

FOR THE MEN, AND THEIR
FAMILIES, OF THE 2ND BATTALION,
173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE (SEP)

**WE TRY
HARDER!**

2/503d
VIETNAM
******newsletter*



September-October 2016, Issue 69
Contact: rto173d@cfl.rr.com

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 ~



A/2/503's RTO extraordinaire Don Horger in the "D" Zone jungle, circa '66. *So, you wanna be a paratrooper?*





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 September & October 1966



*“If they are remembered, they are not gone truly,
they simply changed duty assignments
and are amongst our best.”*

~ Unknown

Tommy Traxler, Jr.
A/1/503, 9/6/99

“Tommy is buried at Crystal Springs Cemetery, Crystal Springs, MS.”



Louis R. Randall
C/3/319, 9/24/66

(Virtual Wall states date-of-death 9/25/66)

“Louis was my first love and we were to be married when he returned home. He was fun loving and took care of the world in more ways than I can tell. Even after 35yrs I still dream of him. I know he is in heaven and will meet me one day. He was too young to go but he always did what was required of him. He was a very passionate young man and he loved the army, it suited him. He volunteered when he was 16yrs old and loved every minute of it. He was about 5'11 and broad shoulders and the deepest brown eyes that could look into your very soul. When he left he took a big part of me with him. I will NEVER NEVER forget him. As long as I live his memory will live. ALMOST.” **Donna Randall**



Alexander Lorenzo Barney, 173d Abn, 9/10/66

“Alexander is buried at Long Island National Cemetery in New York.”

Joseph Lloyd Miller
B/4/503, 9/15/66

(Virtual Wall states C/4/503)

“This (photo) is in the remembrance of my father Joseph Lloyd Miller. I Love You Dad, your Daughter.” **Judith Patricia Miller**



Edward Garry Rankin
A/4/503, 9/16/66

“Originally from Texas, he became a high school chum when he moved to Augusta County, Virginia. He went to Wilson Memorial High School. His high school classmates miss him, and he is remembered at every five year reunion, along with those others that have passed away.”



John

WMHS Class of '65 Reunion Committee

Wayne Allen Blanck, AATTV (RAINF), 9/20/66

Thomas Lee Westpoint, E/17th Cav, 9/30/66

(Virtual Wall states B/2/503)

“Thomas is buried at Beaufort National Cemetery, Beaufort, SC.”

Elmer Eugene Cotney
E/17th Cav, 9/30/66

“I miss you every day! You were only 20 years old when you were killed I was 15 years old and trying to understand my brother was never going to come home again I love you and will see you again in heaven! You are my Hero.” **Unsigned**



(continued....)

*“I have fought a good fight,
I have finished my course,
I have kept the faith.”*

~ Unknown



Lanham Odell Broyles
HHC/2/503, 9/30/66

"My dad's name is Chuck Joslin. He has told me stories of his best friend but won't go into much detail. Odell was his best friend and I don't believe he ever has gotten over losing him." **Chris Joslin**



John Henry Jones
A/2/503, 10/4/66

"Miss you very much, love you, your sister Sarah."
Sarah Jones Green



William Leroy Stubbe
A/2/503, 10/1/66

"William is buried at Central City Cemetery, Central City, Merrick County, NE."



Josh Palm, Jr.
C/1/503, 10/5/66

(Virtual Wall states C/2/503)

"Thank you PFC Palm for your courage in dangerous times, in a far and dangerous place."

A Grateful Vietnam Vet



Michael James DeMarsico
A/2/503, 10/1/66

"Michael is buried at Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Greenburgh, NY."



John Green Dickerson, III
C/1/503, 10/5/66

(Virtual Wall states C/2/503)

"John is buried at Evergreen Memorial Park, Hobart, IN."



Graham F. Warburton, 5RAR, 10/1/66

Terry Eugene Hemmitt, A/3/319, 10/2/66

"Terry is buried at Ft. Leavenworth National Cemetery."

George Allen Waldron, C/1/503, 10/3/66

"George was my favorite cousin. He was kind and loving to his little cousin. I'll never forget his warm smile and eyes that twinkled. He was the very best cousin. I'll always miss him." **Leslie Gammel Gaard**

David Wesley Branch
E/17th Cav, 10/7/66

"In loving memory, thanks, and gratitude for your ultimate sacrifice. Your daughter, Salina C. Hamilton." **Mae Frances Davis**



Randal Clyde Ingram
C/1/503, 10/3/66

"Randy started Inf OCS in Nov 1964 as Abn & Ranger qualified. Randy and I were good friends in 2nd Platoon. He often spoke of family and how he looked up to his father. After graduation, Randy went to the Airborne School. I was assigned to join the 82nd Abn Div in combat in the Dominican Republic. On my first jump, Randy made sure he was with me. He sat across from me and teased me. Years later, I realized he was watching out for me, smiling as he jumped first. In 1968, a 173rd NCO who knew him told me Randy's unit in the 173rd Abn Bde had been overrun. Certainly not easily."



Ronald Bunch

~ Freedom ~
Those who take freedom
for granted,
would be dependent
on those brave souls,
who are willing to pay
the price for it.
And the price of freedom,
will be paid at times
unexpected,
by heroes,
who didn't know they
were.

(continued....)



Willie Junius Roundtree

A/2/503, 10/7/66

“Personal Thanks: Willy Junius Roundtree. ‘Willy’ to his friends and other soldiers, ‘Roundtree’ to his Sergeants and the officers of the mortar platoon Company “A” 2nd Battalion, 173rd Brigade (Airborne) Infantry stationed at Bien Hoa, Republic of South Viet Nam in 1966. A tall, charming friendly fellow, a boy really, 19 years of age whose always sweat glistening skin in that tropical climate was only out shown by the brilliance of his ever present smile. He was THE forward observer, that fellow who goes out day and night on small group patrols, well in advance of the company troops, and directs mortar and artillery fire, and the occasional air strike, to keep his colleagues and the whole infantry company safe from enemy attack. A more dangerous job than most, as it is always far out front, with a different group each time and often a great distance from quick help. For almost a year he did this dangerous job superbly. On the day that he died, he was preparing to go home in two weeks or so to Fayetteville, North Carolina, his tour in Viet Nam complete. He had been training his replacement and normally they made an odd pair; the tall lanky Black Willy from North Carolina followed by the shorter White stocky kid from New York . The ‘new guy’ always carrying the heavy PRC-25 radio that was the Forward Observer’s link to the mortar and cannon crews and their deadly long range fire power. These two were friends and laughed, shared meals and talk of home, girls and the future in their long and difficult treks through the Asian countryside, rice paddies and mountains. Until that day and for over the prior three weeks, Willy had been the teacher, called out the commands (‘Fire Mission’, ‘Marking Round’, ‘Add’, ‘Drop’, ‘Traverse right/left’, ‘HE’(High Explosive) and the understudy had relayed them to the gunners through the radio for action. But not today. Today the roles were reversed with the understudy carrying the carefully marked maps and Willy carrying the radio ready to relay the commands when the time came for his now trained replacement. It was a company movement that afternoon, in single file through thick jungle and these two men held their places with the others following their point men toward the daily objective. There was no battle, just a single shot from a sniper hidden in the dense jungle who was never found. And the tall amiable black soldier, probably targeted because he was carrying that radio, crumbled to the ground, shot through both lungs so that he drowned in



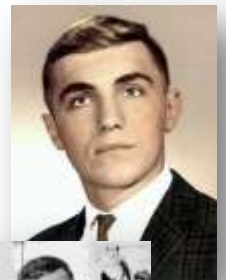
his own blood and in minutes was dead. The medics did their best but the damage was too great and Willy Roundtree died being held by his now graduated replacement. The helicopter carried him to some far away army mortuary a few minutes later. So near and yet so very very far from that imminent anticipated trip back home. I know all of this because I was that replacement and the memory of that day, and those few minutes have haunted me for almost fifty years. Had we walked that trail two days prior I would have been carrying that radio and the likelihood would have been my death instead of Willy’s. Such is the role of chance and fate in the tapestry of life and death. Over the years since then I have visited the ‘Wall’ many times (Section 11E Line 58) and quietly thanked Willy for his sacrifice many many times in many places around the world. My two daughters who have also left flowers at that wall for him, and taken a rubbing of his name from that wall, are keenly aware that their very existence is a result of his sacrifice so very long ago. One of them told me of this site (Wall of Faces) just recently and hence this long overdue contribution to his memory. A brave man, a good son, a good soldier and a good friend. Gone a long time now but never....ever.... forgotten. Willy, from the center of my heart, thank you for your service and your sacrifice.”

**John Timothy Kelly
Livingston, Tennessee**

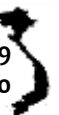
Frank Michael Sokolowski 173d Eng., 10/7/66

“An elementary school in Chelsea, MA was named in honor of my brother Frank. My family loves to fish and this 4½ pound brown trout was caught by Frank at Cliff Pond in Brewster (Cape Cod), MA.

Diane Sokolowski Gulley



(continued....)



John Francis Dalola, II
173d Eng., 10/7/66

"Pfc. John F. Dalola 3d, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Dalola, of 649 Neshaminy St., Pennel. The parents of Pfc. Dalola received a letter from their son the same day he was reported killed while his 173d Airborne Division was engaged in cleaning out a mine field. Dalola was 19, October 1. He was sent to Vietnam three months ago. A graduate of Neshaminy High School in Pennel, he is survived by his parents." **Jim McIlhenney**



David Harold Freeman
HHC 173d Flt. Plt., 10/12/66

"Found a picture from my brothers pictures while he served with the 173rd Airborne in 66-67. I wanted to share this with his family, friends and comrades."

Joe Plunkard



Douglas Lee Jones
HHC 173d Flt. Plt., 10/12/66

"Douglas is buried at Evergreen Cemetery, Erwin, Unicol County, TN,"



Crash Information on U.S. Army helicopter
OH-13S tail number 64-15416
Posted on 10/7/12 - by W. Killian

"Crew members included pilot 1LT Douglas L. Jones (KIA) and SGT David H. Freeman (KIA). There are two accounts of crash:

First account - Aircraft was returning from operation area when it struck high tension power lines. Aircraft struck nose down. Fire consumed the aircraft after impact with total loss. Wires were approximately 50 feet above ground.

Second account - SP5 Larry Snedden and I, SP4 Alex Horvath had the sad job of transporting said aircraft back to Bien Hoa soon after the crash. It was one of our aircraft. THE major cause of the accident was that the aircraft was flying directly into the sunset, flying west unable to see the power lines. The sad part is that this accident could have been prevented by flying just a few feet higher. The power lines were common knowledge to all aircrews in the area."

Submitted by Alex Horvath, The Wall of Faces

"We have spent thirty plus years trying to forget what Vietnam had done to us, but it is very difficult when you return there each night. It is very difficult to forget when the memories are still clear and vivid in one's own mind and try to deal with the pain alone. It has taken thirty years, but the Casper Platoon over the past two years has learned that we need to be together as a family and share the pain with others who understand what we hold inside. The healing, we have learned, comes from being together, remembering together, celebrating together and mourning together. Our brothers who died in combat are missed as any family member would be, and at each reunion those of you that were lost to us are remembered in a ceremony dedicated to the memories we all share. You were our brother, you are our brother, and our family is incomplete without you, but your memory lives on within us forever. You are greatly missed at each reunion, but we do feel your spirit among us. God bless America, God bless the Vietnam Combat Veteran. "

Casper Aviation Platoon Organization
8/13/03

James Edwards Gardner, HHC 173d Bde., 10/13/66

"Army First LT. James E. Gardner, 25, of Texas Township, was killed Thursday in Viet Nam when the vehicle he was riding in struck a land mine, the Army reported today.

Gardner, son of Mr. and Mrs. Lester F. Gardner, 5181 Texas Drive, was a graduate of Portage Central High School and Western Michigan University.

Gardner was attached to Company B which is part of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. He had been in Viet Nam since February 25 and was scheduled to leave the country early next year.

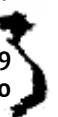
A 1959 Graduate of Portage Central High School, Gardner earned his bachelor's degree from Western Michigan University in 1963. He received his master's from WMU in 1965.

Gardner was commissioned through the Army Reserved Officer Training Corps program at WMU. He had volunteered to go to Viet Nam after spending seven months in Korea, his parents said.

Surviving in addition to his parents is a brother, Daniel, at home. Funeral arrangements will be announced later by the Truesdale South Chapel."

THE KALAMAZOO COUNTY VIETNAM WALL

(continued....)



**Emery George Mikula
HHC 173d Bde., 10/13/66**

"Why did you have to go? You are not forgotten because you are our hero forever. I hope you are happy and proud to be a hero. I hope you are looking down on your family. Sincerely your friend," **Terry Alas**



*A butterfly lights beside us like a sunbeam
And for a brief moment its glory
and beauty belong to our world.
But then it flies again
And though we wish it could have stayed...
We feel lucky to have seen it.*

Author Unknown

**Norman James Womal, 5RAR, 10/17/66
Gordon Henry D'Antoine, 5RAR, 10/18/66**

**Emery M. (Doc) McIlvain, III
HHC/1/503, 10/18/66**

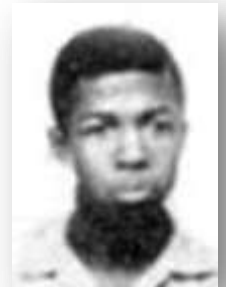
"Acting Sgt. Edward Morton McIlvain Jr., 21, of 301 Cherry Lane, Wynnewood, was killed in action in Vietnam on Tuesday. Sgt. McIlvain, who was with the 173d Airborne Division, was on patrol in a jeep when it was struck by enemy fire. His mother, Mrs. George M. Cheston, was notified of his death on Thursday. Sgt. McIlvain attended Episcopal Academy, and was a graduate of Darrow School. He enlisted in the Army in October, 1964, and volunteered for the Special Forces 18 months ago. He had been in Vietnam since March. Besides his mother and stepfather, he is survived by two brothers, John M., of Villanova; Lt. David D., serving with the U.S. Army; a stepbrother, Miguel de Braganca, and a stepsister, Sydney Cheston."

Jim McIlhenney



**Thomas Respress
B/4/503, 10/29/66**

"A lot has changed since my last visit on 09-24-2001. My 5 children are all now grown and independent. As of now Connie and I are married 43 years, I have 10 grandchildren so far, and still think of you often. My 3rd son, 4th child, Tim is active duty Army, Iraqi War veteran 2005 tour, a Captain now, and is stationed outside of Washington DC. So for the first time in my life I traveled there and was finally able to kneel at the actual Vietnam Memorial Wall and pray for you. Of all of the sights in Washington, the Wall and Arlington Cemetery touched me most. Once, before I was able to travel to Washington, I had the honor and privilege of being a guide for visitors to the traveling Wall that Heals when it came to the town I live in now. I purposely stationed myself near your panel so I could visit you often. I was never so profoundly touched as by the experience of those few days, talking with many veterans and watching their emotions and how they reacted. I am retiring this year, and I know it won't be that many more years before I will see you again. Thank you for being a part of my life Tommy. I want you to know you were an inspiration to me. I could never have been as courageous a soldier as you. I also want you to know my last son's name is Tommy. I think you know why. God bless you." **Robert F. Tomes**



Leonard Wesley Burns, HHC/1/503, 10/18/66

(Virtual Wall states B/173d Spt. Bn.)

