commands.

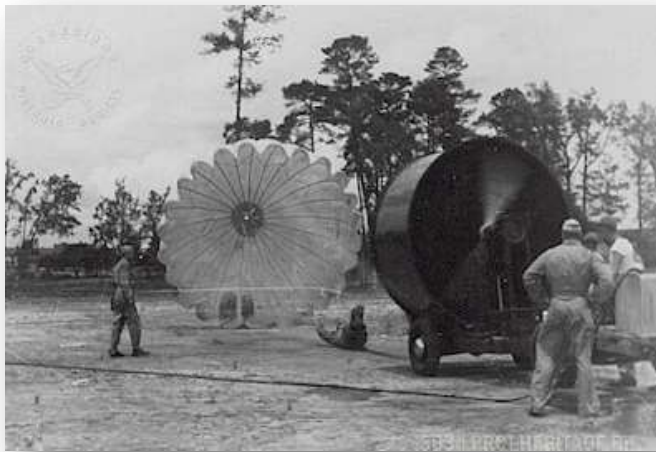
All through these three months we could see the tall steel towers in the distance where would-be paratroopers took their training. A few of us decided that was what we wanted, not just because of the presumed glory of it, but also because of the extra \$100 a month officers received for the risk. So, about the time we graduated as second lieutenants, about 100 of us lined up for interviews. Not all got accepted. I was mildly surprised to be one of the 25-or-so lucky ones.

Officer school graduates were granted ten days leave before reporting to their next duty station, I went home to Worcester to see my fiancée, a girl named Mary Kneass. Way back when I was a lowly GI, I had proposed and she had accepted. On a weekend visit from Camp Edwards I spoke to her father -- in a sort of roundabout way asking for his permission to marry Mary. He called for his wife and called for a drink, so I knew it was OK.



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Parachute school was rough. The curriculum, if one could call it that, was divided into four one-week sessions. The first week consisted of mornings spent in agonizing physical training and afternoons in learning to pack a parachute. The second week was even worse, more of the same. I can remember doing deep-knee bends until I fell on my face at the bottom of each bend. This was the weeks we were introduced to the plumber's nightmare, a giant jungle gym on which we were required to act like monkeys. We also did some exercises in a gymnasium. One of the requirements for continuing was to climb a 30-foot rope. I failed the first few times; got close, but ran out of gas. Finally, on the last day, I made it to the top and hung there until the achievement was recognized.



A minor torture was a suspended parachute harness. This consisted primarily in repeated chin-ups while holding on to risers. The instructor in this bit of self-torture was a beefy sergeant who could chin himself while holding on to the straps with nothing but thumb and forefinger. And then there was the 40-foot tower, a spindly structure with a hut-like box at the top. You climbed a ladder to get there and were greeted by an instructor who handed you a parachute harness and told you to stand in the doorway cut into one side. A cable ran from the harness to another, long, inclined cable outside. When you jumped out the door, you fell 15 feet or so, were caught by the inclined cable and slid to the earth.

When we assembled around the base of this new test the instructor asked for someone to volunteer to go first. No one spoke up. Since my name began with A, I knew that with no volunteer I would be ordered to go. So, I volunteered. When I stood in the door it looked like a long drop to the ground. I was frightened, but when the instructor yelled "Go!" I went — and there was nothing to it. Others followed, not all successfully. One broke his arm when it was struck by a snapping-tight harness riser. An instructor on the ground made notes on each jump. When all were through I asked him how I did. He had made the notation "QF" by my name. I asked what it meant. *"Quite frightened,"* he said. And he was right.

Was it the third week when things got a bit easier? This was when we were introduced to the steel jump towers. Actually, they were fun. Parachutes were held open by clips attached to wires running from earth to the top of the tower. You stood under the chute in your harness and were hauled 200 feet into the air. At the top the chute was released and you floated back to earth, guided by the vertical wires. That was the easy part. The tough part was what I called the no-chute test. You lay on your belly on the ground in your parachute harness. The harness was attached to a cable at your back. There was no chute. At a signal you were pulled 150-feet into the air, still horizontal. There you hung until an instructor with a megaphone yelled up, *"Pull!"* At which command you pulled the rip cord at your chest and you began to fall. The harness tightened after 15 feet and you were once again vertical, jerking up and down like a rag doll. Then you were lowered to the ground and another student took your place. The purpose of all this testing of body and mind, I later realized, was to weed out those of us who would not or could not endure it.

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The fourth and final week was the easiest of all. All you had to do was make five parachute jumps from a couple of thousand feet from a plane flying over a field. If you balked or got badly hurt you were out. By this time some of us had already been dismissed. You jumped one at a time, a tough sergeant standing behind you to make sure you went out the door as ordered. You didn't have to do anything, just jump. A 40-foot static line running from a wire in the plane to the back of your harness pulled out the chute from its pack as it broke away. But it was both fun and exciting and at the end you got your wings and were a qualified paratrooper, ready for assignment to a fighting unit.



I don't know where most of my fellow graduates went, but Guy Campbell and I were sent to the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. We were ordered to report to the commander of Headquarters Co., Battalion, for assignment. After a few questions the captain realized we had practically no experience in combat units. He assigned Guy to the light machine gun platoon and me to the 81mm mortar platoon. Because the army expected a high casualty rate for paratroopers, each platoon had two officers. My leader was a Lieutenant Fickle (Fickel?), a man I soon came to like and respect.

