



2/503d VIETNAM Newsletter

August 2009 / Issue 4

For the men, and their families, of the 2d Battalion, 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep) ~ We Try Harder!

SSG Larry Pierce Memorial Highway

The State of California will be Dedication the SSG Larry Stanley Pierce Memorial Highway on Monday, September 14, 2009, at 1000 hours in Wasco, CA. SSG Pierce received the Medal of Honor while serving with HHC 1/503d, and he is buried in Wasco, CA. Please forward this info to other members of the 1/503d. Contact person at the City of Wasco, CA, is: Mr. Danny Brown and his email is: dabrown@CL.WASCO.CA.US.

Jarad Montie (MOH) KIA

Jarad will be awarded the Medal of Honor and it will be presented to his mother on September 17, 2009. He was a friend of Barb and me back in 1999, and then we lost track of him. We were shocked when we found out that he was killed in action. There will be an article written about him in our next Newsletter (South Carolina 173d Chapter). He was and is loved and he will be missed.

We spoke to his mother in order to lend her support. Barb also found his father and e-mailed him too. Barb is attempting to see if we can attend the award ceremony at the White House. I believe she's attempting to contact the President to see if she or I can attend. Keep your fingers crossed for this attempt. Much love from both of us.

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

Our Newsletter

Please send all stories, opinions and other submissions, including photos (JPEG), to rtol73d@cfl.rr.com This Newsletter will be issued periodically. If you do not wish to receive the Newsletter please send a note to the above email address. *Airborne!*

A Little Ditty About Vet Health Care

As a disabled veteran, the local VA clinic here in Florida sent me to a nearby neurosurgeon to diagnose problems I was having with my lower back. Turns out there are two herniated disks back there which need tending to – there are countless Sky Soldiers with this same problem -- Messrs. Fleming and Sturges, I'm thinking of you.

This surgeon, who looked like Elvis Presley with all the baubles and bangles he was wearing, was hard selling me on the needed operation – his new Beemer out front did need a waxing. It turns out the VA will cover his radical procedure which includes implanting a screw in my spine, at a cost to the VA of upwards of \$150,000., he told us. The VA, however, does not cover the less invasion, dramatically less expensive and newer, outpatient laser procedure he was offering, at a mere \$50,000., he said.

Not trusting this particular doctor, based more on his sales tactics than his appearance, my wife and I went on a search and find mission for the laser option offered by others. We found a local doctor laser expert who accepts Medicare, Eureka! And, the cost is only \$30,000. Now we're getting somewhere, my wife and I thought.

He added, while Medicare covers much of the operation, there will be a "facilities usage fee" which we must absorb. Thinking it might be a couple thousand dollars which we could pull together, we were close to signing up. "How much is that?", my wife asked. "Seventeen-thousand dollars," he said. We said "thanks" and hung up. That must be one hellofa facility.



So here I remain, sitting at this computer working on our next newsletter with pain shooting down my ass and legs while sucking down pain pills to get thru the day.

When I can no longer walk, perhaps then I'll give Elvis a call. Maybe he'll throw in a song or two, or at least dinner and a movie with the screw he's gonna give me.

On a more serious note, there's a deeper more meaningful story here, of course. Many of us are fortunate to have access to VA medical care, while others have some form of medical insurance. What about many of the 46 MILLION other Americans who have no care whatsoever because it's just not affordable? I'm sure some of you or someone you know fall into that category. *We've got ours, let them eat cake?*

I suspect the CEO of one of the largest medical care firms in the U.S., whose total compensation package earns him over \$100,000. per hour (yes, per hour), has good, free medical care, as do many of our elected officials. It's nice to see people out there protesting a government-sponsored health care system for all, to protect the obscene profits of these companies; I mean, that CEO has to eat too.

Smitty Out

Opinion

Thanks for your reasoned rebuttal to the Obama critic (Issue 3, Page 7). I too am thoroughly disgusted with the vitriolic attacks upon our President.