"Offering our gratitude and respect to a fallen Sky Soldier from fellow paratroopers of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Association. May he rest in peace and dignity."

173rd ABN Assoc.

Robert Smith, Sr., A/3/319, 10/21/66

"Robert is buried at Raleigh National Cemetery."

**George Belanger
C/4/503, 10/24/66**

"On this your angel day I humbly give thanks for your service and sacrifice and with honor I leave you this poem..."

60's Girl



**In war the heroes always
outnumber the soldiers
ten to one.
H. L. Mencken**

(continued...)





Nathaniel Brown
A/2/503, 10/31/66

"Nathaniel is buried at York Memorial Park in Charlotte, NC."



Note: We don't know if Nat's Bronze Star was with "V", but we assume it was.... after all, he was Alpha 2/503.

Eleftherios Pantel Pappas, B/4/503, 10/31/66

"You know how they say that you will never forget your first, of anything. Well Sp/4 Pappas was the first soldier of our unit to give his life. I can remember that day like it was yesterday. I will never ever forget you, my comrade, my fellow paratrooper, but most of all my friend. God Bless You, and rest easy. As you are truly my hero. "

1SG. Joseph J. Oliverio. (retired)



For if *we*, their fellow veterans and their families don't remember them, then we ask, *who* will?



August 4, 2016
No. 16-23
Mokie Porter

VA Suicide Report 2014: 65 Percent of Veterans over Age 50

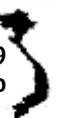
(Washington, DC) On August 3, the VA released *Suicide Among Veterans and Other Americans 2001-2014*, a comprehensive analysis of veteran suicide rates in the United States in which VA examined more than 55 million veterans' records from 1979 to 2014.

"While the number of suicides among all veterans is significant, what may not be known is that approximately 65 percent of all veterans who died from suicide in 2014 were 50 years of age or older," said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America. "Why is it that so many veterans, basically, take their lives by suicide? Last year, the Clay Hunt SAV Act, Public Law 114-2, was enacted to address the high suicide rate amongst the newer veterans but did not specifically address the older veterans. We call on the VA to increase its outreach and education efforts immediately so that the families of all veterans, especially our older veterans, are aware of this risk."

The VA must overcome all barriers to find the key if indeed there is one to preventing suicide in as many instances as possible among our veterans. All Americans must also realize that there is a very serious problem with veteran suicides and act upon it with a coordinated effort in our communities with our fellow veterans, both young and old; our families; our friends; and with researchers and the agencies of government. As we have repeatedly stated, one veteran suicide is too many. And let's not fool ourselves with easy answers."

Since 2001, the rate of suicide among U.S. veterans who use VA services has increased by 8.8 percent, while the rate of suicide among veterans who do not use VA services increased by 38.6 percent. In the same time period, the rate of suicide among male veterans who use VA services increased 11 percent, while the rate of suicide increased 35 percent among male veterans who do not use VA services. In the same time period, the rate of suicide among female veterans who use VA services increased 4.6 percent, while the rate of suicide increased 98 percent among female veterans who do not use VA services. A link to the report may be found at: www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/2016suicidedatareport.pdf

Source: ccvvchapter982@gmail.com



A Tribute to Vietnam Veterans Featuring the Voice of Mr. Sam Elliott

Nine million Americans served during the period of the Vietnam War, they represented ten percent of their generation, six million of them were volunteers. They were the oldest and best educated force America ever sent into harm's way. Ninety-seven percent would be honorably discharged. And today, the vast majority of them testify with their actions and their words that they are proud of their service and would serve again if called.

November 14th, 1965, 10:48 a.m., elements of the 7th Cavalry touched down at Landing Zone X-Ray, within 30 minutes the battle of the Ia Drang began, the first major battle fought by the American army in Vietnam. Over three harrowing days vastly outnumbered American forces would hold out and ultimately repel enemy forces. American forces would never lose a major engagement during the ensuing eight years of combat operations.



"Battle of Ia Drang, Vietnam War." (web photo)

Known as The Wall, the Vietnam Memorial stands in honor of those who served in the Vietnam War. The names of the men and women who gave their lives are inscribed in the order they were taken from us. 58,286 names.



The youngest was Marine Private First Class Dan Bullock at 15 years of age, and the oldest was Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Kenna Taylor at 62.



Dan Bullock



Kenna Taylor

There are three sets of fathers and sons, one set of step-brothers, thirty-nine pairs of brothers, eight women, sixteen clergy, and 155 Medal of Honor recipients, and let us not forget there are still more than 1600 missing and unaccounted for personnel.

The French were in Vietnam before the Americans and lost more than 70,000 lives, more than 400,000 allied troops served with the American forces. Joining those allies with the United States were the Republic of Korea, Thailand, the Republic of the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand. These allies suffered more than 5,000 lives lost during the course of the war.



Fr. Charles Watters

American combat forces left Vietnam in 1973, two years later Saigon fell. Over those last two years without American and allied combat forces in the region casualties in Southeast Asia would double what they had been during the 10 years prior.



The fall of Saigon. (web photo)

(continued....)



To our Vietnam Veterans who answered the nation's call to serve, we thank you. Your greatness is etched in history from the battlefields of Southeast Asia to the neighborhoods of hometown America where you continue to bring blessings and inspiration to your families and your country today.

To the families of our Vietnam Veterans, we thank you for the greatness of your support, sacrifice, vigilance and compassion.

And to our allies who stood by us 50 years ago, we thank you.

The greatness that was earned by this generation never left you, and it never will.



www.vietnamwar50th.com

Thank You

A grateful nation thanks and honors our Vietnam Veterans and their loved ones

www.vietnamwar50th.com

Produced in partnership with the Virginia International Tattoo

Producer/Director: J. Scott Jackson

Producer/Editor: Jay Sanchez

Narrator: Sam Elliott

To view the entire video visit:

www.youtube.com/embed/aVeBtfnAxP8

[Sent in by MG Jack Leide, (Ret), CO C/2/503]

Most photos shown are different than those which appear in the video. Ed



Whodat?



One of our 2/503 Chargin' Charlies sent in this snapshot taken of him when he was in beautiful Southeast Asia a few years ago. Anyone recognize the Sky Soldier?



Alpha Company troopers at Camp Zinn, circa '65/'66.

(Photo by Freddie Parks, A/2/503)





INCOMING!



~ Thanks to a Buddy ~

My name is John Esquivel, I met George (Sutherland) when I arrived in country at Cam Ranh Bay in March of 1971. We hit it off pretty good on the bus ride from the airplane to the transit barracks. He kidded me a lot about being a 'cherry', and asked if he could escort my body back to the states because it would give him extra time at home to party. But he gave me some helpful tips to stay alive and what was expected of me, to which I will always be grateful for. He also gave me his unit address and said to drop him a line to see how I was doing. Well, while at the transit station at Cam Ranh there was this form that asked if you had a relative in country and wanted to be stationed near them so I answered yes and used Sgt. Sutherland's APO address -- the stories he told about the Herd were almost too unbelievable to be true and I just had to be part of that unit, so I stretched the truth a bit and said that he was my step brother. Well, I got assigned to the Herd and they sent me to LZ Uplift to see George. I told him what I did and he said that if I wanted to be there that bad he would play along and say we were brothers (in arms). My MOS was aviation so they sent me to LZ English where I was assigned to Casper as a door gunner. I have to say that time I was privileged to serve with the 173d was the best time of my life in the Army. I will never forget the camaraderie and friendship I had there and that 'can do' spirit that I have never experienced before or since. I know Sgt. Sutherland was assigned to the 2nd Batt, and was a LLRP from Ontario, CA. If you know of his whereabouts tell him thanks for that act of kindness for not letting the cat out of the bag. Sincerely,

John Esquivel
Caspers

Thank you for sending this wonderful email from John. I sent him an email. I hope to hear from him soon.

George Sutherland
E/1/503, C/2/503

~ Damn Leg Civilians ~

The other night I was sitting on the veranda outside the Cocoa Beach VFW with an Air Force buddy and the widow of a mutual friend, enjoying our cocktails and conversation. It was Friday, steak night there, and the Post was open to non-members and civilians during the dinner hours. Two young civilian couples arrived and

sat at the table immediately behind my chair. My AF friend rose, took his plate of steak tidbits appetizers to the new arrivals and offered to share them. One young civilian stud rudely shied him off, and as my friend and his unshared tidbits returned to our table I heard the stud say, "I was ready to punch him in the face." Without turning around, I stated to the young man behind me and loud enough for his table to hear, "Yeah. You punch him in the face, then you gotta punch me in the face, and all those guys inside you have to punch in the face too." "I was kidding!" the stud cried. "I knew we shouldn't have come here," whispered his lady. No shit. Damn Leg civilians. ☺

Lew "Smitty" Smith
HHC/2/503

~ From a Bravo Bull CO ~

Thank you for including me in your latest newsletter. It was a genuine honor for me to be featured in such a thoughtful way (Issue 68, Page 24 and cover photo. Ed). I am certain there are many others who deserved such recognition far more than I do.

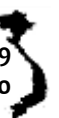
I hope that maybe a few of those wonderful young guys I was privileged to serve with and command might recognize and remember me. If you should hear from any of them, I'd appreciate it if you might let me know.

Thanks again and I hope you are continuing to do well. All the best, Les.

Les Brownlee, Col. (Ret)
CO B/2/503
Former Acting Secretary of the Army



L-R: Bravo Company's 1LT Les Brownlee and Capt. Fred Henschell near Pleiku, August 1965.



The Fallen 9000

"A large percentage of our country doesn't know of or care about Normandy. My guess is it has been removed from the text in History Books.

A few weekends ago, British artist Jamie, accompanied by numerous volunteers, took to the beaches of Normandy with rakes and stencils in hand to etch 9,000 silhouettes representing fallen people into the sand. Titled *The Fallen 9000*, the piece is meant as a stark visual reminder of those who died during the D-Day beach landings at Arromanches on June 6th, 1944 during WWII. The original team consisted of 60 volunteers, but as word spread nearly 500 additional local residents arrived to help with the temporary installation that lasted only a few hours before being washed away by the tide.

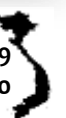
9,000 Fallen Soldiers etched into the sand on Normandy Beach to commemorate Peace Day. What is surprising is that I saw nothing about this here in the US.

An overseas friend sent it with a note of gratitude for what the US started there."

Source unknown



[Sent in by Steve Goodman, B/2/503



From A/1/503 Sky Soldier Pete Arnold's Wife To Frank Martinez, A/1/503

Frank,

I was overcome with emotion when I was presented with the framed poster I requested (but was told was not available, Mmmm?) of the American Flag with eagle. I was honored to receive not one but two framed copies during the ceremony at the Alamo Silver Wings Airborne Association Command Post. I wanted to share a photo with you of our daughter, Alexandra, with her copy of the artwork.

Our children were raised with the knowledge that freedom is indeed not free. Thank you for your service.

With much respect,

Tracy Arnold



Alexandra, named after Alexander Rodarte, A/1/503, KIA, holding poster honoring her father and his friend.

Note: See background story in Issue 68 of our newsletter. Ed

About Chuck Dean Recipient of the Hirsch Foundation "2008 Erasing the Stigma Leadership Award"

In early 1987, Chuck Dean, a veteran of the Vietnam War, became the Executive Director of Point Man International, a veterans-for-veterans support organization.

As a writer and counselor he has worked with thousands of soldiers and veterans not only in the United States, but several foreign countries-including Russia, Italy, and France. His mission has always been to see other veterans find positive solutions to the many issues facing them upon returning from combat.

In the spring of 2004, Chuck was invited by the U.S. Army to assist the paratroopers of the 173d Airborne Brigade in their re-adjustment after combat in Iraq. He has worked extensively in the publishing industry, and is the author of several books on recovery issues, such as the best-selling "*Nam Vet: Making Peace with Your Past*" which portrays a profound understanding of the issues that warriors face upon their return from a war zone. He has over 20 books available on Amazon.com and Kindle:



All American-Sky Soldier
Chuck Dean

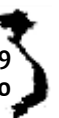
Chuck Dean's Books



Chuck spent six years serving in The U.S. Army as a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division, and the 173d Airborne Brigade in Vietnam and Okinawa. He was one of the first 300 regular Army troops to be deployed to S.E. Asia in 1965. Upon his return from the combat zone he spent two years as a 6th Army Drill Instructor at Ft. Ord, CA. Presently he continues to write and work for veterans and military personnel, and resides in Las Vegas, NV.

Note: We have not read all of Chuck's books listed on the website below, but in our opinion his *Nam Vet – Making Peace with Your Past* is a must read for all Vietnam veterans battling with PTSD, as well as their spouses and family members. Ed

For a complete list of and details about Chuck's books, visit:
www.amazon.com/Chuck-Dean/e/B001JOZBY6



An absurd quote....

"The Oriental doesn't put the same high price on life as does a Westerner. Life is plentiful. Life is cheap in the Orient." W.C. Westmoreland



An iconic photo from the Vietnam War....



Photo by the late German photojournalist Horst Faas of a young mother weeping over her child killed during the war.

Hearts and Minds

is a 1974 American documentary film about the Vietnam War directed by Peter Davis. The film's title is based on a quote from President Lyndon B. Johnson: *"The ultimate victory will depend on the hearts and minds of the people who actually live out there"*. The movie was chosen as Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature at the 47th Academy Awards presented in 1975.

The film premiered at the 1974 Cannes Film Festival. Commercial distribution was delayed in the United States due to legal issues, including a temporary restraining order obtained by one of the interviewees, former National Security Advisor Walt Rostow who had claimed through his attorney that the film was "somewhat misleading" and "not representative" and that he had not been given the opportunity to approve the results of his interview. Columbia Pictures refused to distribute the picture, which forced the producers to purchase back the rights and release it by other means.

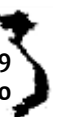
A scene described as one of the film's *"most shocking and controversial sequences"* shows the funeral of an

ARVN soldier and his grieving family, as a sobbing woman is restrained from climbing into the grave after the coffin. The funeral scene is juxtaposed with an interview with General William Westmoreland — commander of American military operations in the Vietnam War at its peak from 1964 to 1968 and United States Army Chief of Staff from 1968 to 1972 — telling a stunned Davis that, *"The Oriental doesn't put the same high price on life as does a Westerner. Life is plentiful. Life is cheap in the Orient."*

After an initial take, Westmoreland indicated that he had expressed himself inaccurately. After a second take ran out of film, the section was reshot for a third time, and it was the third take that was included in the film.

Davis later reflected on this interview stating, *"As horrified as I was when General Westmoreland said, 'The Oriental doesn't put the same value on life,' instead of arguing with him, I just wanted to draw him out... I wanted the subjects to be the focus, not me as filmmaker."*

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hearts_and_Minds_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hearts_and_Minds_(film))



Prisk's Hill People



1st Platoon, Charlie Company, 2nd/503rd...in hospitality room during 173d Airborne reunion near Fort Benning, GA in June 2016. Left to right: Harold "Ranger" Riggs, Jim "Ski" Bednarski, Ken Bagley, Tommy "Drips" Thompson, Gary "Lima Six" Prisk, and Bob "Boston" Mathews.