A mortar is a cumbersome weapon, consisting of a steel tube through which to fire the shells, a bipod to support the top end and hold the sighting mechanism, and a heavy steel base plate to hold the bottom of the tube. Each part is heavy and awkward to carry, the base plate especially. We learned that the hard way, because we carried our four mortars with us on every march and tactical exercise.

I grew fond of those mortars. Awkward and heavy they might be, but they could throw a seven pound

shell almost 3,000 yards, flying high over any obstacles and exploding effectively on impact. They were simple to use and had no moving parts to break down. All you had to do was set the sight for distance and aim and drop a shell down the tube. Then you made adjustments to cover your target. That's an oversimplification, of course, but it's basically what we did.

When we went on a tactical exercise, the mortars were disassembled and rolled into heavy fabric bundles, along with the ammunition. Each bundle had its own parachute. In flight we stacked two bundles in the open doors of each of our planes, pushed them out at the drop point and jumped after them. That was the fun part. Most training hours were spent in marches, dry firing exercises, platoon tactics, and the like. One day the whole first battalion stripped to shorts and shoes, ran two miles to a lake for a brief swim, and ran back to barracks.

This went on week after week. And then we began to wonder how long it would last and when we would be shipped out to a theater of war. With that came the realization that I might lose my intended if I was gone for long. So, I wrote to Mary and asked her to come down to Fayetteville and marry me. She must have had similar fears, because she wrote with the same idea and our letters crossed in the mail. I managed to rent the ground floor of a small house in the town and arranged for the wedding to be held in the Episcopal Church on August 8, 1942. Meanwhile, I visited regimental headquarters, talked my way by a stuffy staff officer, and invited the colonel to attend. I also invited a few of my buddies. Both sets of parents, plus my two brothers, arrived in time to witness the ceremony. That was followed by a small, very brief party. And we were married. The following morning I hoisted Mary over my shoulder and went out on the front porch to greet our families. Just hours later, they were gone, on their way back to Massachusetts, and married life began.

Mary couldn't cook very well, but we had a lot of Charlotte Russe, which she could cook. And once in a while, we would be joined for dinner by a friend from the regiment. Meanwhile, our training went on. But not for long. Somewhere near the middle of October we got orders to ship out and the regiment assembled at the nearby railroad track, where we said goodbye to friends and family, and boarded the train for a long, long trip to San Francisco.

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Most thought we would end up in Europe. If not, why did they issue us long underwear? The train was slow and all window shades had to be pulled. It was boring, boring, but I did learn to play redeye and lost a few dollars in the process. In about seven days we arrived in San Francisco and were taken to a nearby camp. I don't remember how long we were there, perhaps a night or two, and then were driven to the harbor, where we boarded a Dutch freighter, the Poelau Laut, which would be our home for the next 44 days.

We did not know where we were going, but we were certain it would not be Europe. Instead of heading straight across the Pacific, we sailed to the Panama Canal, where we were boarded by what was to be our second battalion, some 600 men who had been training there in jungle warfare. Then we sailed again, one small ship all alone in the vast Pacific. No escort. The Poelau Laut was not a large ship and it was jammed to the railings with the 503d Parachute Infantry. No room for training beyond exercises and lectures. Each night the vessel would make a large circle and one of the ship's officers would yell out over a loudspeaker, *"You can doomp the garbitch now."* That left a huge circle of garbage behind the vessel so no enemy ship could follow our trail through the waters.



One day when I had no duties I stood by a railing on an upper deck near the ship's officer's cabins. There I was joined by an elderly man who introduced himself as M. Visser, chief engineer of the Poelau Laut. He asked lots of questions about my background and then invited me to his cabin where we continued our talk and a Javanese boy served me a glass of beer. As the trip progressed I thanked God for Mr. Visser. He had a sizable library of paperbacks and I could repair to his cabin whenever I got another kind of cabin fever. By comparison to the crowded quarters offered our officers his cabin was luxurious and, of course, way beyond comparison with the holds where our troops slung their hammocks.

Weeks went by. Then one day we steamed into the harbor at Brisbane, Australia, where we came closer to disaster than at any other time during the crossing. Another ship suddenly moved to cross our bow. It looked for a moment as a collision was inevitable. Bells rang, saxons blew, men shouted. The two captains yelled imprecations at one another like motorists. But we didn't hit and we dropped anchor in the middle of the harbor.

The ship had barely stopped before a crowd of our men jumped over the side and into the water, laughing and yelling and thrashing. No wonder. There was no water aboard for showers. But the sailors were not amused. They screamed at the men to come back aboard; there were sharks in those waters!



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As it turned out, Brisbane was not our destination. We upped anchor and headed North, finally arriving at the town of Cairns in Queensland and debarking there. There was a small delay, though. Australian dockworkers were on strike and there were none available to unload our ship. No problem. Among our troops were men who had operated cranes and done construction work in civilian life. Soon enough all our equipment and supplies were ashore.

The then little town of Gordonvale lies about 12 miles inland from Cairns and just a couple of more miles more were open woods beside a road. That was where we set up our base camp and where we spent some months in training for our eventual entry into combat. The training was rough. We made grueling hikes through the mountainous country nearby. We made parachute jumps. On one or two occasions we engaged in mock warfare with Australian troops. This, too, was the place where I made my first and only free jump. I was working with my platoon when I got a message to report to headquarters. I had, it seemed, "volunteered" to join some other officers in a free parachute jump. So, we boarded a plane at the nearby strip and began circling over a field not far from the camp.