I hoped that after his overwhelming victory, all Americans would unite to attempt to solve the greatest economic crisis of our lifetime. A crisis, I might add, that was primarily caused by the policies of the previous administration. An administration, who I regret to admit, I helped to vote into office for their first term. By the end of their first term, I was so disillusioned by both major political parties and the direction they were taking this country that I registered with the Independent Party.

My fondest hope is that all these bigots and critics utilize the considerable time and energy they expend on negative innuendo, and enter into constructive dialogue. After all, we are all Americans. Thanks.

John Kirk, 1/503d

Operation Silver City

On March 16, 1966, the 2d Bat came under attack by the 271st Main Force Regiment of the Viet Cong, heavily reinforced by North Vietnamese soldiers, at a small clearing in the jungle of War Zone "D". The VC referred to this place as Bau San, the cabasa swamp. Sky Soldiers who were there that morning know it as LZ Zulu-Zulu. The surrounded battalion came out victorious after fighting the enemy for over five hours in what was nearly hand-to-hand combat. In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson awarded the battalion and attached units the *Presidential Unit Citation* for bravery during combat actions. From the story, *The Battle at Bau San*, here are some recollections of some of those brave Sky Soldiers who were there.....



2/503d ready to load choppers at Bien Hoa Airbase for Operation Silver City. Photo by Tom Goodwin

(On the use of "airmobility" during Operation Silver City) *"It was the first time we used the method for everything, assaults, artillery placement, resupply, reinforcements and maneuver. It really worked for us. It was our most successful action."*

John Walsh

"I want to thank Lewis Wingfield for the day he saved my life, March 14th or 15th, 1966. He crawled over to me, looked me right in my face, stopped me from going where I was going and said, 'They are killing 'em up there'. The next day, March 16th, I'll never forget that day. It started out with us walking





through camp getting ready to go out. Then a helicopter was shot down. I killed more people that day than I care to remember. That was the day Jody got the tripod shot on his M-60." **Hassan Farlan**

"The point squads of the battalion's four columns had to slowly hack their way through the dense vegetation with machetes. This limited the battalion's progress to between 200 and 300 meters an hour and required the point squad to be rotated hourly to prevent the men from becoming exhausted." **Tom Faley**



"The Battalion was following the B-52 strikes that had knocked the tops off of the trees in this triple-canopy jungle. The trees were growing taller as we progressed to the northeast. As the canopy raised, the undergrowth was decreasing offering better fields of fire for the NVA/VC."

Bob Carmichael



"I was there on 13 March as part of Operation Silver City. I was part of the small party that walked into the base camp and was surrounded by the VC. We were part of a security party after getting resupplied. Somehow, we got ahead of the main element of the Battalion and walked right into the

middle of the VC camp. We were able to hold off until B Company was able to get to us. Lt. Tabb had been killed and I was wounded when we began to pull back into our lines. I spent some time in the Saigon hospital until I was able to be shipped back to Letterman Hospital in San Francisco for another 6 months."

Art Martinez

"A fierce exchange of fire erupted, with the Viet Cong obviously holding the long end of the stick, shooting from their well-prepared positions. All we had to hide behind were the trees which the jungle fortunately had in sufficient supply in order to offer minimal protection to each of us. I had found cover for me and my M60 machine gun behind a pretty sturdy and thick trunk. To my right, if I remember correctly, was "Stevie P" Steets, to my left, I made out our buddy Marvyn Hudson with his M79 grenade launcher." **Herbert Murhammer**

"I was in the ambush when Sgt. Butler, Marvin Harper and the young E-5, who had only been in the company a few weeks, were killed. I believe that the most difficult aspect of being a combat surviving soldier is to remember the last moments shared with your friends. Bonds developed in combat are intensely strong and could never be understood by REMF's or civilians."