"They were an odd assortment, boys really—twelve month men really. Their pictures were familiar—the cocked hats and the melancholy grins. They enjoyed talking about girls and home, rumors and cars, the little things mostly.

They enjoyed a good joke most of all. Caught in a time of chattel sacrifice, the regret that anchored their black humor was the baseline for their survival. Slogging through the mud, in and out of the vines, fighting a war that was mindless, and discomposed..." they were the Hill People.

From *Digger Dogface Brownjob Grunt*
A Novel by Gary Prisk (CO C/2/503)





Steve & Marcia on The Rock: Corregidor Journal

Monday, January 17, 2011

503rd PRCT Paratrooper Dick Adams Returns

By: Steve and Marcia Kwiecinski



L-R: Alyson with parents Nancy & Dick with friend Marcia Kwiecinski seated behind the two ladies.

We love to welcome returning friends, and to make new ones, on our adopted home of Corregidor. Of course, it is especially exciting to us when we encounter people who come from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, where we grew up and spent most of our lives. But our greatest thrill, one that is happening less and less frequently, is to host a returning Bataan or Corregidor war veteran.

To our knowledge, the last American defenders were Chuck Towne and Everett Reamer. They were serving here on Corregidor in 1942, and subsequently had to survive over three years in Japanese prison camps. Chuck and Everett, along with Bataan Death March survivors Malcolm Amos and Richard Francies, were here as part of a contingent that came for the 2006 inauguration of the Hellships Memorial in Subic Bay. Chuck, a corpsman (only females were called nurses), passed away less than a week after returning to his home in Washington State. Everett, who manned a machine gun at Battery Cheney, is still with us, but dealing with health issues that prohibit extensive travel. We often wonder if we will ever see another American defender back on The Rock.



Dick saluting men of the 503rd PRCT fallen on Corregidor.

But there is another group of veterans, those who were part of the liberation of Corregidor in February and March of 1945. They did not suffer the years of starvation, disease, and brutality in the prison camps, and on average were a few years younger than the defenders. To our great delight, Richard (Dick) Adams of the 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team, part of the fabled "Rock Force," returned last week with his wife and one of their daughters. We had been anticipating their visit since having lunch with Dick and Nancy last summer in Michigan. Alyson had come for a day-trip early last year, and was excited to accompany them on this trip. Her sister, Kim, was unable to join them.



The Adams family reading through the names of the fallen of the 503rd PRCT.

Marcia spotted the trio on the upper deck of the ferry as it pulled into the north harbor. Each tried to see as much of Corregidor as possible while the boat turned around and pulled alongside the dock....

(continued....)



...We greeted them as they walked down the ramp, and introduced them to island and hotel managers while security men provided a low-key honor guard. Multiple photos were snapped. Dick's initial reaction was, "Things sure look different now!"

They climbed aboard the tranvia, accompanied by other visitors, a small film crew, a few fellow Corregidor lovers who had come to meet and assist a returning veteran, Marcia, and Steve as guide.

Dick, a somewhat reticent gentleman, wanted to minimize the "hoopla" while here. There was a very simple but moving ceremony at the 503rd PRCT marker at Topside, attended by some of the other tourists as well as our group, with solemn raising of Philippine and American flags followed by presentation of a floral arrangement. Dick seemed a little surprised by the number of tourists who approached to shake his hand and request photos with him



Dick displays a photo of a group of 503rd PRCT men together with General MacArthur in his jeep on Corregidor. Dick is one of the troopers in the group.

His main goal was trying to find the areas he remembers from his time on the island in 1945: the golf course landing zone; the hillside cliff where the wind brought him down; the building which held the aid-station where he brought injured fellow paratroopers; the officers' quarters building near which he lost – and later found – his Miraculous Medal; the huge water tanks between which he spent two nights as perimeter guard, sleeping in shifts with a buddy; and the area on Malinta Hill's north side where he and five other men bivouacked for ten days and nights.

Having been told that Dick was coming, two of the premier Corregidor explorers, Karl Welteke and John Moffitt, were able to join us as we tried to locate the spots that Dick particularly wished to find. We started by climbing the lighthouse, from which Dick hoped to spot the golf course area near his landing site. As we had warned him, trees block any possible view, but it did help him to orient himself to the Topside area.



The Adams family with Corregidor explorers. On left is Karl Welteke, (2 tours in Vietnam, USN Diver, resident of Barrio Baretto).

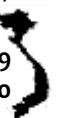
Next we went to the easiest place of all to locate, the water towers which are just yards from the foot of the lighthouse. Dick was satisfied that he'd found the sleeping spot. We proceeded to the senior officers' housing area nearby. We could not be sure of the exact location, but we knew we were in the area where he lost and found his Miraculous Medal, and the stairs he used to get up to the aid station. From there it was only a short walk to the swimming pool, roughly across the road from where Dick had landed on the cliff face. Of course the area is overgrown with jungle, but we could at least make a reasonable guess as to the area.

The following day began with a banca trip around the fortified islands of Manila Bay. It is not an exaggeration to say that the wind was calmer and the sea smoother than they had been since at least the first day of November. It was a marvelous trip, and we were joined by four other Americans whose visit overlapped with the Adams'. Later we all walked up Malinta Hill, and Dick was pretty sure he found the spot where the six men 'hung out' for about 10 days. By the way, Dick, who is 88, and in great shape, didn't slow us down on a hike that includes a few short, steep ascents.



Karl Welteke, Trailmaster of the Corregidor Historic Society, assists the Adams with copies of original maps.

(continued....)





Paratrooper Dick Adams assaulting Malinta Hill, again.

The following day was just the opposite weather-wise. It was easily the windiest and waviest day since the first of November. We can usually say that tomorrow's weather will be about the same as today, but this was the most marked day-to-day change we've seen except for when typhoons affect Corregidor.

We joined the Adams family for lunch and dinner each day, and have to say that we were already missing them as we said our goodbyes at the pier.



The Adams, on left, with Steve and Marcia Kwiecinski. They were the only Americans allowed to reside on Corregidor, and provided special tours for visiting US dignitaries.

Will this mark the last return of an American liberator to Corregidor? Not if Dick has anything to say about it! He and his family had such a wonderful time that they are seriously thinking of returning next year, when their other daughter may be able to join them. We sincerely hope that this will happen, and want to encourage any other defenders or liberators of the Rock to return as well.

You can read more about Dick's adventures here 66 years ago, including the Miraculous Medal story at: <http://steveandmarciaontherock.blogspot.com/2010/03/bats-flies-and-parachutes.html>

###

Dick Adams and Other Troopers of the WWII 503rd PRCT Honored at Brigade Reunion



In 2012, 503rd trooper Dick Adams, along with some of his buddies who also made the famous blast onto Corregidor, attended our reunion in Lexington, as guests of Sky Soldiers of the 173d Airborne Brigade. Sometime later, Dick was kind enough to gift me this piece of silk he recovered from the DZ on The Rock during a return trip he made there. One day this historical remnant from WWII will be donated to the Special Operations and Airborne Museum in Fayetteville, NC in Dick's name. Ed



Trooper Adams



Paying Homage

Gang, these photos are from the ceremony at Motts Military Museum on August 6th. It is located in Grove Port just outside of Columbus.

Bricks of honor had been placed at its *Walk of Fame* and the ceremony paid homage to the men and women of the American military. I had contributed to this honor by having recognition of the 173d placed among those bricks. The Herd is there for all to see and it will be there forever.



It was a bright day as the museum played host to a large collection of people. Motts Museum has to be saluted for all the fine work it does for every veteran.

The elderly gentleman in the picture (on left) is a WWII veteran who jumped into Normandy and, among many battles, took part in the Battle of the Bulge.



From WWII to Korea to Viet Nam to Iraq and Afghanistan names and units were read off to the sounding of a bell and the applause of the public.

William Terry
A/3/319

Secretary Takes Action to Ensure Project ARCH Veterans Continue to Receive Care Closer to Home

Coverage Continues Through Exemption in Choice Program

July 21, 2016

Augusta, Maine – As the Project ARCH pilot program comes to an end next month, Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert A. McDonald today announced that Veterans enrolled in the program will be able to continue receiving care closer to home. Taking advantage of options available under the Veterans Choice Program, such as the “unusual or excessive burden provision” and Provider Agreements, Veterans receiving care under Project ARCH will continue care without interruption when the pilot program ends August 7.



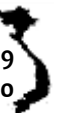
Secretary McDonald

“There is nothing more important to us than serving the Veterans who served our country,” said Secretary McDonald. *“My commitment to those Veterans under Project ARCH is that we will do everything within our control to make sure they maintain continuity of care in their communities with the providers they know.”*

Project ARCH operates in Maine, Virginia, Kansas, Montana and Arizona. In anticipation of the program’s end, Project ARCH providers have been contacted and invited to continue to provide health care to Veterans under the Veterans Choice Program.

“VA appreciates the Veterans and community providers who participated in the program,” said Dr. Baligh Yehia, Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Community Care. *“VA is employing lessons learned and best practices from the program as we work to build one consolidated program for community care – a program that delivers the best of both VA and the community.”*

Veterans transitioning to the Veterans Choice Program are being contacted regarding their individual care.



From Down Under...

Long Tan Veterans to Receive Gallantry Awards 50 Years After Battle

Exclusive by defence reporter Andrew Green



Lt Col Harry Smith has sought to get recognition for Battle of Long Tan (Supplied: Colonel Harry Smith)

Australian veterans from the Battle of Long Tan will next week receive official recognition for their gallantry, almost 50 years to the day after their heroic efforts in the Vietnam War.

On 18 August, 1966, members of D Company who were outnumbered 20 to 1, fought against enormous odds to defeat the Viet Cong in one of the most well-known Australian engagements of the war.

For half a century, many of the men have received no official recognition of their courage, despite sustained campaigning from D Company commander, retired Lieutenant Colonel Harry Smith.

In April last year, former army chief David Morrison refused to recommend a range of gallantry awards for 13 Australian Army members who had fought at Long Tan,

prompting Lieutenant Colonel Smith to approach the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal.

Last month the retired Lt Col told the ABC's 7.30 program this latest effort would probably be his final attempt to gain recognition for his company.

"I owe it to my soldiers to follow through on what I recommended in 1966," Mr. Smith said. *"Probably if we don't win with the current review, at age 83, I'll probably decide to get on with my sailing and maybe let it go."*

With the 50th anniversary of the battle approaching, the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal has now finished reviewing an application to officially recognise 13 men who fought in the battle.

The ABC has confirmed on August 10 the Veterans' Affairs Minister Dan Tehan will announce new bravery awards alongside Lt Col Smith and Mark Sullivan, the chair of the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal.

Details of precisely which medals will be presented and how many former soldiers will be recognised for their efforts in the Battle of Long Tan so far remain confidential.

Surviving Long Tan veterans will head to Vietnam later this month to attend a 50th anniversary commemorative service.

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



"Major Harry Smith MC at Nui Dat with his Battalion on parade." (web photo)



Office of the Honorary Colonel 503d Infantry Regiment

28 August 2016



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

SUBJECT: Update

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The time since I last wrote (March 2016) to the Distinguished and Honorary Members of the 503d Infantry Regiment has passed quickly and has been filled with a number of events.

Honorary Regimental Sergeant Major Richard Weik and I are pleased to announce the "2015 Class" of Distinguished and Honorary Members of the Regiment (DMOR/HMOR).

Those designated as Distinguished Member of the 503d Infantry Regiment were LTC (R) Jack Kelley, The Honorable Thomas K. Kaulukukui, Jr., and CW5 Ronald Galloway. Mr. Paul Whitman was designated as an Honorary Member of the 503d Infantry Regiment.

LTC Kelley, a Citadel graduate, commanded A/2-503 and served as Aide de Camp to BG John R. Deane, Jr. in the mid 1960's. In a subsequent tour with the 173d Airborne Brigade, he served as the Operations Officer of the 3-503d Infantry (1970). He became involved with perpetuating the heritage of the 503d Infantry Regiment while serving on active duty and has remained involved in this mission to the present day. He was instrumental in founding the 173d Airborne Brigade Association. His most current effort to promote the heritage of the Regiment is production of a video to tell the story of "Operation Yorktown," one of the earliest significant combat operations of the Regiment's units in Vietnam.

The Honorable Thomas Kaulukukui graduated first in Noncommissioned Officer's Class 25-69 and was designated the Outstanding Leader of Airborne Class 34. He served as a platoon sergeant with A-3/503 in Vietnam from September 1969 to June 1970. Following his discharge from the Army in 1970, Kaulukukui served as a Clerk in the U.S. District Court of Hawaii and subsequently was appointed to the Trail Court in Hawaii and sat by designation on the Intermediate Court of Appeals and the Hawaii Supreme Court. His advocacy for veterans and their causes spans more than 45 years, serving as the President of the Hawaii Vietnam Veterans Leadership program and as an informal consultant to the Hawaii Veterans Administration Regional office on matters relating to PTSD, as well as serving on a congressionally created Committee on Minority Veterans.

CW5 Ronald Galloway demonstrated exceptional leadership and service to the United States Army spanning a career of almost 40 years. Among his many assignments were as Battalion Personnel Services NCO with the 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry at Camp Hovey, Korea in 1987 – 1988. He served as Chief Warrant Officer of the Adjutant General Corps and as the Senior Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army. He is the only CW5 to work at the Combatant Command and Service Center level serving as the Administrative Executive Officer to the Supreme Allied

Commander Europe, the Commander of United States Forces Korea and the Chief of Staff of the Army.

Mr. Paul Whitman is a citizen of Australia with a lifetime interest in military history. In 1999, Whitman developed a history website entitled "Corregidor, Then and Now" that became a pioneering historical source for information relating to the little studied fall of Corregidor in 1942 and subsequently expanded his efforts to record and preserve written and photographic material relative to the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment. He expanded his original Corregidor-related website to what is now the "502rd PRCT Heritage Battalion" Website, an aggregator of materials about the Regiment and a repository of such information for generations to come.

Honorary 503d Regiment Sergeant Major Richard Weik and I have initiated action to place a 503d Infantry Regimental Memorial on the National Infantry Museum "Walk of Honor." The Memorial will be approximately 4 feet wide, and 26 inches tall and constructed of Topaz grey granite and will be located adjacent to the 173d Airborne Brigade national Memorial. The Regimental Crest will be in the center of the granite stone surrounded by the titles of the four conflicts associated with the Regiment's heritage (World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Global War on Terrorism.) Estimated cost of the memorial, whose size is dictated by its available location, is \$15,000.00. An electronic depiction of the marker is attached* for those who receive this letter electronically or may be requested by those who prefer U.S. Postal Service receipt.

The 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation has agreed to collect donations for this cause. (A generous veteran has offered to match any donation of \$50.00 or less up to \$1,000.00.) 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 503d Infantry Regiment Memorial is long overdue. Please support this effort and make it happen.