One by one we jumped and I noticed that one lieutenant told others to precede him. Finally, only he and I were left. He told me to go and I went, remembering that I had no static line to pull open my chute and that I had to pull the rip cord handle. Since we had been flying at around 3,000 feet I had plenty of time to enjoy the drop and managed to land close to a small group of officers waiting below. It was fun, but I wondered about the man who told others to go ahead. So far as I know he never jumped and I still wonder what happened to him.

That was the only break in training I recall. On one exercise troops were loaded into a single plane, flown up high near the tableland and told to march back to camp. Because of a problem with the plane my platoon and I were the last to fly. I did not even have a map, so we just started hiking down the mountainside in the dark to where we thought the rest of the troops would be. We were lucky. We found them, sitting around a fire and roasting a pig they'd bought from some farmer.



On another day the whole regiment marched from camp up into the nearby mountains. Hours went by and the miles fell slowly behind us. Once, when we had stopped for a short break, the colonel walked by us on the narrow trail and asked, "How are you doing, Armstrong?" "Fine, sir," I said, although my feet were swollen and sore, but what else could I say? Not so diplomatic was one of my men. "Fuck you, colonel," he said, fortunately not loud enough for the colonel to hear. He knew, as we all did, that the colonel had not accompanied us on the march. He'd ridden in a jeep.

When dawn broke the next day my feet were so swollen I doubted I would be able to walk. Fortunately, we were met by trucks and carried back to camp. Three days of that mountain hiking and stream crossing was enough.

Back to small unit exercises. I had taken my platoon away from camp and up on the side of a small mountain where we set up the mortars and practiced firing -- with no ammunition -- at some other mountains far away. In order to get better vision on the target, I climbed a tree... Disaster.

The branch I stood on broke off and I fell, impaling a thigh on another stub as I dropped. Someone got an ambulance; I don't know how, and I was carried to the little aid station in Gordonvale, where I spent three or four days recovering from my first "wound." One day a few of my men visited me in the hospital and I have never felt so honored.

Some two thousand American soldiers encamped just a couple of miles away could be a problem for the little town of Gordonvale. So our leaders set up a protection program called an interior guard. We erected a tent on the little common in the center of town and our units took turns operating what was, in effect, a military police station. Our turn came and my platoon and I took up temporary station in the town. My men walked patrols in the evening to make sure nothing happened. But something did. A soldier from another company was picked up for throwing rocks at streetlights (and Gordonvale didn't have many of those,) being drunk and disorderly, out of camp without a pass, and out of uniform....



(continued....)



....Two of my men brought him to me in the guard tent. He was obviously very drunk and very combative. Before I could say very much he began insulting me and yelling to all my men that he was going to beat the shit out of me. Up until that point I could have had him escorted back to camp and turned over to his own officers for company punishment. But not now. If he got away with that behavior, what effect would that have on the discipline of my own men? So, guards took him back to camp and turned him in at the stockade, a kind of regimental jail. A few days later I preferred charges and he was sentenced to six months in the stockade and the loss of two-thirds of his pay.

Several months later I ran into him again. We were on leave and had traveled to the city of Townsville for what the army calls rest and recreation. Again he was drunk and followed me into the restroom of our hotel and once more offered to beat the shit out of me. But this time and this situation were different. I ignored it and him and I never saw him again. But I have always been grateful that he was not in my company or my platoon. Fortunately, I never had any problems like that with my own men.

Indeed sometimes they went out of their way to avoid trouble. On one exercise we marched for hours in the hot Australian sun, loaded with full equipment. One man, a short fellow named Tallent, was carrying, in addition to his regular stuff, a mortar vest. This consisted of a piece of canvas with a hole for the head and three deep pockets front and back. Each pocket held a large cardboard tube containing a mortar shell. Total weight, some 43 pounds.

As we pounded along through the dust and the heat I could see that Tallent was struggling with his load and I became concerned. So I offered to carry the mortar vest for a while. *"Oh, no thanks, lieutenant, I can handle it."* After several similar exchanges I gave up, knowing that nothing less than a direct order would force him to surrender the load. It wasn't until the next day that that I learned all those cardboard tubes were empty -- no shells! No wonder he didn't want to give me the vest.



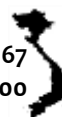
When did we finally leave Australia for New Guinea? I don't remember. But I do remember that was the beginning of my greatest adventure in the service. We set up camp near Port Moresby, then the only place in New Guinea with any pretensions of civilization -- and not many of them I think there was only one, permanent building in the place and that was the governor's mansion. We lived in tents, of course, and carried on with the same kinds of training we had in Australia, lots of tactical exercises and climbs up nearby mountains and some live firing exercises.

This went on until the day I was summoned to regimental headquarters. There I was introduced to a very well set-up Australian lieutenant who greeted me with the words, *"So this is the body basher!"* He knew more than I about the purpose of the introduction. The field officer who introduced us explained that the Aussie was an artillery man and I had about two weeks to teach him and his 28-or-so soldiers how to jump out of airplanes and figure out how to drop their two 25-pounder guns to the ground.



Every morning thereafter a truck delivered my Aussies to camp for training. Fortunately, I had two excellent sergeants to help me. The conditions were pretty primitive and so was the equipment. We built a small platform under a tree and hung a parachute from a branch above. Of course, we tortured our students with physical exercises and speed marches, hoping primarily to build strength in the legs to withstand landings....

(continued....)



....Then we hung them in the parachute harness and taught them how to maneuver by pulling on the risers. Meanwhile, our riggers were figuring out ways to bundle the cannon so they could be parachuted. The Aussies were tough and willing and I soon became good friends with their leader and his two or three fellow officers.