Larry Cox

"I remember going through the bomb craters and then coming up to a large clearing where we recon'd by fire. We moved ahead and then came upon an enemy camp where rice was still cookin'. We then moved out again. Shortly after that we set-up a night perimeter at what we later learned was LZ Zulu-Zulu."



Mike Sturges

"The only clear signs of recent enemy activity were numerous sharpened long poles erected as helicopter obstacles, but these were quickly knocked down."



2/503 arrive LZ Zulu-Zulu on 15 Mar 66.

Photo by Wayne Hoitt

"On March 16, 1966, during Operation Silver City at landing zone Zulu-Zulu in the heart of War Zone "D", one U.S. paratroop battalion suddenly found itself surrounded by a reinforced enemy regiment. At the end of the fiercely fought five-hour battle, although out Numbered 3-to-1, the paratroopers could claim one of



the most significant victories in the war. As the March 25, 1966, issue of *Time* magazine noted, 'The Airborne won with fewer casualties and more enemy dead than any major engagement of the war to date'. Company commanders were briefed by the battalion S-3, Major Willard Christensen, on the next day's operation. At 0800 hours,

Alpha and Charlie Companies, minus their weapons platoons, would sweep to the southwest and northwest, respectively.

Headquarters and Bravo companies would defend the LZ.

The battalion settled down into defensive positions for the evening, placing out two and three-man listening posts,

emplacing interlocking machine-guns and Claymore mine patterns, digging shallow fighting positions and registering indirect fires. The night passed with only one incident: the VC fired several rounds of 75mm artillery into the clearing, severely wounding two Charlie Company mortarmen; one of them lost the lower half of his legs.... Incredible as it may seem, however, an enemy regiment had moved in during the night without being detected, and surrounded the 2^d Battalion at Zulu-Zulu..... Regardless of how the battle started, it was soon apparent that the 2d Battalion was surrounded by a strong enemy force determined to overrun Zulu-Zulu. ...While we settled in for the night at Zulu-Zulu, the enemy crept in around us. We should have heard them. I don't know why we didn't."

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Tom Faley



Willard Christensen

"At about 0100 a short 105 round, supposedly from the 1st Div. Artillery, landed square in the middle of our LZ, killing one man right off, blowing the legs off one and wounding another; and the rest of the night I lay by my shelter wondering if I would see the light of day."

Bill Vose



"The bursting shells looked pretty in the dead of night in the jungle, but true to form some of our buddies were hit. I was standing working on the radio trying to get a Dust-Off in when something hard knocked me to the ground. I looked around and there was no one near me. I finally realized that it must have been a piece of shrapnel, so I yelled for the medic. Not far off, he quickly found me and used a flashlight with a red night-time filter, to check my back. He said, 'You're O.K., drive on'."

Tom Goodwin



"I remember that morning like yesterday. There were 5 or 6 of us who went on a screening patrol across the platoon front first thing in the morning. I think it was Carl Boutwell, Sgt. Phillips, John Links, Jack Ribera, Mike Sturges and myself. The area was torn up from all the artillery from the night before and it was super quiet out there....we had to be walking all around the enemy."

Jim Gettel



2/503d humping the "D" Zone.

Photo by Tom Goodwin



"On a bright, sunny morning of the 16th of March, I awoke and was greeting the beautiful morning in the jungle while watching a helicopter hovering above the LZ and attempting to land. As this was occurring, gunfire from one side of the landing zone was directed at the chopper. Then gunfire came from another side, then all around us. The chopper was hit and began swaying in mid air from side-to-side. Suddenly, the blades were ripping into the trees, raining branches all over the area. The chopper crashed and the gunfire intensified with our brothers returning fire. We had no idea of the size of the unit that we were engaging, but it was big."