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

Warm regards to all!

Kenneth V. Smith

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

* See image of marker on following page. Ed



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 \$15,000.00.

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!



The United States Army Pacific (USARPAC) “Fire Brigade”

By Fred E. Elam, MG, USA, (Ret)

Forward

The history of the 173d's combat operations has been well documented by airborne troopers who were assigned to the Herd as well as historians writing about the Vietnam War. The purpose of this article is to describe some of the less well - documented activities prior to and immediately following the deployment of the Brigade to Vietnam.

173d Deployment to Vietnam

I served in the 173d from January 1964 until June 1966. My service with the Brigade included both Okinawa and Vietnam.

During my service with the Brigade in Okinawa and initially in Vietnam, I was assigned as the Brigade Movements Control Officer in the Brigade S-4 office. My responsibilities included highway convoy planning, movements planning (air and sealift) to support contingency plans as well as off-island exercises.

The Brigade had the unofficial title as the United States Army Pacific (USARPAC) “Fire Brigade” which resulted in the requirement to deploy the alert company task force in less than 12 hours after being alerted. One aspect of this deployment requirement was to have a rifle company continually ready for deployment along with its organic equipment rigged for heavy drop.

All members of the Brigade participated in mandatory jungle training on Iriomote Island of the Ryukyus chain south of Okinawa. In addition, numerous alerts (some resulting in a training jump either on Okinawa or off-island such as Taiwan and the Philippines) further prepared Sky Soldiers for potential combat operations. Our predeployment training focus was to find, fix and destroy the enemy and remain on the battle ground until relieved by other US forces or Allies.



Iriomote Island

In early May 1965, the Brigade was alerted for deployment (via air and sealift) to Vietnam to two separate operations areas. Two departure airfields were used - Kadena Air Force Base and Naha Air Force Base as well as one seaport (Port of Naha). Arrival Airfields were Bien Hoa airbase outside Saigon and Vung Tau on the coast east of Saigon. The sealift arrived at the Port of Saigon.

The initial deployment order called for the Brigade to be in a Temporary Duty Status (TDY). Sky Soldiers assigned to the Brigade were paid \$1 per day during the almost 90 day period that the Brigade was in a TDY status.

When the Brigade deployment status was changed from TDY to a Permanent Change of Station (PCS), family members living on Okinawa were required to relocate to CONUS. Brigade troopers having family members on Okinawa were permitted a short visit prior to their family member's relocation to CONUS. Needless to say there were a lot of birth announcements 9 months later! Communications with loved ones consisted of snail mail (a letter took 10 days from Vietnam to the United States) and radio talk via the HAMM radio volunteers who were a part of the MARS network.

When the Brigade arrived in Vietnam, there was no infrastructure to support our arrival and offloading of the arriving aircraft and sealift. As a consequence, troopers (primarily from the Brigade's Support

Battalion) were pressed into service as ad hoc arrival control parties to offload aircraft and stevedores to offload the sealifted Brigade equipment.

Our initial resupply of all classes of supply came from Okinawa. Each evening, using a single sideband Collins radio, a requisition was sent to the Brigade

Rear Detachment on Okinawa for fill. Two “log birds”, normally C130s, would be loaded with replacement personnel and resupply and would generally arrive at Bien Hoa and Vung Tau in the late afternoon each day.

(continued....)



Our training did not prepare the Brigade for a Base Camp option. The Brigade was not authorized the beds (cots), tents, or large generators to build base camps. As a result, each unit was required to divert troopers to provide base camp security when the Brigade deployed from the base camps at Vung Tau and Bien Hoa for combat operations.

The policy makers in the Pentagon required that continued Administrative jumps were required in order for troopers to collect jump pay. After several months under this policy, while simultaneously conducting combat operations, wiser heads prevailed and troopers who were on jump status upon arrival in Vietnam were able to collect their jump pay without the requirement to participate in administrative jumps.

I assumed command of the Brigade Headquarters, Company A in Vietnam in September 1965. One of the company's missions was to provide a rifle platoon Brigade Command Post security when deployed on combat operations.



Major General Fred E. Elam, USA, (Ret), served over 33 years as a commissioned officer. He commanded at all levels from Captain to MG and served as the Chief of Transportation and the first Commander of the Transportation Corps Regiment. He served two combat tours in Vietnam. He is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College and the Naval War College. He holds a BS degree from the University of Arkansas and a MBA from Michigan State University. Awards and decorations MG Elam has received include: Distinguished Service Medal (with one oak leaf cluster); Defense Superior Service Medal; Legion of Merit; Bronze Star Medal (with two oak leaf clusters); Meritorious Service Medal (with three oak leaf clusters); Air Medal; Army Commendation Medal (with three oak leaf clusters); Parachutist Badge; Army Staff Identification Badge; Medal of Merit from the Turkish General Staff; and Korea Service Medal from the Korean Joint Staff.

Military Myths & Legends: Common Myths of the Vietnam War

Common belief is that most Vietnam veterans were drafted.

Fact: 2/3 of the men who served in Vietnam were volunteers. 2/3 of the men who served in World War II were drafted. Approximately 70% of those killed in Vietnam were volunteers.

Common belief that the media reported suicides among Vietnam veterans range from 50,000 to 100,000 - 6 to 11 times the non-Vietnam veteran population.

Fact: Mortality studies show that 9,000 is a better estimate. "The CDC Vietnam Experience Study Mortality Assessment showed that during the first 5 years after discharge, deaths from suicide were 1.7 times more likely among Vietnam veterans than non-Vietnam veterans. After that initial post-service period, Vietnam veterans were no more likely to die from suicide than non-Vietnam veterans. In fact, after the 5-year post-service period, the rate of suicides is less in the Vietnam veterans' group.

Common belief is that a disproportionate number of blacks were killed in the Vietnam War.

Fact: 86% of the men who died in Vietnam were Caucasians, 12.5% were black, and 1.2% were other races. Sociologists Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler, in their recently published book "All That We Can Be," said they analyzed the claim that blacks were used like cannon fodder during Vietnam "and can report definitely that this charge is untrue. Black fatalities amounted to 12 percent of all Americans killed in Southeast Asia, a figure proportional to the number of blacks in the U.S. population at the time and slightly lower than the proportion of blacks in the Army at the close of the war."

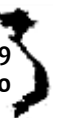
Common belief is that the war was fought largely by the poor and uneducated.

Fact: Servicemen who went to Vietnam from well-to-do areas had a slightly elevated risk of dying because they were more likely to be pilots or infantry officers. Vietnam Veterans were the best-educated forces our nation had ever sent into combat. 79% had a high school education or better.

The common belief is the average age of an infantryman fighting in Vietnam was 19.

Fact: Assuming KIAs accurately represented age groups serving in Vietnam, the average age of an infantryman (MOS 11B) serving in Vietnam to be 19 years old is a myth, it is actually 22. None of the enlisted grades have an average age of less than 20. The average man who fought in World War II was 26 years of age.

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



2/503d Vietnam Newsletter to be Maintained on University Website

Subject: Possible inclusion of the 2-503 Vietnam Newsletter and Sky Soldier Magazine in the Digital Military Newspaper Library at the University of Florida

Hello,

My name is Will Canova. I am the Newspaper and Periodical Projects Coordinator for the University of Florida Digital Collections. I am writing to you today in regard to the fact that the University of Florida is currently seeking publications for inclusion in the Digital Military Newspaper Library. We would be truly honored if you would allow us to include both the 2-503 Vietnam Newsletter and Sky Soldier Magazine in our Digital Collections. They each appear to be really extraordinary publications in terms of broadening the scope of our collection.

DMNL acts as a repository of military news and culture from around the country. The Digital Military Newspaper Library's continuing goal is to archive and preserve military perspective by offering full geographical representation of historic through current issues of select U.S. Military publications. There are currently over 100 periodical titles in the collection.

Here is a link:

<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/dmnl>

Please rest assured that there would be no cost to you and a major benefit would be increased readership and availability of this amazing resource to students, scholars and researchers.

We would simply harvest the pdfs from your website as they become available. If necessary we would gladly put an embargo on uploading the issues of the 2-503 Vietnam Newsletter and Sky Soldier Magazine...Some of our publishers have asked for a one week, 2 week or even a one month delay in our uploading of their content.

If you do decide to participate I will send the permissions form that needs to be signed and Faxed or scanned and emailed back to us.

We honestly hope that you decide to have either or both 2-503 Vietnam Newsletter and Sky Soldier Magazine join the Digital Military Newspaper Library!

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about our project. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Will Canova

Newspaper and Periodical Projects Coordinator,
Digital Production Services & Florida Digital Newspaper
Library
Interim Library Facility
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611



Our reply:

Mr. Canova, hello:

Sky Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion of the 173d Airborne Brigade will be pleased to learn our *2/503d Vietnam Newsletter* will be included as a historical reference source in your digital military library at the University of Florida, assuming access by readers will be free in perpetuity and we may include a link to your site in the newsletter. Thanks, and please email me the appropriate permission forms.

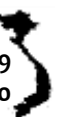
Of course, we cannot speak for the publisher of *Sky Soldier Magazine*.

Best regards,

Lew "Smitty" Smith
HHC/2/503, RVN '65/'66
Newsletter Editor
rto173d@cfl.rr.com

To Sky Soldiers & Friends of Sky Soldiers:

We highly recommend you visit the University of Florida's web site shown here to view and read from a wealth of current and historical military-related publications. The University has agreed to include our newsletter in perpetuity and free to anyone interested in accessing and reading it. Ed



PREPARATION OF 2/503 FOR COMBAT IN VIETNAM

By George E. Dexter, Col. (Ret), Abn Inf

On Monday, August 17, 1964, I took command of the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry at Camp Kue on the island of Okinawa. At that time I was 40 years old, had been on active duty for 19 years and had achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel but had not been in combat. The question could logically be asked, was I prepared for this job? Specifically, did my training and experience since commissioning prepare me to lead an infantry battalion in combat, and secondly what did I do to prepare the battalion for combat in Vietnam?



(Then) LTC George Dexter, 2/503 Battalion Commander on the tarmac at Bien Hoa AFB on 5 May 65, upon arrival of his battalion in Vietnam.

Since I was a 2d Lieutenant it had been my goal to command an infantry battalion. However, beginning in about 1957, it began to look as though that would be impossible, since the Army decided to eliminate infantry battalions. Foreseeing the possibility that atomic weapons might be used on future battlefields, the Army eliminated the triangular division of World War II and instead adopted a pentomic division, each composed of

five Infantry battle groups, which in turn were composed of five rifle companies. No battalions! The battle group, however, did not last long. It was quickly found to be unwieldy in the field, and by about 1960, it was decided to go back to the triangular organization.

Unfortunately, my service as a platoon leader and company commander did very little to prepare me for command of an infantry battalion in combat. That's because it came during what I call the nadir of the United States Army, the years between the end of world War II and the beginning of the Korean War when the feeling in the political class of our country was that we no longer needed much of an Army because we had the atomic bomb. What combat troops we had were primarily deployed on occupation duty in Germany, Japan and Korea, but they did not do much in the way of training. The poor performance of our troops in the initial phase of the Korean War, troops who had been on occupation duty in Japan, is evidence of that. And the troops we rushed in from Hawaii and CONUS pretty much had to learn on the battlefield.

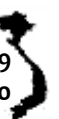
I was commissioned as a 2d Lieutenant of Infantry in the Regular Army in June of 1945, two months before the bomb was dropped. At the time of Hiroshima I was at Ft. Benning, GA learning to lead platoons and companies in combat. That was excellent training. Then I was shipped off to join the occupation forces -- however, I did not go to Germany, Japan or Korea. My ship went to the Philippines where I was assigned to the 86th Infantry Division, the only US division which fought in Germany and was rotated to the Philippines to participate in the planned invasion of Japan.

The primary mission of the 86th Division at that time was to send home all the men who had no intention of staying in the Army. This took about six months depending on the availability of shipping. I was assigned as a rifle platoon leader in a battalion based in a coconut grove about 40 miles south of Manila. Our daily routine involved reveille, PT, breakfast, close order drill (in case we had to participate in ceremonies), improvement of the camp, lunch, organized athletics all afternoon (baseball, volleyball, basketball), supper and an outdoor movie in the evening. We did have a night interior guard detail to prevent thievery by the local populace....



86th inf. Div.

(continued....)



....But with the war over and no enemies in sight, it was hard to motivate the men towards rigorous field training. Besides, we had no training areas. Actually, the battalion commander did decide to have the men conduct their annual refresher firing of their individual weapons, and he assigned me the job of building a range and conducting the firing. That was the best experience I gained during my two years in the Philippines.

In May 1946, about six months after my arrival in the Philippines, the battalion had lost almost all the men who had been in combat in Europe. We tore down our base camp and moved to join the remainder of the 86th Division at a camp east of Manila. Here our battalion was deactivated, and those of us left were transferred to another battalion in the same regiment where I found myself a 2d Lt company commander of a rifle company with no other officers, no senior NCO's and only about 30 or so enlisted men, mostly just out of basic training. In the whole battalion there were only six officers—a Regular Army Lieutenant Colonel battalion commander and five 2d Lieutenant company commanders, all classmates of mine. (We were promoted to 1st Lieutenants in September).

With only first term troopers in the orderly room, supply room and mess hall, there was one thing I had to learn—company administration: morning reports, duty rosters, payday procedures, promotions, company punishment, courts martial, property books, requisitions, reports of survey, menus, mess sanitation, field sanitation, etc. All these were subjects which effected the morale of the troops. But the training situation was about the same as in the coconut grove.

The 86th Division was eventually deactivated, and I returned to CONUS in late 1947, to an assignment with the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project at Sandia Base, NM near Albuquerque where I spent two years disassembling and assembling atomic bombs, and one year in the post headquarters handling "Special Projects." This assignment was followed by three one-year assignments in the early 50's which I consider were the best preparation I received for commanding 2/503 a decade later.

In spring 1951, I, now a captain, volunteered for Airborne and attended Jump School at Fort Benning in June, followed by assignment to the 508th Airborne Regimental Combat Team (RCT) at Fort Benning which had just been activated as part of the Korean War buildup of the Army. The RCT consisted of the 508th Airborne



508th Abn RCT

Infantry Regiment, the 320th Airborne Field Artillery Battalion, and the 598th Airborne Engineers. The infantry regiment included three battalions of Airborne Infantry plus a Headquarters Company, a Service Company, a Medical Company and a Support Company. As you can see, this is very close to the 173d Airborne Brigade organization in the 1960's.

The Department of the Army had developed a standardized training cycle for newly activated units. For Infantry regiments this cycle involved refresher training of individuals in their MOS's, followed by training of squads, platoons, companies and battalions. Each unit phase lasted about a month to six weeks in time and culminated in an Army Training Test (ATT) to test the competence achieved by the unit in that phase. After battalion tests the regiment or RCT participated in a field exercise to determine their overall level of competence.