It seemed that we had hardly started the training when I was informed that they were to make a practice jump. By this time they all knew how to don a parachute and all were equipped with American steel helmets. Australian helmets, with their sharp brims, were not suitable. They all had made jumps off the low platform we had built and practiced limited maneuvering while suspended in the harness. Ready or not, we had our orders.



I'm sure they were scared, but all faced the jump with considerable courage. We emplaned at a nearby field and took off. To my surprise we were accompanied by a few high ranking officers, including a General Vasey of the Australian army. It was apparent that higher ups in both armies regarded this as an important experiment.

Once over the designated target, a cleared strip in the jungle, I stood my Aussies, ordered them to hook up to the cable and stand in the door. Then the command to "Go!" Every man flew out the door and all but one landed safely. The exception was a lieutenant who broke his leg on landing. The big guns were dropped from a following plane, but not with perfect results. One was damaged enough so that it could not be moved around. Nonetheless, the operation was a success. My orders were clear. When we went into combat, it would be my job to get these men safely on the ground.

Not long after the trial run we faced the reality of a mission. The target was a place in the jungle called Nadzab. It was about 20 miles inland of Lae, a major Japanese facility. September 5, 1943. Plane after plane filled with paratroopers took off from airstrips near Moresby. In one of those planes were my Aussie artillerymen, four officers and 28 men.

I learned later that Generals Kenney and MacArthur flew overhead in B-17s to witness the operation, and the number of planes in the air set a record. I was supposed to drop the Aussies about an hour after the regiment landed, so my planes stopped for a while at a place called Dobodura. I hadn't been told that was a

scheduled part of the operation, so I fussed and steamed until we were finally permitted to take off.

We arrived at the drop zone, a huge field of grass, and our pilots dropped down to somewhere between 400 and 600 feet. I had no exact idea of our destination, but as we neared the end of the field and the green light was on, I gave the command to go. Nothing to it. Every man leaped from the plane and the 25-pounders were dropped from the following C-47. I did not jump -- not then. I had chores, consisting of circling around the field and throwing out equipment needed by our troopers and Australian engineering troops below. The engineers had marched overland to the site and it would be their job to restore the long-abandoned airstrip in the field so Australian infantry could be flown in.

When I finally jumped, as close to my artillerymen as I could, I found myself in a sea of kunai grass, sharp-edged grass six or seven feet high. Or maybe more. I found that I could get through it only by falling forward and pressing it down with my body.

Eventually I reached my Aussies, happily sitting around in the shade of jungle trees at the end of the field, their cannon already recovered. How they managed that I never found out.

I had received no orders to rejoin my own company, so I spent the next 11 days or so loafing around with the artillery. Actually, we had nothing to do. There were no Japs in the area; hence, no fighting. Some units of the 503d did run into firefights, but nowhere near our location. The only injury received by the Aussies was a skinned nose. A last-minute replacement for the officer who had broken his leg in the practice jump had been equipped with an ill-fitting American helmet which tilted forward with the opening shock and peeled a bit of skin off his nose.

With nothing to do, I became impatient and one day walked off alone down a trail toward the coast, passing one of our outlying guard posts on the way. After a mile or two I became uncertain of my safety and turned back. Within moments I heard the roar of engines and an American bomber passed close over my head, raining down 50-caliber cartridge casings from its guns as it swept the area with fire. It took a moment to realize that those were casings and not bullets and I was not a target.

For me the operation was over. I read later that more planes were in the air the day of our jump than ever before. We were very well protected. And I was never in any serious danger.

(continued....)



Two books published after the war briefly covered my own part in the operation, not because of the danger, but because this was the first time any Australians made a combat parachute jump. (The books were *Paratrooper*, by Gerard M. Devlin, St. Martin's Press, 1979, pages 260 and 264, and *Geronimo*, by William B. Breuer, St. Martin's Press, 1989, page 104.)

It was time to leave. Planes loaded with paratroopers were taking off from the newly restored strip. John, my Aussie friend, had found a motorcycle somewhere and drove me to the strip. I was in greater danger then than at any time during the mission, bouncing around on the rear fender as we careened over potholes and ruts, my rifle and equipment flying wildly in the air. I think that was one of the last planes to leave. My Aussies rejoined their 7th Australian Division and proceeded up the coast; I was sorry to leave them; they were a great bunch of men.

Back at our base camp in Australia things went on much as before. Those of us who had joined the outfit back in America found ourselves promoted to first lieutenant. Many went on leave and I was able to make a brief visit to Sydney, the nation's biggest city. I regret to say that I did not frequent any museums or other cultural attractions, but I did get to know some of the better watering holes. Meanwhile, we learned that our commanding officer, Colonel Kinsler, committed suicide. The regiment had been visited by the Inspector General and he received many complaints about the outfit. Perhaps the colonel received serious criticism about some aspect or aspects of his performance as commanding officer. We never knew.

Before we left for our second visit to New Guinea, I got sick with a very painful bladder infection. It got worse and by the time we reached the island I had to go to a hospital, where I spent a few weeks of mainly ineffective treatment. But I did begin to improve and eventually rejoined the outfit, which by this time was engaging in clean-up actions along the coast. I was still sickly and did not participate.