A.B. Garcia

"I certainly don't remember who our squad leaders were or our platoon sergeant, but I do remember Cpl. Beauchamp. No one ever called him Cpl., it was only Beauchamp. Our squad once again was chosen to patrol the perimeter before the rest of the battalion pulled out. Beauchamp and I argued over who would pull point. He only had 45 days left. He had spent a year in-country and I just couldn't see him risking it another time. He, on the other hand, felt like it was his turn, and he did out-rank me, so off we went. About 100 yards out all of a sudden Beauchamp turned a corner; from that moment on all hell broke loose. I thought we had walked into an explosion of an ammunition factory! Every conceivable noise a rifle, machine gun, grenade or rocket launchers could make going off simultaneously, went off. Beauchamp was killed instantly and the rest of us were pinned down."

Robert Toporek

"The first thing I recall was starting to receive a briefing at the east end of the LZ to go back with a patrol to destroy some caches that were left late the previous evening. I didn't notice the helicopter approaching behind me until I heard what I thought at the time was his pulling torque to try to lift up out of the LZ. Now I'm not sure whether it was the popping of the chopper blades or rounds of the heavy machine gun firing on him that caused me to look up directly over my head just in time to see the Huey's tail buckle and watch it take that slow rollover onto its left side and into the trees. The briefing came to an abrupt halt."

John Nix

"The VC gunner had obviously been trained to lead aircraft to shoot them down. The dumb shit didn't realize we weren't moving forward. We were going straight down. He finally broke the code and turned



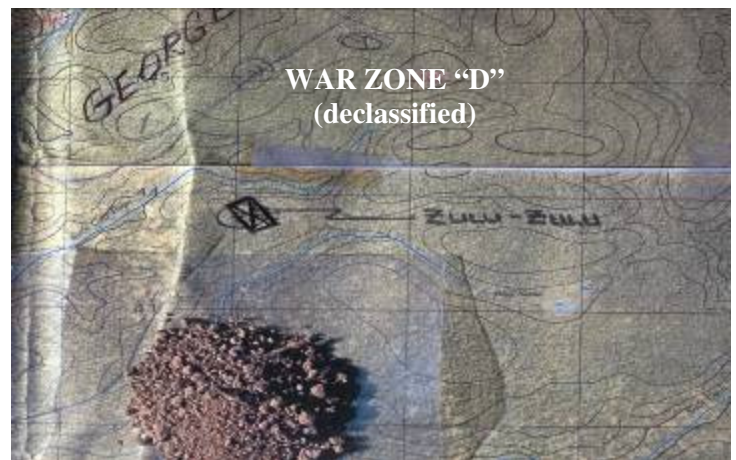
his gun on our chopper, hitting the tail rotor and tail section. That made the helicopter start to go in circles and we started to lose control. All both of us pilots were trying to at this point was to keep the aircraft level as we hit the ground."

Tony Geishauser/Cowboys

"The situation had the makings of a massacre. It was so immense. Once they opened up and hit the helicopter, all hell broke loose all around our perimeter. Quite frankly, I was stunned. I thought 'What the devil is going on?' In the end it was a massacre, but not of the Americans.

Luckily, the Vietnamese attack was premature. Had it started an hour later, we would have been out of the shelter of our foxholes, strung out on patrols and quickly overwhelmed."

Tom Faley



Silver City map provided by Tom Faley.
The dirt shown was taken from LZ-Zulu in 2005.

"The morning of 16 March for the 1/503d started out like any other day in the bush for us. Needless to say it wasn't too much later that we got word that the 2/503d was in heavy contact with a large enemy force.

Immediately we started calling our platoons on patrol to return to base camp and the rest of us got ready to move. After all our patrols had returned, sometime around midday, we started marching to help our brother Sky Soldiers of the 2/503d. As we were several clicks from Zulu Zulu it was late in the day before we arrived to join the battle. Along the way we ran into numerous old bunkers and dead VC. Several VC who were fleeing the battle ran into our column and immediately were sent to see their ancestors."