On reporting for duty to the 508th in July of 1951, I was assigned as one of three Assistant Regimental S-3's. The S-3 gave me the job of planning and conducting ATT's for all the infantry units in the RCT, specifically 81 rifle squads, 27 rifle platoons, 9 rifle companies and three infantry battalions. Each test was a tactical problem which the leader of the unit being tested had to solve through the employment of his unit. To prepare the tests I had to study the field manuals, conduct a map reconnaissance and a ground reconnaissance to find terrain suitable for the test and draw up a Scenario and a Control Plan for the conduct of the test and instructions to the tested unit to prepare them for the test. The Scenario basically spelled out the theoretical tactical situation at the beginning of the test and orders issued to the leader of the tested unit by his commander to initiate or change action by the tested unit. The Control Plan included additional details to insure the tactical problem on the ground proceeds as required by the Scenario. For example, if there are Aggressors (troops playing the role of the theoretical enemy force), the Control Plan included instructions on where and when they should appear and what they should do. If there is live fire, the Control Plan spelled out what precautions are to be taken to insure the safety of everyone involved

The Fort Benning reservation sprawls over a considerable area of rolling country east and south of Fort Benning, covered with Southern Pines and scrub oak. A great deal of the land was utilized by the Infantry School, the primary tenant unit at Benning, as ranges and demonstration areas....

(continued....)



....However, there was plenty of space available on the reservation for me to lay out Army Training Test tactical problems. Once decided on such an area, I requested from Ft Benning that they reserve that area for the 508th for the duration of that particular test. One particular skill which I sharpened while setting up these tests was that I became extremely proficient in map reading of the topographical maps the Army uses in all its operations. I could locate myself or topographical features on a map within a hundred meters or so. This was an important skill when I commanded 2/503 in combat operations.



Troops conducting field exercise at Ft. Benning. (web photo)

For the squad, platoon and company tests, I played the role of the next higher commander—platoon leader for the squad tests, company commander for the platoon tests, and battalion commander for the company tests. I also played the role of chief umpire, graded the units on their performance and conducted the critique of their performance after the exercise was over. For the battalion tests, the RCT Executive Officer played the role of the RCT commander and Chief Umpire and graded the units. For the company and battalion tests, we also had additional officers as umpires with the platoons and companies.

Obviously, this was a tremendous opportunity for me to learn how infantry units perform at squad, platoon, company and battalion levels in combat.

In December of 1951, we had completed the company phase of training and ATT's, and the RCT moved by convoy to Ft. Rucker, AL to participate in a week long field exercise against a National Guard Division which had been called to active duty for the Korean War. In combat the S-2 and S-3 Sections of a regiment operate the Regimental Operations Center, maintaining communication with higher headquarters, the battalions and separate units, receiving periodic reports on their locations and activities and on enemy locations and activities, posting this information on the situation map, sending out orders and periodically forwarding this information to the next higher operations center. This was my first experience with an operations center, and I learned a lot.

In January 1952, we wrapped up the battalion training and ATT's and began preparation for participating in a major maneuver, *Exercise Longhorn*, which was to take place at the Ft. Hood, TX reservation in early April. This exercise involved the maneuvering of an Infantry Division and an Armored Division against each other for two or three weeks culminating in a break through by the Armored Division, which then would race to capture an objective in the enemy's rear. Along the route was a river with a key bridge. The 508th mission was to conduct a parachute jump, capture and secure the bridge before the enemy could capture or blow it up.

In early March the RCT Executive Officer plus the S-2 and S-3 with most of their personnel and contingents from S-1 and S-4 flew to San Angelo, TX where there was a mothballed WWII pilot training base and airfield. This was to be the marshalling area for the 508th jump, and the staff was to complete the plan for the jump there. I was left back at Benning as the acting RCT S-3 with the primary mission of planning and executing the movement of the 508th RCT by truck convoy from Ft. Benning to San Angelo and back.

This was quite a convoy. To accomplish it, three units were attached to the RCT—a Transportation Battalion of 2½ ton trucks to carry the Infantry, an Ordnance Automotive Maintenance Company to repair those trucks that broke down on the road, and an MP Platoon to help with traffic control. In all there were about 500 vehicles in the convoy, including organic and attached vehicles. We travelled on the blue highways (there were no interstates at that time), at a speed of 35 mph, and it took 5½ days to get from Ft. Benning, GA to San Angelo, TX.

I was given the job of preparing the March Order for the convoy. This primarily involved organizing the convoy into battalion Serials and company March Units and publishing a March Table which specified at what time each day each unit passed each critical point. We had some glitches along the way, but we rolled into the abandoned airfield at San Angelo at noon on the 6th day in the rain but with all vehicles and personnel. This was to be the Marshalling Area for our jump, which would take place in about a week. The troops were billeted in the buildings which were not in the best of shape but better than pup tents. Equipment was checked, parachutes and equipment bags were packed, and some refresher training was conducted.

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By the time I got to San Angelo, the Operation Order for the jump was almost completed. One of the EM in the S-3 Section was a draftsman who was a Navajo artist and did beautiful work. He was given the job of building a large sand table of the drop area, showing the DZ, the highway on which the Armored Division would be approaching and the bridge which was the RCT objective, plus all the nearby hills, woods, houses, farm fields and other roads. The RCT commander gave his operations order to the battalion commanders for the jump utilizing this sand table in lieu of a map, and a schedule was set up so that the subordinate commanders--battalion and company--could issue their orders to their subordinates utilizing the same sand table.

On the day before the jump the troops moved all their equipment--weapons, packs, equipment bags--down to a hangar next to the landing strip. Also, the riggers completed packing all the parachutes and moved them into the hangar, and guards were posted. On the morning of the jump the troops were awakened around 0400, had breakfast in the barracks and at 0500 marched down to the hangar to don their equipment and parachutes and load onto the aircraft. It was just starting to dawn, April 8, 1952, when the planes taxied down to the airstrip, took off and began to form up for the flight to the drop zone.

I was the jumpmaster for a planeload of HHC troops. The wind was blowing hard, the plane bounced all over the sky, troopers were getting sick all over the plane, but the crew chief had plenty of barf bags. The red light came on, we stood up and hooked up, checked equipment and shuffled to the jump doors. The green light came on, I tapped out the first jumper and the stick followed, with me as the Jumpmaster going out last.

When my chute opened, I looked down to see the DZ covered with inflated chutes dragging their jumpers down the DZ. My PLF was fine, but I was being dragged and really struggling to collapse my chute when someone who had already landed and gotten out of his chute ran around in front of mine, grabbed the apex, ran around to the side and collapsed it! If he hadn't done so, I'm not sure when I could have collapsed it by myself!

I don't know how many paratroopers jumped on that day, but I will make a rough estimate of 2,500. One was killed, 221 were injured, of whom 196 were admitted to the hospital. Helicopters from Fort Hood were flying in and out all morning picking up the injured for evacuation. The story that I later got was that the RCT S-4 was on the DZ with an anemometer to read the wind speed

on the ground. If the wind speed exceeded 15 mph, the jump was supposed to be cancelled. It was up around 20 mph while the planes were enroute to the DZ. The S-4 had radio contact with the RCT Commander, COL Joe Lawrie, who was riding with the Air Force Commander, BG Murrow. When the planes were about 5 minutes out from the DZ the wind speed on the ground dropped to 15 mph. The S4 passed this on to COL Lawrie, and he in consultation with BG Murrow decided to go ahead with the jump.



508th jump during Exercise Longhorn. (web photo)

By late afternoon the troops had captured the bridge which was our objective and had secured it for the night. About mid-morning the next day the Armored Division linked up with us, and Operation Longhorn was over. Either that day or the next I prepared an Operations Order for the return convoy to Ft Benning, which came off without a hitch.

In the summer of 1952, I received orders assigning me to the Infantry School at Fort Benning to attend the Infantry Officers' Advanced Course beginning in September 1952, and graduating in June 1953. Each branch of the Army has a "home" station which primarily includes a branch school which develops doctrine, publishes field manuals and conducts officer and enlisted specialty schools. Regular Infantry Officers attend two courses - the Basic Course and the Advanced Course. The Basic Course, which prepares officers to command platoons and companies, actually reviews much covered in pre-commissioning training, but it takes place with live firing of weapons on real terrain.

(continued....)





(web image)

I have always considered the Infantry Officer's Advanced Course as the best school I ever attended, military or civilian. Most Regular Officers attended the Advanced Course for their branch after about 5 to 10 years of active commissioned service. The class I was in graduated 208 students. There was another class about the same size taking place at the same time. Age-wise we were in our late 20's or early 30's. Probably the majority had seen combat in World War II or in the Korean War, which was going on at that time. Most were captains, but there were 14 Lieutenant Colonels, 68 Majors and 2 First Lieutenants in the class. Included were 3 black officers, pretty rare at that time. One Air Force and one Marine officer also attended. In addition to Americans, 13 foreign Officers attended, including 7 from Latin American countries, 2 from Europe, 3 from Iran and one from Taiwan China. The American Army officers were from all commissioning sources—West Point (about a quarter of the class were my classmates), college ROTC, Officer Candidate School and Battlefield Commissions.

The primary goal of our course was to prepare us to be staff officers and commanders of Infantry battalions and regiments (what we now call brigades). About 2/3 of the instruction time was in the classroom and 1/3 in the field. Our primary texts were Field Manuals. Our classroom was a large lecture hall in the main building of the Infantry School. We had assigned seats with a table about 3 feet by 2½ feet in size, large enough to spread out a map. The instruction was excellent. The instructors knew their subjects, had been rehearsed and critiqued by the other instructors in their departments and used training aids utilizing the latest technology available at that time. Our homework the night before was to study the Field Manuals on the subject to be covered that day.

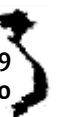
The course began with a refresher on some key lessons we learned in the Basic Course. We then launched into learning the duties of staff officers. The Army at that time had four of them at every level of command above the company. At command levels below general, they were designated as S-1, S-2, S-3 and S-4. At General Officer commands they were G-1, 2, 3 & 4, and at Joint levels, J-1, 2, 3 & 4. At all levels, staff officers were responsible for gathering information within their field, developing possible courses of action, recommending to the commander what action he should take and then carrying out the commander's decision.

S-1's are responsible for personnel matters--requisitioning people by MOS to fill vacancies, assigning them to units and jobs, promotions, pay, leave, decorations, discipline including courts martial and punishments, medical care, burial, etc.

S-2's are responsible for Intelligence matters--intelligence about the enemy, the terrain and the weather. They gathered much of it from higher level intelligence agencies, but also from patrols sent out by their own unit, by study of captured documents and interrogation of prisoners captured by the unit. S-2's also disseminated information about the enemy, weather and terrain to subordinate units.

S-3's are responsible for Operations and Training. They determine the current training level of the unit as a whole and of subordinate units and in accordance with the commanders' guidance develop training programs to bring them to the desired level. In combat operations, the next higher level of command issues an operations order which spells out the overall mission of the organization and assigns specific missions to subordinate units which, if accomplished, will achieve the mission of the organization as a whole. In offensive operations, these tasks are normally the attack and seizure of terrain objectives which are defended by enemy forces. In defensive operations they are the defense and holding of specific terrain features, such as a hill, a forest, a town or a river line. In a withdrawal, the task is the abandonment of a defensive position and orderly movement of the unit to occupy a new defensive position or an assembly area preparatory to renewal of the attack. The operation order also specifies what fire support, such as artillery, tactical air or organic mortars, will be supporting the operation.

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The S-3 normally accompanies the commander to receive operations orders from the next higher commander. The commander then takes the S-3 with him while they reconnoiter the area in which their unit will operate during the operation. The commander makes decisions as to how the subordinate units will be deployed for the operation and what objectives they are to capture, and the S-3 organizes all these decisions into an Operation Order. This order is always in five paragraphs:

- Information on the enemy, terrain and weather in the operational area.
- The mission which has been assigned to the unit by the next higher commander.
- Specific missions assigned to each subordinate unit, plus coordinating details, such as the time of attack, line of departure, phase lines, and intermediate objectives. Also fire support available.
- Administrative and logistical support
- Communications

At squad, platoon and company levels, the commander issues the order verbally. At battalion and higher the order is issued verbally by the commander but is usually backed up with a written order.

The S-4 is responsible for logistical support, which generally includes the fields of supply, maintenance and transportation support. Supply is broken down into five classes, which vary in how they are handled:

Class I – Food and Water

Class II – Organizational Equipment (guns, vehicles, etc.)

Class III – Petroleum, oils and lubricants (POL)

Class IV - Special Equipment, e.g., fortification materials

Class V – Ammunition and Explosives

In World War II a new staff position was established, S-5, which handled Civil-Military Affairs. We learned at Benning about how they functioned in Europe in WWII. However, in Korea and Vietnam they functioned at higher levels, probably division and up. They have been used extensively in Iraq and Afghanistan at regimental level and above.

After learning about staff jobs, we began learning about combat operations at the battalion level. First there were lectures presenting basic doctrinal principles for particular types of operations. Also we received presentations from Artillery, Armor, and Air Force officers on the faculty concerning what support they can provide us and how to request and control that support. Then we were presented with theoretical tactical situations. We are a commander or S3 of a battalion. Our troops are deployed here on a map. (Each of us has a map of the operational area spread on

our table). This is the known enemy situation. We receive the following order from the regimental commander. Where do we go on reconnaissance? Who do we take with us? Where, when and to whom do we issue our battalion operation order? What is our plan of action? The operation begins, but then such and such happens. What are our actions and orders? We discuss and critique possible solutions. Then the instructor presents a “school solution,” which is also critiqued by the students.

As the course progressed, we frequently formed student teams with a commander and staff. We would be issued a regimental operation order and came up with our battalion operation order to carry it out.

Periodically we had written examinations on the material covered. We had only one paper to write, on a subject of our own choosing. We also received periodic lectures in the post Theater, many concerning the Korean War then in progress. Also many were by higher ranking Army commanders.



The 187th RCT jump in Korea. (web photo)

In late winter our focus shifted to the regiment. The activities of commanders and staff officer at this level were basically the same as for the battalion, so after going through attack, defense, and withdrawal operations at regimental level, emphasis shifted to conducting operations in different environments— arctic/winter operations, desert operations, mountain operations, jungle operations, armored operations, urban warfare. We also looked at planning and conducting airborne operations, armored operations and amphibious operations. The Marines put on a great half-day show on this for us in the post theater.

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In late spring we participated with the other Advanced Class in a large Command Post Exercise (CPX) out on the Benning Reservation. We were broken down into battalion or regimental staffs – Commander, Executive Officer and S-1, S-2, S-3 and S-4 -- and each staff was put into a Command Post (CP) tent with a table and a few chairs plus a map posted on a board and covered with a 1/25,000 map and further covered with transparent material which could be drawn on with a colored grease pencil and erased with a cloth. This was a Situation Map which showed the most recent known locations of subordinate units and enemy units. Throughout, the CPX the CP received messages from higher headquarters or subordinate units, some by telephone, but most supposedly by radio. Actually the radio operators were CPX faculty members posing as radio operators who wrote the text of radio messages they received and delivered them to the Operations Sergeant (another faculty member) who decided which staff officer should receive it. If the message showed a change in the location or activities of an enemy or subordinate unit, the appropriate staff officer sent a message to this effect to appropriate subordinate or higher headquarters. If the message required a change of mission of a subordinate unit, the commander and S-3 conferred, the commander decided, and the appropriate units were notified.