Within a few weeks it was time to go back to work. Our mission this time was to jump on a sandy airstrip on the coast of an island named Noemfoor. Our job: reinforce an infantry outfit already in place and bogged down by Japanese resistance. This jump was not as easy as the one at Nadzab. Our train of planes circled in from the sea and flew down beach. But they flew too low and many were the injuries and broken legs from rough landings. Many jumped as low as 200 feet and their chutes did not have time to open properly. But we still had a job to do and we began it with a series of patrols and probes into the surrounding jungle. This was the first time that many of us actually faced enemy

fire. My mortars were not of much use; we had no visibility at all on possible targets. Nonetheless, we were ready.

Noemfoor was not a large island, perhaps 14 or 15 miles across, all of it rough terrain, forested with almost impenetrable jungle, and heavily populated by poisonous snakes, stinging vines, land crabs, aggressive mosquitos, and other unpleasant inhabitants. Not to mention the heat. Even when it didn't rain, which was not often, our dark green coveralls were almost always soaking wet from sweat. We never wore our fancy polyurethane jump suits. They were totally unfit for this climate.

I think the value of the island lay in its possible future use as a base for aircraft which would attack Japan. The enemy themselves had used it for planes and there still were aviation fuel dumps near the former airfield. Indeed, we found some of that gasoline pretty handy for heating coffee and field rations.

For a few days my platoon had no serious duties. They had some time to rest. Once, when I had been off on some mission or other I came back to our area to find that my guys had dug a slit trench for me. A slit trench was about the safest place to sleep. Just the same, I always kept my machete and trench knife handy, just in case some overbold Jap crept up in the night.

To prevent that very thing we established a ring of sentinels around the camp, two men to a foxhole, there to warn and help stop any incursion. My platoon got the job one night. By this time we had received several replacements, men who were new to us and new to combat. When I lined up my platoon prior to taking our positions, I went down the ranks, checking each soldier for readiness and equipment. I stopped before one of these new replacements and looked him over. He was armed with a pistol, which he held pointed upward, the proper position for inspection. When I moved to the next man he pointed the pistol down and pulled the trigger. The damn thing was loaded, with a round in the chamber. All hell broke loose, heads popping out of tents all over the area....



(continued....)



....*"Stand fast!"* I yelled at my own men and they did. Luckily, no one was hurt. I told the boy — and that was what he was -- to step out of the formation. I never saw him again; perhaps he was assigned to kitchen duty. Perhaps he was a fine young man, but I could not afford to take chances with his inexperience.

This was just a minor interruption in the daily patrols into the jungle carried on by our rifle units. Somewhat to my surprise, my platoon was picked for one of these and it was led by our company executive officer. We left our mortars behind and hiked off into the forest armed with our rifles and grenades. Behind the scouts we had out front came the exec and the platoon. I brought up the rear. We had been hiking down a trail for an hour or two when I heard firing break out at the front and rushed forward to see what was happening. We had run smack into a unit of Japanese soldiers coming toward us on the same trail. It was what the military manuals call a "meeting engagement," in short, an accidental encounter. Our lead scout, armed with a tommy gun, had performed beautifully, killing some of the enemy. Unhappily, we lost some of our best men in the first seconds, including a former platoon sergeant and a corporal. A second sergeant was badly wounded.

The exec ordered me to take a squad around the left flank, which I did, laying down a fire line when we reached our position. We were at a junction of three trails and the enemy had taken cover in the woods behind one which ran across our front. Firing continued. I could hear Japanese voices, but could see nothing. I stood for a better look and belatedly realized the little twigs and branches falling around my head were caused by bullets. Eventually the firing died away and we departed, stopping only long enough to bury our two dead and make a stretcher for the wounded sergeant.

Two or three days later my company commander told me to go back to the scene of the firefight, bring back the bodies of the two men we had buried, and turn them over to graves registration at the beach. Reluctantly, graves registration let us have two stretchers and we set out. Exhuming those two bodies was not fun. Despite being wrapped in ponchos they were already crawling with maggots and the smell was awful.



The scene of our little battle was unchanged. Japanese bodies lay where they had fallen and I was pleased to see that we had killed about 20. Even a few weapons had been left, one of which was a light machine gun. On the way back to the beach we ran into the colonel and some of his aides. He asked me if I had seen any good place for a permanent camp and, not in the most diplomatic of moods, I told him the best place would be near the beach, where the men could at least go for a swim. I also offered the opinion that a truck would be a big help in getting my dead men back to the beach. And surprise, surprise, he radioed for a truck to meet us where the track became a road. And we turned over the bodies to graves registration.

Those were good men. One, the former platoon sergeant, was an intelligent but independent minded young man. Whenever I asked him how things were going he would answer, *"Mediocre, lieutenant, mediocre."* And when I came to him as he lay dying just off the trail and asked how he was, he said *"Mediocre, lieutenant."* A little later we wrapped him in a poncho and buried him and the corporal who had died in a shallow grave. Sergeant Lassiter, the one wounded man, was placed on a crude stretcher and we carried him back to the shore and medical attention. I never saw him again.

That was our first real firefight. Later, the 503d moved deeper up the coast of Noemfoor, engaging in small actions along the way as we sought to eliminate Japanese resistance. I had been sick again when I rejoined the outfit at some unnamed place on the shore. Half of my platoon had moved further up the coast in support of infantry action and I was told to join them. Unhappily, I was not in time to go in a small landing craft and started hiking the few miles between the two positions. With me were two men of my platoon, both good soldiers. The trail we followed was on top of a ridge lying above surrounding jungle. At one point I called for a short break -- more stomach problems. But at the same time I thought I saw movement in a small clump of grass at the edge of the trail where the ridge descended into heavy growth below, and decided to investigate. Big mistake.