Craig Ford 1/503d





The second half of recollections from the story, *The Battle at Bau San*, will appear in the next edition of our Newsletter. Ed.

Return to Zulu-Zulu

In 2005, three paratroopers of the 2/503d who survived this battle, Bill Vose, Gus Vendetti and Lew Smith, returned to Vietnam and humped into the “D” Zone jungle to find LZ Zulu-Zulu.

Mike Thibault, 2/503, who, during an earlier visit to Vietnam, had made that treacherous journey to the LZ, is likely the first of us to ever return there.

The following was written about the three troopers’ visit to the jungle and that hallowed ground at LZ Zulu-Zulu:

The Jungle Speaks....

Welcome back Sky Soldiers. Do you remember me? I remember you. As you walk on my jungle floor today, please note I still bear the scars from your last visit here. I long ago forgave you for the ruin you brought me and my people. I took the blood spilled here, your blood and the blood of my brethren, mixed it with my rich soil and watered it yearly with my monsoons to replace the trees you fell, the greenery you trampled and cut away. You see, it has all returned, new and fresh and green and alive. You’ll see other scars remain; the wide and deep holes from your bombs. It is taking me longer to repair these holes, so in the meantime I use them to collect water for my monkeys and tigers and boars and the countless other animals and insect life which returned here upon your leave. Walk in peace here today you paratroopers of the 173d Airborne, enjoy the beauty and serenity of my jungle, but, I will not make it an easy walk for you. You are old now, and although you carry no ammunition and guns seeking to destroy humanity, my jungle, while forgiving you, cannot forget. Be cautious of my vines; you called them “wait-a-minute” vines in your youth. My vines would grab you, stopping your forward progress – they really were doing my bidding, telling you to turn and go, but you would not. And, be cautious of my insects, a million times a million strong, who will sting you and burn your skin. And, Gus, be wary of my bees, for one sting from them could kill you. When you were last here you will recall I ordered my bees to attack your men, and eight of your soldiers were removed from this place. Had I known then you

were coming, I would have enlisted all my jungle’s bees to welcome you. My failure to do that contributed to so many of our two armies leaving their life’s last breath here in the bosom of my jungle. And, as you walk my paths do not stray too far from their safety, as the growth of my vines and the rains from above have not disarmed the weapons of war left here by you and my people – my jungle is a peaceful yet very dangerous place. I welcome you back to this place where so many good Vietnamese and American men died or were maimed and scarred for life. I know you have good souls, as each of you are compelled to return here for one final farewell to your brothers, and I noticed and respect you for recognizing the losses sustained by my people here, as you now call them “brothers and sisters of war”. You have come for peaceful reasons, and you are welcome into my jungle. The ghosts of your time here are watching you – unlike you, they are forever young. They mingle together in the darkness of night in my jungle, and they now are friends. They understand your visit here and appreciate you coming to remember them. Go in peace into my jungle you gentle souls, you old soldiers.

The Ghosts of Zulu-Zulu



LZ Zulu-Zulu. Photo by Wayne Hoitt

On Social Security Disability Claims



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A note came in from one of our Sky Soldier brothers following-up on some emails discussing claims for Social Security Disability (SSD). This particular trooper has been rated 80% disabled by the VA, and has been unable to work for a number of years. His question was....

"You said something in your last email 'since I am 80%', about getting Social Security. I just turned 60 on the 6th of August so I am not yet there unless you know something I don't regarding being 80% and being able to get it early. Let me know what was with that statement, okay?"

Okay. I got to thinking, if my buddy is unaware early filing for SSD based on current disabilities might be available to him, well, perhaps some of you are equally unaware. Now, I'm no authority on the laws and regulations governing this, but from my own experience and that of many Sky Soldiers I know, here's what I have learned which might be of help to some.