This exercise went on for about 24 hours and was one of the most valuable we experienced in the Advanced Course.

We graduated from the Infantry Officers Advanced Course in June 1953. It had been a tremendous learning experience!

During the Spring I received orders to Korea, but I didn't actually get there until late July. The night I landed in Japan on the way to Korea, a cease fire was announced, so I missed the war. I was assigned to the 5th Infantry Regimental Combat Team as S-3 of the 3d Battalion, a job that I felt fully qualified to perform after my experience as Assistant S-3 of the 508th Airborne RCT and my attendance at the Advanced Course at Benning.

The cease fire did not end the Korean War, and it technically could start again at any time, so we had to be able to resume fighting. This was not the Philippines experience repeated -- far from it. The 5th remained at full fighting strength through the year I was there, and we maintained a full training schedule. It was a great time to be an S-3!

My battalion commander, LTC Verne Mergler, was an experienced officer who had commanded a battalion in Europe for a time in WWII and since had commanded battalions in other units. We worked well together, and

he was apparently quite satisfied with my work since he kept me in the job until he rotated home 11 months later.

The mission of the 5th RTC was to be Corps Reserve in the III Corps sector along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The III Corps had two US Infantry Divisions dug in along the DMZ in mountainous terrain. In the middle of the corps sector a wide valley ran south and slightly southwest about 30 to 40 miles back to Seoul. So this was a major avenue of approach to Seoul, and we were encamped in the valley. The RCT camp was located about 20 miles south of the DMZ, at the site of a prewar village named Chipori that no longer existed. The valley here was about a mile wide, with a stream and a well maintained road running down the middle--the Main Supply Route (MSR) for the divisions up on the DMZ. East of the valley the land rose through foothills to mountains. It was in these foothills that the RCT Headquarters, Artillery Battalion, Engineer, Service and Medical Companies were encamped. On the west side of the valley were a series of low, barren, well eroded hills running north to south, and the three infantry battalions were bivouacked in the gullies radiating out from these hills.



(web image)

The RCT Commander wanted to conduct rigorous training to keep us prepared to return to combat if necessary. The Korean War had been a "High Ground" war. We fought to seize and control the hills, ridgelines and mountain tops, from which we could dominate the enemy on lower ground. Therefore, I wanted to find a good training area not too far from our base camp which had both high and low ground....

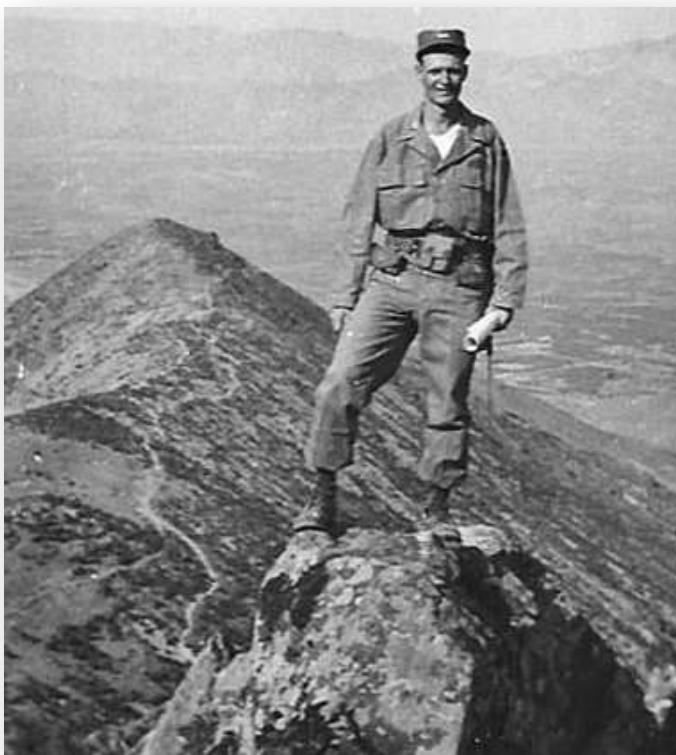
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....One thing that greatly helped in this was that all civilians who used to live in this area had long ago been evacuated to suitable farming areas behind the Corps rear boundary, which was probably ten miles south of us. Regiment had not designated an area for our training, so I set out to find one.

The obvious place to look was among the mountains on the east side of the valley. A map study showed a small stream flowing out of a valley about two miles north of RCT Headquarters, with a road paralleling the stream for a short distance into the hills. So I and my jeep driver took off to check the valley and the road. We found that the road was in pretty good shape, and better still, that after a couple of miles it turned south, crossed over a small ridge on a series of switchbacks, and descended into a beautiful bowl surrounded by mountains.

The road down to the floor of the valley passed through a conifer forest, something, pretty rare in rural Korea. The floor of the bowl was large, quite open, with a lot of smaller hills and numerous paths up ridges to the surrounding mountain crests. It was just about a perfect training area.



"This picture was taken in the vicinity of Taegu South Korea in April 1954, and shows me doing what I did a lot of as the S-3 of 3d Battalion, 5th Infantry Regimental Combat Team -- reconnaissance for appropriate combat training areas for the battalion." George Dexter

I further found that an intermittent creek bed with a path beside it ran from the bowl out to the valley, a distance of about 2 miles. The troops could hike from

the battalion base camp to the bowl in about an hour, train all day and then return in another hour, which would help keep them in shape. I broke the bowl down into several sub-areas so that several units could be training there at the same time.

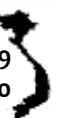
As S-3 my primary job was to publish and distribute a weekly training schedule for the units of the battalion. I had an experienced Operations Sergeant and Clerk, and we had a squad tent for an office plus three small tables, three or four chairs, a mimeograph machine and a couple of gasoline lanterns. We also had a complete set of Field Manuals, and the companies had the same manuals. The training schedule spelled out what training each company in the battalion would do each day of the coming week, where and when they would do it, and it cited the references in the appropriate Field Manual covering that subject. For example, if the training is to be on Rifle Squad in the Attack, the reference would be to FM 7-10 (Rifle Company), Chapter so & so, paragraphs so and so, where US doctrine on conducting an attack by a rifle squad is spelled out. In addition, the rifle companies at that time had two light machine gun squads and three 60mm mortar squads, the heavy weapons company had heavy machine gun and 81mm mortar squads, the Headquarters Company had reconnaissance squads and Pioneering and Ammunition Squads, and the Communication Platoon had wire laying teams and radio teams that needed constant training, and all of these needed to be included in the weekly training schedule.

The training schedule was distributed to the companies on Thursday for the following week, so I had to complete my draft of the schedule on Wednesday night. At that time we did not have a generator for the battalion, so I had to complete my draft by gasoline lantern light. During my first month as Battalion S-3 I seldom got back to my tent on Wednesdays before midnight.

On Thursday the Operations Sergeant took over, had the schedule typed on mimeograph stencils, proofread, reproduced and distributed to the companies.

In subsequent months my job became easier as we moved into platoon training, since there were fewer types of platoons than squads in the battalion. Also, the battalion finally got a generator, so we had electric lights at night.

(continued....)



It was a beautiful fall, but by December it had turned quite cold. By this time we had received winter uniforms for the troops and had winterized the tents by adding floors, a tent liner and a stove in each tent. As yet, however, we had had very little snow. We continued outdoor company level training to inure the troops to the cold, then stopped mid-December for a holiday break.

But early in the New Year this came to an end when III Corp ordered us to move into a blocking position. This was an exercise to practice one of several movements Corps might direct us to execute in the event hostilities should break out again. The exercise directed that the RCT move by truck to the southwest several miles, then climb to a ridge, occupy and prepare defensive positions. There was not much snow on the slopes, but there were icy stretches along the trails, and the ground was frozen, making it very difficult to dig in. The Battalion Commander and I were not able to make much of a reconnaissance of our assigned sector of the line but we did get up to the ridgeline which we would defend and assign company sectors based primarily on map reconnaissance.

There was enough daylight left for the companies to get up into positions and dig in before dark. My major concern was that somebody would slip and break a leg on the icy stretches of a path and have to be evacuated. As anyone who ever watched MASH knows, helicopter evacuation was in its infancy in Korea, and the choppers of that day were far less capable than the Hueys of our day. As it turned out one soldier did fall and break a leg and had to be carried down to where an ambulance could haul him to a hospital.



Korean War version of a Dust Off. (web photo)

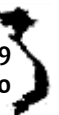
The battalion CP was down off the ridgeline on flatter ground. I slept in a pup tent in a sleeping bag that night, but it was the coldest night I ever spent in my life. The exercise terminated by noon the second day and we returned to base camp and our much warmer tents.

In February we learned that III Corps would conduct battalion level Army Training Tests of all the infantry battalions in the Corps, beginning in March. Since as Assistant S-3 of the 508th Airborne RCT back in 1951-52 (just 2 years previously), I had been responsible for planning and conducting Army Training Tests for all the rifle squads, platoons, companies and battalions of the 508th, I knew that the battalion tests involved the daylight preparation of a battalion defensive position, a night withdrawal to an assembly area, followed by a daylight attack. We were already in the battalion phase of training, so I scouted around to find some new training areas that would be appropriate for additional training in defense, withdrawal and attack.

It turned out that our battalion was selected to be the first in the corps to go through the test. It was scheduled for early April, and all the snow had melted by then. The temperature the first day probably ran from about 40 to 50 degrees, it was cloudy all day, rained intermittently, and clouds settled over the test area at times.

For the defense phase we occupied an east-west ridge to stop attacks from the north. Two adjacent rifle companies were deployed facing north to provide the main line of resistance, and the third rifle company was deployed behind them as a reserve to provide depth to the position or to conduct counter attacks. In addition a platoon from the reserve company, known as the Combat Outpost, pushed forward about 500 yards to provide early warning of the arrival of the enemy, to delay him and to deceive him as to the location of our main line of resistance. The defensive phase went without a hitch, and by mid-afternoon the troops were deployed and dug in, the Battalion Command Post (CP) (the field headquarters) had been set up in a draw next to the road and stream downhill from the defensive positions, the 81mm mortars set up next to the CP, and the Communication Platoon had laid telephone lines to the companies, the mortars, the CP and the Combat Outpost.

(continued....)



The next phase of the test was the night withdrawal. There was a pearl of wisdom I picked up at Ft Benning, **“If you are going to conduct a night operation, issue your order early enough that subordinate commanders can conduct a daylight reconnaissance.”** On that basis I figured that the umpires would have to give the withdrawal order around 3:00 to 4:00 p.m., so LTC Mergler and I made it a point to get back to the Battalion CP by around 3:00 p.m. But nothing happened!

We later learned that troops from another infantry unit were designated as an Aggressor Force with the job of attacking our Combat Outpost with blank ammunition in midafternoon, which would cause us to order the withdrawal of the outpost. The Aggressors would follow them to our front lines which they would fire on, and that would lead to the issuance of the withdrawal order by the umpires. However, the Aggressors got lost in the cloudy/rainy weather and never got to the Combat Outpost until after dark.

We waited and waited, and it got later and later, but no withdrawal order. Finally around 6:00 p.m. LTC Mergler and I, the Chief Umpire and the S-3 Umpire were sitting around in the Operations Center, when we got a telephone call from the Combat Outpost that they were under attack. I took the call and repeated it to Mergler, who directed that the combat outpost be withdrawn back to friendly lines. That set things off.

The umpires issued an order that the battalion withdraw from its present positions beginning at 9:00 p.m., assemble on the road at the bottom of the ridge, march back on the road to an assembly area where we would prepare to conduct an attack at 0900 the next day.

It was well after dark now and there was no way for the company commanders to conduct a reconnaissance, determine the best route down off the ridge and post guides at critical points along the trails down from the ridge where the troops were deployed. Actually, there were very few trails up the ridge from the south, but the withdrawal was basically simple, even if there were no guides posted: go south off the ridge by squads until you get to the road at the bottom, then reorganize into platoons and companies and march back to the assembly area. The squads mostly followed the finger ridges down, since the draws between these fingers were often choked with brush and pretty hard to navigate, especially at night. The finger ridges in turn split into more fingers as they descended down the slope, and it was difficult to select the best fingers. As a result, we had troops all over the slope that night working their way down. In some cases the fingers led to very steep areas of descent where the troops had to

lie down and inch their way down feet first. In the early part of the night there was a moon behind the clouds, but after the moon set it was extremely dark.

The squad leaders came through! In spite of the dark and the rough terrain, noise and light discipline were outstanding, and there were only minor injuries. The first troops got down to the road around midnight. The battalion vehicles had been sent back to the assembly area earlier in the evening, except those which carried weapons or equipment which were being brought down off the ridge. As each company got down and accounted for its men, it reorganized and started the march back to the assembly area to prepare for the attack the next day. However, the last man was not off the ridge until six o'clock in the morning.

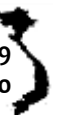
I stayed at the bottom of the ridge until about two o'clock in the morning, then marched off with a platoon up the road toward the assembly area. I knew this road well, but the only way I could navigate that black night was by feeling with my feet the tracks in the mud left by the vehicles which had gone ahead of us while watching the silhouettes against the sky of the men marching ahead of me. I reached the battalion CP around 4:00 a.m., found the operations tent and relieved the Operations Sergeant who had been receiving situation reports from the companies and forwarding them on to Regiment (the Umpires). I told him to get some sleep and began preparing to receive the attack operations order from Regiment early in the morning, and to issue our resulting battalion attack order.

We jumped off on the attack around 1000 the next morning, and the Training Test terminated when we reached the top of a small mountain on the rim of the bowl around noon and reorganized to continue the attack. We pulled down off the mountain, accounted for all personnel and had lunch, then mounted trucks for the trip back to Chipori. That evening, when I was back in my tent getting ready to write a letter to my wife, I realized that I had not slept for the past 40 hours!

A couple of weeks after the Battalion Test, the 5th RCT got a new Korean Communications Zone (KCOMZ) mission. We were to provide security to them. The Communications Zone is the area behind the Combat Zone where all the logistical and administrative installations are located....



(continued....)



....This basically was everything south of the capital city of Seoul. The 5th RCT Headquarters moved to the port of Pusan on the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula, and the 3d Battalion moved to the city of Taegu about 50 miles north of Pusan. Actually, by this time, seven months after the Armistice and with no sign of the resumption of hostilities, many of the logistical and administrative installation had been consolidated, but there were still a few around and they needed protection, primarily from thievery.

Our battalion was to provide security not only to Taegu, where the Headquarters of KCOMZ was located, and also in Inchon, the port city west of Seoul where Gen MacArthur had conducted an amphibious landing in September 1950 which drove the North Koreans temporarily out of South Korea. We sent one company to Inchon where they were billeted in the port area and provided security to port facilities. They stayed for a month, then were rotated back to Taegu while another company took over their mission.



U.S. troops prepare to land at Inchon during Korean War.
(web photo)

In Taegu we were billeted in Quonset huts in a closed US Army camp named Camp Walker that was quite comfortable. Most of the facilities we were guarding were on the grounds of the Headquarters for KCOMZ, an attractive former Japanese Army post, but there were several other installations in and around the city such as ammunition dumps. Guard shifts were two hours on and four off and really quite boring. We needed an activity to break the boredom, and the best activity for soldiers is field training. But where?