Instead of taking my guys with me I told them to stay put and I would check it out. I moved slowly and with caution down into the forest, carbine ready. I didn't have to go far. Just as I bent over, searching the ground ahead, I was hit in the chest. It felt like I had been punched with a red hot iron....

(continued....)



....But it didn't knock me down and simultaneous with the blow I saw an enemy soldier lying down perhaps a hundred feet further down the slope. Firing from the hip I squeezed off four or five shots and then, the hardest thing in my life, I managed to get my weapon up to my shoulder and gave him three or four aimed rounds.



That was it for me. I yelled for my guys, but I could no longer stand and sank to the ground. Moving cautiously, they checked to make sure my Jap was dead and finally reached me. By this time I was in great pain. Fortunately, we carried individual morphine shots with us and a needle in my arm brought some peace. In truth, it brought moments of unconsciousness.

Later, borne on a stretcher, I finished the trip to rejoin half of my platoon and was loaded on a landing craft for the trip around the island to a field hospital. I remember little of that brief voyage except that I was very thirsty most of the time when I was conscious. When I awoke at the hospital, just a collection of tents and cots, I was on an operating table, where I greeted the surgeon and passed out again. The bullet had passed all the way through my body, entering just to the left of my heart, nicking a lung and exiting through a scapula in my back. When I got a bit better they sat me on the edge of my cot and the doctor inserted a long needle in my back and pumped fluid out of a lung. The procedure was repeated later after I had been transferred to a more permanent hospital somewhere else, but this time in a well-equipped operating room.

Eventually I recovered enough to walk a little and I boarded a hospital ship for the return to the States. It took a lot less time to return than it did to sail over -- something like ten days as compared to 43. Then followed a train trip to Washington and another hospital, this one Walter Reed. Prior to arrival I had sent telegrams to Mary at every stop, telling her present location and reporting progress. She had found a room at the Willard Hotel and, somewhat to my surprise, hospital authorities said I could go there to meet her.

The Willard is a large old hotel, one with long corridors on each floor. I walked down one of these until I came to her room. I stared for a moment at the number on the door, then walked back to the elevator. Not hesitant, not uncertain. I just wanted to savor every second of our reunion. And when I knocked and she came to the door and I held her in my arms for the first time in more than two years, it was all worthwhile. I was home.

But all was not perfect. Not for me, at least. The hospital let me travel to Massachusetts for a few days with Mary's family. I was not cured. Once again I suffered from a bladder infection and had to return to Walter Reed in some pain. Eventually, after days of misery in bed, I was given spinal anesthesia and a doctor introduced silver nitrate to my bladder. Once the anesthesia wore off I was again in agony. But it didn't last forever and the army sent me to the Grove Park Inn in North Carolina for ten or so days of rest and recreation. Then we went to another recuperation facility on Long Island.

I was finally returned to duty at Fort Bolting. That did not last long. Came a telegram from Washington ordering my presence at the War Office. There I got my orders; Go to Camp Campbell, Ky., with a few enlisted men with some communications experience and make the surrounding towns and cities offer a hearty welcome to the members of the 5th Division who were returning from Europe. This was the best duty ever. Mary and I lived in quarters for visiting officers and were served great meals at a mess operated by Italian prisoners of war. Once a month I reported progress to my boss in Washington. No one bothered me. My crew and I had little difficulty persuading people to make the troops of the 5th Division feel welcome. Of course it was too good to last.

In a phone conversation my boss said he wanted me to go to California to do a similar job for a corps returning from Europe. Uh uh. I wanted out. There soon would be thousands upon thousands of discharged soldiers and sailors who would be looking for jobs. I wanted an early start. By the then-used point system I had enough credits to get a discharge from the army. I got it. So I took my Purple Heart and brand new captain's bars and said goodbye to military service. After some five years in uniform I was a civilian once more. And damn happy to be there.

Robert W. Armstrong died Sept. 5, 2012, at the age of 95.

Source: 503rd PRCT Heritage Bn. Courtesy Paul Whitman



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~ Reunions of the Airborne Kind 2016/2017 ~



~ 2016 ~



Currahee Reunion. May 11-14, 2016 the 506th Association will be holding its 2016 Currahee Reunion in Clarksville, TN.

Contact:

Phn: 931-552-3331



Alpha Avengers 2016 Reunion, New Orleans, LA May 12-15. All members of 2/319th & 2/11th Arty from FB Airborne are welcome to attend.

Contact:

Ken Counts @ 504-343-8393



187th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 47th Commemorative and Reunion "Hamburger Hill", Clarksville, TN, May 16-20, 2016.

Contact:

Phn: 877-487-4837 or 931-552-3331



D/16th Armor Reunion, 173d Airborne Brigade, Ft. Benning, GA, June 4-6, 2016.

Contact:

Web: www.d16armor173rd.org/reunion-2016.html



173d Airborne Brigade Association Annual Reunion, "Back to the Beginning", hosted by South Carolina Chapter 30, June 7-10, 2016, Ft. Benning, GA.

Contact:

Phn: 803-237-3169

Eml: bowway@aol.com

Web: 173dreunion2016.com



501st Parachute Infantry Regiment Association 40th Reunion, Erlanger, KY, June 8-12, 2016.

Contact:

Phn: 1-855-639-8422



2016 SFA Convention, Special Forces Association, June 12-19, 2016, Jacksonville, Florida.

Contact:

SFA Chapter 88

Phn: 904-993-1211

Web: SFA88@sfachapter88.org



USARA Annual Ranger Muster 2016, July 11-17, 2016, Columbus, GA.