If you suffer some disability which keeps you from holding a full-time job, you should consider filing a claim for SSD, whether your disability was caused by military service or service in Vietnam, or not. Even if you are awaiting final disposition on a claim with the VA, do not let that cause you to delay filing for SSD. SSD claims are often approved before the VA renders their own claim decision – the two processes are exclusive of one another. Here's what I suggested our brother do:

You should immediately apply for Social Security Disability based on 1) you haven't been able to work in years, and 2) the fact the VA has found you to be 80% disabled. They may even grant you SSD for up to two years prior to your claim date.

This is what I suggest you consider doing:

1. Go to a local SS office. Take your VA award letter with you, and complete the claim paperwork for SSD, stating why you are unable to work. If you have a doctor's statement confirming your disability that can only help your case. In a number of months you will hear back from them either

either approving your claim or denying it. They deny many claims initially, only to later to approve them. Many guys have been approved before the VA made any decision on their VA claims.

2. If your claim is denied, talk to the local DAV and/or other vet groups about who the best social security attorneys are who specialize in Vet claims is in your area. Pick one.

3. Meet with that attorney and discuss them filing an appeal with Social Security. The attorney will file the appeal and you may or may not need to appear before a law judge who will render a decision. The fees assessed by attorneys representing Vets before Social Security is regulated. Last I knew they could charge no more than 15% of the initial award not to exceed \$5000. If an attorney says otherwise, or asks for upfront fees (which is unlikely) find a new attorney. Social Security will pay your attorney from the proceeds of any award you receive from the date of your claim, sending you the balance of any amount due.

I think this whole process can take anywhere from six months to a year or so from the date of your initial claim.

Again, you should request all your military service and medical records from Army Archives in St. Louis....you can get the form(s) on the web (see contact info below. Also request all your medical records from the VA which you may need down the road. Don't wait for receipt of either of these to file your SSD claim.

If any of you guys can add to this, or correct any misstatements, please send them in.

To request military service records, use the Standard Form (SF) 180. Web address:

<http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/standard-form-180.html>

2/503d Sky Soldier Extraordinaire

In each future issue of our Newsletter we will feature one of our 2d Bat brothers. For this issue we are honored to recognize 1st Sergeant John “Top” Searcy, for his distinguished service to his unit and his country.

John W. Searcy, Sr.



Top is the recipient of the Bronze Star w/V device, two awards of the Meritorious Service Medal, two awards of the Army Commendation Medal, six awards of the Good Conduct Medal, and Master Parachute Wings. John served as a Squad Leader in the 4.2's Platoon HHC 2/503d Airborne Infantry in 1965-1966. Along with his fellow Sky Soldiers, he was deployed to Vietnam with the 2d Battalion from Okinawa (The Rock), in May of 1965. Following his dedicated and heroic service during the Vietnam War, Top served with the 82nd Airborne Division, and the 101st Airborne Division; and C Company (Abn), 4th & 5th Battalions, 23rd Infantry at Ft. Richardson, Alaska. First Sergeant Searcy was an instructor for Basic



Airborne School and Jumpmaster School at Ft. Campbell, KY, and Ft. Benning, GA, and instructor at the NCO Academy, 9th Inf Div at Ft. Lewis, WA. “Duke” or “Cutty”, as his friends call him, also served as an instructor at the NCO Academy at Ft. Richardson, AK, and Ft. Bragg, NC. Following his distinguished career in the U.S. Army, John retired from service as a 1SG, (E8), on June 30, 1982. Following retirement, John instructed JROTC at East High School, in Anchorage, AK, until 1985, then was a Correctional Officer with the Department of Corrections for the State of Alaska until retiring on October 1, 1996. Married to his lovely wife, Leona, for 47 years, they have two children, daughter Zina, and son John, Jr. Top and his bride moved to North Las Vegas, NV, in July of 2000, where they spend time RV-ing in their motorhome, fishing (when they can), and enjoying their seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren.



Top and Mrs. Top



Zina & John Jr.

Airborne Top! Job well done Sarge.