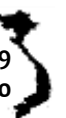
I went by the G-3 office of HQKCOMZ and found out that there was in fact a pretty good training area about 40 miles northeast of Camp Walker. But in addition to the distance there was one other drawback -- it was on top of a mountain! I was able to get maps of the area, and my driver and I headed out to look it over. As we approached the mountain, it was obviously flat topped. We drove on roads around the base and found two paths heading up the mountain, one with switchbacks, and the other straight up a spur. I took the switchback trail up to the top and found an area about 400 yards by 200 yards that was generally flat with a few small hills and sparsely forested. The biggest problem was that there was no water on top, and if troops camped up there, water would have to be hauled up to them along with food, ammunition, etc.

A few days later I took LTC Mergler, the S-4 and the company commanders up to the mountain to look it over, and they all agreed it would be an excellent training area. So we set up a system for the three line companies at Camp Walker—every week there would be two companies on guard duty and one out on the flat top mountain training. For the first company that went up there, they had to back pack their own supplies up every day, but after that the S-4 arranged to hire Korean porters to do it on their A-frames.

In August 1954 LTC Mergler rotated home. MAJ Harper, the Executive Officer had already left, so the Executive Officer from another battalion came over to take command. In mid-August I received orders to the Pentagon and left in mid-September for Pusan where I boarded a troop ship to Seattle. Not long after that the entire 5th RCT was shipped back to the United States where it was deactivated!

Those three assignments in the 1950's – Assistant S-3 of the 508th Airborne RCT, the Infantry Officer's Advanced Course at Benning And S-3 of the 3d Bn, 5th RCT in Korea after the cessation of combat were my primary preparation for command of 2/503 in training on Okinawa and combat in South Vietnam in combat. Plus my time as a company commander in the Philippines and instruction in the duties of the S-1 and S-4 at Benning prepared me for the administrative side of the Battalion Commander's job.

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After Korea I spent the next 8 years far from troops—three years in the Pentagon processing message traffic between the Department of the Army, JCS and Department of Defense and the major US military commands worldwide; a year at the Command and General Staff College at Ft Leavenworth, KS learning how to be commanders and staff officer at the Division, Corps and Field Army level; a year at Tulane University earning a Masters in Psychology and three years at West Point teaching Psychology and Leadership. Actually, that last assignment did help prepare me for command of 2/503.

While I was still at Ft Leavenworth I received a telephone call from West Point asking if I would be interested in teaching Psychology and Leadership at the Academy. They did not have such a course when I was a cadet, but after WWII General Maxwell Taylor, who commanded the 82d Airborne Division during the war, took over as Superintendent of the Academy, and he had it established as part of the regular curriculum beginning in the late 40's.



George E. Dexter, Col. (Ret) was graduated West Point Military Academy in 1945. Ed

I entered Tulane University in June 1958, completed my MS in General Psychology with an emphasis on Social Psychology a year later and reported for duty at West Point in midsummer,

1959. The Office of Military Psychology and Leadership (MP&L) taught three subjects to the cadets. General Psychology was taught to the Yearlings (sophomores) in the fall semester, and Military Leadership was taught to the First Classmen (Seniors) in the spring semester. The other subject, Military Instructor Training, was primarily taught during summer military training. We had 15 officer instructors in the office, all in the grades of captain or major, and all with an MS in either Psychology or Management. One was a

Marine. We were under the command of a colonel who was the equivalent of a Department Chair in a civilian university. All of us except the colonel taught all three subjects, but for the preparation of instructional material, we were divided into three teams: Psychology, Leadership and Military Instructor Training. I was assigned to the Leadership Team.

There were no adequate texts on the subject of Military Leadership on the civilian market, so we wrote our own which were published by the Academy printing shop. Our basic concept was that across the spectrum of human endeavors groups of people in a given situation with a common goal and led by a chosen or appointed leader are able to achieve the goal. In order to do this, the leader utilizes the team to manipulate the situation.

Leadership is learned, largely through experience. There are no born leaders, and there is no leadership personality. However, in order to gain the respect of the group the leader must abide by the values of the group. For example, the leader of a gang of crooks must be a crook himself, the leader of a religious group must abide by the tenants of the followers, and the leader of soldiers must at times expose himself to the hardships and dangers faced by his troops. The leader must also know how to employ the followers in order to achieve the goal.

The texts that MP&L produced and used for the leadership instruction of the cadets and their subject areas are shown below:

Volume I

Part I -- A Concept of Leadership

This covered chapters on: A Usable Concept of Leadership, The Individual and the Group, The American Soldier, Interpersonal Communications and Leadership Behavior.

Part II -- Management

This covered chapters on The Scope of Management, Planning, Organizing, Coordinating, Directing, Controlling and The Future Challenge.

Volume II

Part III -- The Management of Men

This covered chapters on: The Nature of Personnel Management, Motivation and Morale, The Soldier's Job, Personnel Training, Evaluating Performance, Promotion and Separation, Problem Counseling, Group Solidarity and Esprit.

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Volume III Situational Studies

This included chapters on: Leadership Development, Setting the Example, Creativity and Conformity, Awards and Punishment. Senior-Subordinate Relations, Problems in Training, Problems in Combat, Problems in Cold War and Code of Conduct.

Supplementary Readings

This includes 2 committee reports and 26 articles written by 2 civilians and 3 lieutenants, 2 captains, 3 majors and 16 General Officers on a variety of leadership related subjects

During my third year of teaching at West Point I was appointed chief of the Leadership section of MP&L. In this role I decided to rewrite the texts used for the Leadership Course, primarily to update the material. I farmed out the job among the five of us in the Leadership Section, and the end product was the texts I cited above. I, as chief of the section, had to do the final corrections, so in the process I found myself doing a lot of thinking about leadership. That is why I feel this assignment was an important step in my preparation for command of 2/503.

In the Spring of 1962, I was finishing my tour with MP&L at West Point and expecting to be promoted to lieutenant colonel within a few months. I had asked the Department of the Army to assign me to duty in Europe. I had not previously been assigned to Europe, and I felt my chance of commanding a battalion were best in Europe. Instead, I received orders to the 1st Special Forces Group on Okinawa, with TDY enroute to attend the Special Forces Officers Course at Ft Bragg, NC. At that time the only thing I knew about Special Forces was from an article in the *New York Times* a couple of months earlier concerning a Special Forces A Team in the Highlands of South Vietnam working with indigenous people known as *Montagnards*, training them to defend their villages against VC and NVA attacks and patrolling their areas, often involving fire fights with VC and NVA troops passing through the area.

I found the 3 months Special Forces Officer's Course at Ft Bragg and my two years with the 1st Special Forces Group quite fascinating. The primary mission of Special Forces was to supply and train guerrilla forces operating in the enemy's rear areas. In Vietnam in the early 60's, US Special Forces conducted counterinsurgency operations working primarily with indigenous stone age tribal people, mostly in the Central Highlands fighting

against both VC and NVA in or passing through their traditional tribal areas.

I commanded a Special Forces company on Okinawa training teams for six month TDY tours in South Vietnam training and equipping indigenous forces, leading them on combat patrols in their area, providing intelligence to higher headquarters of enemy activities, and helping the indigenous forces defend their villages against enemy attacks.

There were three different types of teams in the Special Forces company. There were twelve A Teams, each composed of a captain and a lieutenant and ten enlisted specialists in Infantry Operations, Intelligence, Light and Heavy Infantry Weapons, Demolitions and Field Construction, plus two highly trained Radio Operators and two highly trained Medics capable of delivering babies and amputating limbs in the field. In addition there were three B Teams, each commanded by a major with a S-1, S-2, S-3 & S-4 staff of captains plus clerks and a lot of radio operators. The B Team controlled several A Teams in the field. Finally the Company Headquarters, commanded by a lieutenant colonel with a staff of majors constituted a C Team capable of controlling several B Teams in the field.

In the 1st Special Forces Group there were four companies – A, B, C and D, all of which had about the same numbers of teams deployed to Vietnam.

A and B Teams received six months of preparatory training on Okinawa and then were sent to Vietnam for six month TDY tours. While on TDY they received per diem. Basically, at any one time the company had four A Teams and one B Team in Vietnam, four more A Teams and one B Team were in training on Okinawa to prepare for Vietnam and the remaining four As and one B, plus the C Team were made up of men who either had just arrived on Okinawa or had recently returned from a Vietnam tour. With those remaining people I had to keep the company trained and ready for conducting guerrilla operations within the Pacific Theater should the need arise.

In March 1963 COL Woody Garrett, the Commander of 1st Special Forces Group, directed me to put together a planning staff from my C Team and go to South Korea to work with the South Korean Special Forces Group to plan and conduct a combined US/South Korean guerrilla warfare exercise in June in South Korea....

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1st SFG



I was in overall command of the planning group, and I reported to the G-3, Eighth US Army Headquarters. Korean members of the planning group came from the Korean Special Forces Group based at Inchon AFB west of Seoul. All of their officers spoke English well and had attended some US Army schools in the US. None of us spoke Korean!

A squad tent was set up for us at 8th Army Headquarters in Seoul, and they provided us with tables, chairs, typewriters, mimeograph machines, etc. We set about planning the exercise and coordinating with non-Special Forces agencies, e.g. US Air Force and South Korean Air Force. Also US Navy because we planned to infiltrate one US Special Forces A Team by submarine! The planning took about eight weeks and went surprisingly smoothly. The plan was approved by US Eighth Army Headquarters and South Korean Army Headquarters, and we moved the planning group to Inchon to be the controlling headquarters for the exercise. Two A Teams from A Company back on Okinawa flew up to marshal for the night infiltration jump that would start the exercise, and another A team boarded the submarine. The exercise lasted about ten days. There were glitches but overall it came off pretty well.

In September 1963, I had the opportunity to visit the four A Teams and one B Team from A Company that were deployed to South Vietnam at that time. After hearing all kinds of stories from A and B Team Commanders returning from the six months tour in country, it was great to see what was actually happening on the ground. I was impressed.

In the Spring of 1964, COL Garrett sent me and my planning staff to prepare another exercise, this time with the Thai Special Forces. Again the planning went quite well, but this time we had some problems with the USAF, particularly their workhorse transport aircraft, the C-130. There were insufficient spare parts in the Pacific theater, and the aircraft were breaking down. We had three American A Teams which were scheduled to drop on two different DZ's several hundred miles apart. The first team jumped without problems, but after the jump the jump door jammed and could not be fully closed. That meant that the pilot had to fly the airplane at a lower altitude to the second DZ, and this burned up more gasoline. The pilot was scheduled to make two passes over the DZ, dropping an A Team on each pass. However, he was concerned that he would not have enough gasoline to get back to his base if he did so. That meant that both teams would have to jump out of the one good door on one pass! Luckily there was a pretty long LZ. The jumpers jumped,

there were no serious jump injuries, but it took the troops until mid-morning to assemble!

I still wanted to command an infantry battalion. When the 2/503 Battle Group on Okinawa reorganized to become the 173d Airborne Brigade in 1962 or 1963, an artillery battalion was added to the brigade organization. A good friend of mine, Jack Wieiringa, took command of the battalion. He knew of my interest in commanding an infantry battalion, and sometime in the Spring of 1964, probably around the time I got back from Thailand, he told me that one of the infantry battalion commanders in the brigade would be leaving soon. I went to see COL Garrett and asked his permission to visit BG Williamson, CG of the 173d, and ask him to give me command of 2/503. Garrett had commanded a Ranger Battalion in World War II, and he told me to go ahead. So I called the 173d and made an appointment with Williamson—and he agreed! Then a problem came up. Garrett received orders to return to the US in June for a new assignment.



BG Williamson

His replacement, a Colonel Kelly, would not arrive on Okinawa until August, and I was the ranking lieutenant colonel in the 1st SFG, so I would have to command the 1st SFG until the replacement arrived. I called Williamson and told him, and he agreed to hold the command of 2/503 until the replacement for Garrett arrived. There was one more hurdle. Would Kelly release me? The day he and his family arrived, I had lunch with him and brought up the subject. He said he would, but he wanted me to stay for two weeks to help him get his feet on the ground.

After reporting for duty to BG Williamson at the Brigade Headquarters in the Sukiran American Army Post on Okinawa on August 17, 1964, I drove over to Camp Kue, a Quonset hut camp where 2/503 was based; all but B Company which was billeted in modern barracks in the Sukiran area.

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The first thing I needed to do was to get to know the people I would be working with for at least the next year. So I drove over to Battalion Headquarters, walked in and met Major Bill White, the Battalion Executive Officer and SGM Mish, the S-1, S-2, S-3 and S-4, plus the senior NCO in each staff section. I also met my driver and during the rest of the day I visited each company and met the Company Commander, Executive Officer and 1st Sergeant. I also had lunch at the Battalion Mess Hall. This was an organizational change since my last duty with an Infantry battalion in Korea, 10 years previously.



L-R: Bill White, Lynn Lancaster & SGM Mish in Ben Cat.

(Photo by George Dexter)

At that time each company had its own mess team. By 1964, all the mess personnel in the battalion were in a platoon in HHC, commanded by a Warrant Officer. However, they were capable of breaking down into company teams if a company is separated from the battalion. In this case, B Company was billeted in the Sukiran area and had its mess team with it, while the rest of the Battalion at Camp Kue ate in a single mess building at Kue.

During the next few weeks I came to know all the Platoon Leaders and Platoon Sergeants in the battalion, plus the Communications Officer and Communications Sergeant, Motor Officer and Motor Sergeant, and eventually the Squad Leaders. Over time I got to know the Brigade Deputy Commander, COL Duddy, the Brigade Staff Officers and NCO's and the other Battalion Commanders. Shirley White, the wife of the Battalion XO, took it upon herself to introduce my wife, Katy, to the battalion officers wives, and Mrs. Williamson took it upon herself to introduce Katy to other officers wives in the brigade.



Newlyweds George Dexter with his bride, Katy, in 1949 in Albuquerque, NM when he was serving with the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project.

Since I left the 5th RCT in 1954, there had been many changes in the organization of an American infantry battalion. One company, the Heavy Weapon Company, had been eliminated. This company consisted of two machine gun platoons armed with .30 caliber, water-cooled, tripod-mounted machine guns, a weapon that had been in the inventory since World War I. The other platoon of the Heavy Weapons Company was armed with the 81mm Mortar. The rifle companies compensated for the loss of firepower from the Heavy Weapons Company by adding machine guns and mortars. In Korea the Weapons Platoon of the Rifle Company had a Section of three machine gun squads, which fired the .30 caliber, air cooled, tripod mounted machine guns. On Okinawa each Rifle Platoon had a Weapon Squad armed with two 7.62mm air cooled, shoulder mounted machine guns based on the German MG 43 which was considered to be the best machine gun of WWII. So the Rifle Company went from three to six machine guns with a better weapon. As for mortars, the Rifle Company went from having three 60mm mortars in Korea to having four 81mm mortars on Okinawa, a much more powerful weapon. It was also a much heavier weapon, which often meant that it could not easily be hand carried through jungle, swampy or hilly terrain.