Contact Web:

www.ranger.org/Annual-Ranger-Muster-2016



101st Airborne, 71st Annual Reunion, Norfolk, VA, August 17-21, 2016.

Contact:

Web: screamingeagles.org



187th ARCT "Rakkasan's" Reunion, Kansas City, MO, September 12-18, 2016.

Contact:

Web: www.rakkasan.net/reunion.html



Airborne OCS Reunion, 66 Company – Officers Candidate School Class 20-69, San Antonio, September 29 to October 2, 2016 at the Hyatt Regency, San Antonio Riverwalk.

Contact:

Phn: 210-222-1234

~ 2017 ~



3rd Brigade LRRP, 101st Airborne Division Reunion, March 15-18, 2017, Fort Benning, GA.

Contact:

Dr. Rick Shoup

Phn: 978-505-3253 or 978-371-7108

Eml: rfs.concord@gmail.com



Firebase Airborne Reunion, May 12-14, 2017, Nashville, TN.

Contact:

<http://beardedarmenian.wix.com/fsbairborne>



11th Airborne Division Association Reunion, to held in Boulder, CO. Date to be named.

NOTE:

If you are aware of any upcoming "Airborne" or attached unit reunions, please send complete details to rto173d@cfl.rr.com for inclusion in our newsletter.

*"And in the third week,
the fools jumped!"*



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~ In Memory of Our 173d & 503d Buddies Who Took Their Final Jump ~

Bobby Cordova, C/4/503 passed away on March 3, 2016. No man was ever so loved. He served in the 173rd Airborne Unit during the Vietnam conflict. He was awarded the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart and the National Defense Service Medal for the valor he exhibited during battle. Bobby chaffed at the title of hero but, to all that knew him, he was. A flag was flown in his honor at the U.S. Capitol.



John Elbert Cruse, 69, of Bunnell, FL, died Wednesday, February 24, 2016, at Florida Hospital Flagler in Palm Coast, FL of complications of the flu and pneumonia. John was born on January 30, 1947 in Colville, WA. John entered the US Army in February 1965 and served until February 1968. He reentered the Army in 1969, serving until February 1979. He achieved the rank of Staff Sgt. John served two tours of duty in the Republic of Viet Nam as a member of the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Sky Soldiers). He earned the Bronze Star twice, Vietnam Service Medal, Combat Infantry Badge, Parachute Badge, National Defense Service Medal and Good Conduct Medal. He was always so proud of his service to his Country.

Mr. Robert Edward Grace Sr. March 1, 1923 – February 14, 2016 (Age 92). Mr. Grace was born on March 1, 1923 and passed away on Sunday, February 14, 2016. Mr. Grace was a resident of North Little Rock, Arkansas at the time of his passing. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for serving his country in World War II and was part of the U.S. Army 503rd Airborne Parachute infantry that dropped and overtook the island of Corregidor in the Philippines on February 16, 1945.



Norman W. Jenkins Sr.

Sep, 26, 1947 – Jan. 22, 2016. Norman received his education in Baltimore. He was a graduate of Paul Laurence Dunbar High School. He was a member of Pleasant Hope Baptist Church. Norman enlisted in the U.S. Army in October of 1966. He proudly served his country and was honorably discharged. He received a Purple Heart, Combat INF, and was a member special service 173rd Airborne Unit and 75th Rangers.



Michael R. Johnson, June 10, 1948-Feb. 2, 2016. Longtime Ninilchik resident Michael R. Johnson, 67, died Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2016, at his home from natural causes. He also received education in the military and had served as a chaplain. He served in the U.S. Army 173rd Airborne from 1966. He served two tours in Vietnam and also in Germany and Seattle. He was awarded two Purple Hearts, the Vietnamese Medal of Honor and the President's Commendation.

Francis Michael Kanicki, age 70, from Palmyra, NJ passed away in the comfort of his home on Thursday, January 28, 2016. Mr. Kanicki was born and raised in Camden, NJ and had lived in Delran, NJ before moving to Palmyra. Francis served his country honorably in the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team within the United States Army. He also spent many years proudly serving Mount Laurel as a patrolman.

P. Donald Kauffman, 69, born September 11th, 1946, of Denver, died Sunday, January 3, 2016 at Reading Hospital & Medical Center. He is survived by his wife of 48 years, Bonnie F. (Miller) Kauffman. Born in Lancaster, he was the son of Marian E. (Getz) Kauffman of New Holland and the late Phares B. Kauffman. Don served in the U. S. Army during the Vietnam War, serving with the 173rd Airborne. He was a member of the Charles E Ludwig Post 7362 Veterans of Foreign Wars, New Holland.

David W. Klutts, 1949-2016. Born May 28, 1949, David died peacefully on Valentine's Day surrounded by his loving family. David proudly served in the 173rd Airborne "Sky Soldiers" Brigade Combat Team.



"Let us not forget"
*"They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn,
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We shall remember them"*

(sadly continued....)



David Tavaréz Lauriano, 68, was born on September 29, 1947 and was called home on March 1, 2016 in Katy, Texas. He was a veteran of the Vietnam War, and proudly served in the U.S. Army with the 173rd Airborne Brigade and was awarded several medals, including the Bronze Star, Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and the Vietnam Campaign Medal. He went to Fox Tech in San Antonio, Texas. He attended San Antonio College and the University of Houston.



Thomas "Tupu" Lloyd Lesemann, 67, of Pike River, died Saturday, Jan. 2, 2016, at his residence. Thomas was born Aug. 18, 1948, in Big Fork, Minn., to Elmer and Dorothy (Hamilton) Lesemann. He graduated from school in Embarrass prior to being drafted into the U.S. Army. He served in Vietnam with the 173rd Airborne Brigade as a paratrooper.

John Michael Morgan, age 69, loving father and devoted husband, passed away at his home in Harriman, on January 26, 2016, after a five year battle with colon and liver cancer. He was born on September 27, 1946, in Augusta, Georgia. He served in the US Army during the Vietnam War as a Sergeant and a Specialist in Company E, 1st Battalion 173rd Airborne, 503 Infantry. He was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in action and the Bronze Star Medal for Meritorious Achievement in Ground Operations.



Felix Aguilar Pascua, Jr., 68 of Henderson, NV, passed away in Henderson, NV. He was born in Dingras, Ilocos Norte, Philippines. A U.S. Army Vietnam War veteran, part of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, sky soldiers. Longtime resident of Waipahu.



James Elliot Peterson, 93, died March 28, 2016, at Mississippi Baptist Medical Center in Jackson. Mr. Peterson was born June 5, 1922, in Grove City, MN. He was an Army veteran of World War II and the Korean War. During World War II, he served as a Lt. Colonel in the 503rd Parachute Infantry Reg. and in Korea in the 2nd Infantry Division, ASTP. During his time in the service, he received the Bronze Star, the Silver Star, and the Purple Heart.



John "Jack" Joseph Reed Jr, 68 years old of Leominster, died Wednesday, January 27, 2016 surrounded by family and friends in Health Alliance Leominster Hospital. Jack was born April 17, 1947 in West Chester PA. Jack was a US Army Veteran of the Vietnam War and a proud member of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. He entered the service in 1965 and was honorably discharged a SSG in 1974. He received the National Defense Service Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Commendation Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Parachutist Badge and the Purple Heart.



Raymond Earl Reynolds, 77, of Brownstown passed away Sunday, Jan. 10, 2016, at his home. Born Oct. 20, 1938, in Brownstown, he was the son of Orville and Alga Goodpaster Reynolds, both of whom preceded him in death. He served 20 years in the U.S. Army, retiring as Master Sergeant E-8. He survived two tours in Vietnam and was a member of the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Sky Soldiers) and an explosive ordnance disposal specialist.

Victor J. Rivera Jr., 70, of Las Vegas, passed away peacefully March 14, 2016, after a brief illness. Victor served in the U.S. Army 173rd Air Borne Brigade in Vietnam.



(sadly continued....)



Thomas R. Simmons, 65, formerly of Fillmore, recently passed away in Oregon where he had lived for several years. Thomas enlisted as a paratrooper in the 173rd Airborne Division in 1969 and did a tour of duty in Vietnam. Posted: 3/4/16



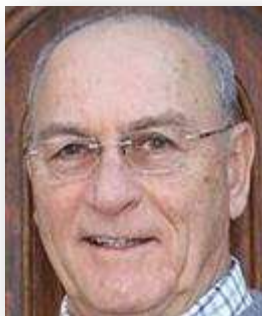
Joseph L. Skladzien, 66, of Hanover Township, lost his battle to lung cancer on Thursday, March 17, 2016. A veteran of the Vietnam War, Joseph was proud to serve his country in the U.S. Army as an Airborne Ranger in the 173rd Airborne Brigade from 1969-75.



Mark Springstead, age 64, of North Branch died March 1, 2016 at University of Minnesota Medical Center. Mark was born December 27, 1951 in Bowling Green, Ohio. He was very proud to serve his country. He joined the Army and was an Airborne Ranger 173rd in Vietnam. While in the military he earned many awards and medals of honor and was a wounded combat veteran. He took pride in being a marksman



Ronald C. Theobald, 72, peacefully passed away Thursday, Feb. 4, 2016, at home surrounded by family and his beloved dog, Libby. Ron was born Feb. 18, 1943, in Galesburg. He enlisted in the United States Army where he was a combat veteran in Vietnam with the 82nd Airborne, 173rd Brigade, from 1962-1965.



William R. Whealy, CW4 Ret. July 15, 1944 - March 5, 2016. At the age of 71, Bill passed away peacefully surrounded by his family on March 5, 2016 following major surgery. In 1965, while working in Germany, Bill was drafted, returned to Canada and the US, completed boot camp then Airborne School at Ft. Benning, Georgia and was assigned to the 173rd Airborne in Vietnam. While serving in the war, Bill was honored to drive General William C. Westmoreland during his command.



Dennis Wai Tien Young, 70, of Honolulu, an Army veteran who served in the Vietnam War with the 173rd Airborne Brigade long range reconnaissance patrol, died in Kaneohe. He was born in Honolulu. He is survived by sons Bradney E. Young and Corey D., daughters Denise K. Young and Sonya K. Young Harris, brother Wesley W.K., sisters Cynthia B.N. Chun and Kareen B.S. Milo, and eight grandchildren.

~ Rest Easy Brothers ~

Just A Common Soldier

He was just a common soldier
and his ranks are growing thin,
But his presence should remind us
we may need his likes again.
For when countries are in conflict,
then we find the soldier's part,
Is to clean up all the troubles
that the politicians start.

If we cannot do him honor
while he's here to hear the praise,
Then at least let's give him homage
at the ending of his days.
Perhaps just a simple headline
in a paper that would say,
Our Country is in mourning,
for a soldier died today.

Excerpt:
by A. Lawrence Vaincourt