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The Rifle Squads in Korea were the same as World War II with 11 men—Squad Leader, Assistant Squad Leader, 2 Scouts, Browning Automatic Rifleman and Assistant, and five Riflemen. On Okinawa they were still eleven men but now composed of a Squad Leader and two Fire Teams with a Team Leader, Grenadier and three Riflemen each. The Squad and Team Leaders and Riflemen carried M-14 Rifles, which were based on the M-1 Rifle of World War II and Korea, but I didn't think were much of an improvement over the M-1. The Grenadiers carried the M-79 Grenade Launcher which looked like a large caliber sawed-off shotgun and fired a projectile about an inch and a half in diameter on a high trajectory that exploded on contact.

The Headquarters Company went through the greatest change. In Korea, besides the Headquarters, the company had a Communications Platoon, a Medical Platoon, a Reconnaissance Platoon mounted in jeeps, a Motor Section and a Pioneering and Ammunition Platoon. This platoon was mounted in 2½ Ton Trucks, carried a basic load of ammunition for the battalion with it, and was capable of field engineering such as repairing roads and constructing makeshift fords or bridges. In Vietnam the Pioneering and Ammunition Platoon was eliminated, the Communications, Medical and Reconnaissance Platoons were retained, and a 4.2 inch Mortar Platoon, an Antitank Platoon with 75mm recoilless rifles mounted on jeeps and a Night Vision Section were added. The 4.2 inch Mortar Platoon added significantly to the battalion's firepower, but were even less mobile than the 81mm mortars. They were often set up with Brigade Headquarters while the battalion was moving cross country, then flown in by helicopter to help defend the perimeter at night. As for the Antitank Platoon, since the VC had no armor, the question came up as to whether we should take them to Vietnam. It was decided to leave them back on Okinawa but bring the jeeps and troops. They were used a lot for defense of the Battalion CP in the field.

The mission of the 173d was as Strategic Reserve for the Pacific Theater. As such, one rifle company had to be on standby, ready to load on aircraft on short notice, fly to a given destination and conduct a combat jump if necessary. As part of this standby the company's vehicles plus ammunition had to be packed for heavy drop. This responsibility was rotated among the six rifle companies in the brigade—three in 2/503 and 3 in 1/503.

I arrived at just the right time as far as training was concerned. As with the 508th Abn RCT at Ft Benning and the 3d Bn, 5th RCT in Korea, I arrived as the unit was preparing to undergo a complete training cycle. Individual training, squad training, platoon training,

company training, battalion training and battalion Army Training Tests, all over a period of about five or six months. In addition, in late October the brigade would conduct a training jump on Taiwan, followed by a week-long training exercise on the Island. My S-3 in 2/503 had for a while been my company S-3 with the 1st Special Forces Group before he had transferred to the 173d about a year previously. I knew what to expect from him and he knew what to expect from me.

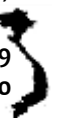


2/503 Sky Soldiers donning their parachutes at Kadena for training jump. (Photo by George Dexter)

Camp Kue was within a few miles of Kadena AFB where we loaded for all parachute jumps, and the drop zone was only about five miles beyond Kadena. There was an open field at Kue available for close-in training, ceremonies and athletics, but for field training we had to go north by truck about an hour (maximum speed limit on Okinawa was 30 mph) to what was called the Northern Training Area, adjacent to Camp Harrison, home of a USMC division. There were also firing ranges here. Overall it was an excellent field training area, but the 173d had to coordinate its use with the Marines and the 1st Special Forces Group.

I went over the training schedule in detail when it came out each week and selected classes or field activities I wanted to visit for each company. From this I built up a personal schedule for the week, including meetings already scheduled, visits to barracks, the Motor Pool, the Aid Station, Brigade Headquarters, other battalion commanders, etc.

(continued....)



At this time (fall 1964) Vietnam was not a hot issue. The only Americans involved were the Special Forces and their Montagnard troops who had occasional fire fights with the VC/NVA, with US Army Advisors to South Vietnamese Army units, USAF fighter crews providing tactical air support to ARVN troops and US Army helicopter crews providing logistical support. I don't specifically recall how we got our world news on Okinawa at that time, other than Armed Forces Radio and Television. We probably got newspaper coverage from *Stars and Stripes*. You will recall that our two previous wars—WWII and Korea—were kicked off by specific acts of aggression – against us at Pearl Harbor in WWII and by a deliberate full scale invasion of South Korea by North Korea in the Korean War. Nothing of this scale had as yet happened in Vietnam. The US was concerned about the political instability of the country after the assassination of President Diem in the fall of 1963, but the North Vietnamese were not yet ready to capitalize on this, and there was little enthusiasm in the US for our getting involved in a shooting war at that time.

The best training the battalion received during the Fall of 1964 was *Operation Sky Soldier* on Taiwan in October. This involved a flight from Okinawa to Taiwan, a brigade jump and a five day cross country offensive against an imaginary enemy. Most of our jumps on Okinawa were “pay jumps” without weapons or equipment. We had done so much training in the Northern Training Area on Okinawa that we knew the terrain pretty well. For *Sky Soldier* we jumped with our rifles and packs. Our machine guns, 81mm mortars and radios were packed in equipment bags attached to our harnesses below our packs or in door bundles which were attached to a parachute and shoved out the door ahead of the jumpers. Some jeeps and trailers, and I think the 4.2” mortars, were rigged for heavy drops.

The jump involved most of the brigade—2 Infantry battalions, the Artillery battalion, the Armored Cavalry Company and the Brigade Headquarters for sure. I am not sure how much of the Tank Company, Headquarters Company, and Support Battalion jumped and how many were flown to an airfield to unload, but overall at least 2,000 troopers of the brigade jumped.

On the evening of October 23 the brigade assembled in their barracks at Camp Kue and Sukiran, drew their weapons, blank ammunition and rations and packed their packs, then proceeded to pack equipment bags and parachute bundles. Around midnight trucks arrived and the troops and their equipment were loaded on the trucks and proceeded in convoy to Kadena AFB. The Rigger truck was already there. The troopers dismounted from the trucks, unloaded, formed up,

dropped their gear and proceeded to draw their parachutes, put them on, attached individual weapons and equipment bags, were inspected by the Jumpmaster and loaded onto the aircraft.

It was a long fight. We arrived over the DZ in mid-morning. The DZ was too small to jump everyone on one pass, even though we were using two doors, so only half of us jumped on the first pass. I was on the first pass and immediately noted that the winds were up and troopers were being dragged down the DZ. My first thought was, “*It’s Exercise Longhorn all over again!*” It wasn’t that bad, and we only had a few jump casualties. I was dragged a couple of hundred yards before collapsing my chute. But the decision was made by General Williamson and the Air Force Commander to cancel the second pass, and half of the battalion flew back to Okinawa to repeat the whole process the next day.

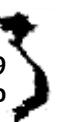


2/503 troopers exiting aircraft. (Photo by George Dexter)

The weather the next day was beautiful and the drop came off without a hitch, except for a few heavy drop items which got rather bent up!

We jumped in the vicinity of Kung Kuan Military Air Base northwest of Taipei. After assembling and capturing an initial objective, we were moved by truck convoy through the city, dismounted and continued the exercise to the south for several days through rolling country of scattered woodlands and farms. The second day of the exercise we started the day with a river crossing, about 100 yards across but only waist deep. We had to share the water with some water buffalo, and our troops were a little leery as to how friendly they were. They ignored us!

(continued...)



Throughout that day we were subject to mock air attacks, something that had not been incorporated into our training previously. We were also subjected to interference with our radio networks, requiring us to switch to alternate channels frequently. Overall we passed through a variety of terrain that we were not familiar with, no one got lost and we responded quickly and effectively to changes of missions and situations. I really felt that the battalion performed well.



“Hammer Jackson” – Charlie Company’s 1SGT Desmond Jackson during Operation Sky Soldier in Taiwan.

(Photo by John Taylor, B/2/503)

The exercise had begun on a Monday and terminated around noon on Friday, when we moved by foot down onto the western coastal plain of the island to an Air Force base where we bivouacked and spent a day cleaning up. Then on Sunday we were flown back to Okinawa.

By the end of 1964, the situation in South Vietnam was deteriorating. In the summer of that year two North Vietnamese divisions had been identified in the Highlands. In December a significant battle occurred in an area about 50 miles east of Saigon along the La Nga River. Under the peace agreement between the French and the Viet Minh in 1954, after the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu, those residents of North Vietnam who did not wish to live under the Communists were allowed to immigrate to South Vietnam, and many of them were settled in the La Nga River valley area. The South Vietnamese Army 10th Division was moved in

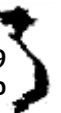
to this area and assigned responsibility for the protection of these settlers. In Oriental culture Number 1 is the best and Number 10 is the worst. The 10th Division had a reputation for being Number 10. In December of 1964, the Viet Cong in the La Nga area had built up enough to challenge the 10th Division in a battle that lasted several days and resulted in the 10th being driven out of the area, and the Communists taking over.

In South Vietnam at that time American personnel stationed in the Saigon area were allowed to have their dependents with them. Shortly after the beginning of 1965, in view of the deteriorating security situation, a decision was made by Washington to evacuate all dependents and send them back to the United States. In early January the 173d Airborne Brigade was alerted to prepare to go to Saigon to provide security for the evacuation. We went through the drill of preparing all the troops and their equipment for deployment to a potential combat zone. In the end we didn’t go. Apparently ARVN was able to provide the security, and the evacuation came off peacefully. But after that we filled up to full strength in personnel and got all new equipment, including the M-16 Rifle.

The M-16 was a great improvement over the heavier rifles we had in World War II, Korea and after Korea. It fired a smaller caliber bullet at a greater velocity and was significantly lighter. It was basically semi-automatic—reloaded after each shot, allowing a shot to be fired every time the trigger was pulled. But it was also capable of short bursts of automatic fire—continuous fire as long as the trigger was pulled back. With the smaller and thus lighter ammunition, a soldier could carry a lot of ammo. However, we did not get new radio models and were still using the Korean War versions of infantry back-pack and hand-held radios.

After New Year’s 1965, the battalion conducted several weeks of battalion-level training, culminating in late February/early March in a two-day Battalion Army Training Test (ATT) conducted by PHILRYCOM (Philippine/Ryukyu Command). This was basically the same test I prepared and conducted for the battalions of the 508th Abn RCT at Benning in 1952, and which the 3d Battalion 5th RCT underwent in Korea in 1954 involving the daylight preparation of a defensive position, a night withdrawal and a daylight attack with live ammunition the next morning.

(continued...)



To prepare for the test I conducted a series of seminars on defense, withdrawal and attack with the company commanders and staff officers. In these I emphasized what is known as Troop Leading Procedures. These are the actions of a commander from the time he receives a warning order from his next higher commander that the next higher unit will conduct a defense/withdrawal/attack at a particular time and place until the operation actually begins. It includes sending out a warning order to his own troops, selecting who will accompany him to receive the order for the operation, receiving the order, conducting a map and physical reconnaissance of the area in which his troops will be operating, deciding how he will deploy his troops, selecting a place to issue his order to his subordinate commanders, sending back a message to his subordinate commanders notifying them of the time and place the order for the operation will be given. Also, he directs that troops begin moving into assembly areas or attack positions to get ready for the operation.

I also took the company commanders and staff officers on a reconnaissance of the Northern Training area where I assumed the ATT would be conducted. The spine of the island, a ridgeline with hillocks, ran northeast to southwest within a few hundred feet of the western boundary of the training area. It was obvious that the defense phase of the test would take place along the spine, and that the night withdrawal would pull back off the spine to the east. There were paths off the spine going east but not too many and steep in places. There was shrubbery on the hillocks. As for the attack phase, it could be anywhere. Once off the spine, the country was largely rolling grasslands with occasional roads and paths, cut by seasonal streambeds with thick vegetation.

The ATT took place in early March and basically came off quite well, with one glitch. In the attack phase A Company was attacking north through rolling grasslands when it came upon a streambed with very thick vegetation, and it took them a very long time to get through. Two weeks later we had a second ATT, for Airborne Infantry Battalions. Tactically it was pretty simple -- a jump into a DZ, assembly and an attack to seize a nearby objective. It came off with no glitches.

Sometime in late winter of 1965, the Viet Cong launched a mortar attack on the air base at Pleiku in the South Vietnamese Highlands, killing several American personnel and damaging a significant number of helicopters operating out of the base. This was an obvious sign that the Viet Cong would attack Americans in SVN who were supporting the South Vietnamese military effort. In early March the US Marine Division on Okinawa was deployed to South Vietnam and

stationed in the vicinity of Da Nang in the northern part of the country. Then in mid-April the 173d Airborne Brigade was alerted to move to South Vietnam on May 5 for a "Temporary Change of Station". So 2/503 began packing up our equipment, deciding what we would leave behind on Okinawa and what would go with us and began the processing necessary prior to deployment to a combat zone. Since this Temporary Change of Station seemed to indicate that we would be returning to Okinawa, our families were able to stay on Okinawa in their government quarters for the time being.

In late April General Williamson and the battalion commanders flew to Saigon for two days of briefings on our mission and a reconnaissance of the area near Bien Hoa Air Base to which we would be deployed. The main thing I remember about that trip was that it was very hot in Vietnam. April and May are at the peak of the dry season. Most of the trees lose their leaves at that time, leaving little shade from the pitiless sun. We were flown to Bien Hoa by Huey helicopter and flew over the area northeast of the Air Base where we would be deployed.

Our movement to Vietnam was classified Secret until the evening of May 4 when it was broadcast on Armed Forces Television that the 173d would be deployed from Okinawa to South Vietnam. I was then able to tell Katy and the kids that we were leaving that night but were supposed to return sometime in the future.

That night the 173d Abn Bde with most of its equipment loaded on C-130 transport aircraft at Naha Air Base on Okinawa and took off for South Vietnam sometime after midnight. 1/503 landed at Vung Tau, a resort city on the coast downriver some fifty miles from Saigon. 2/503, along with the rest of the brigade, landed at dawn at Bien Hoa Airbase about 20 miles northeast of Saigon. BG Williamson, who had flown in earlier, was there on the tarmac to greet us.



Men of the 2/503 arrive Bien Hoa AB. (Photo by George Dexter)

(continued...)





U.S. Ambassador Maxwell Taylor welcomes LTC George Dexter to Vietnam as General Williamson looks on.

After unloading our personnel and equipment we were loaded on Army trucks and taken to our first positions. Our mission was to protect Bien Hoa Air Base from ground or mortar attacks from the northeast. Our position was some five or more kilometers from the perimeter of the air field, which was provided close in security by Air Police. We dug in to a perimeter defense and began aggressive patrolling of our sector, mostly at night.

We were in what had once been a rubber plantation, but the trees had matured and were cut down a few years previously. There was no shade during the day, and the troops were digging their positions. Across a road along our northern perimeter was some shrubbery, and the troops cut sticks that they could use to prop up their ponchos to provide shade while digging. Also the brigade Engineer Company opened up a water hole where the companies could send a truckload of water cans to be filled. They also set up showers, and a schedule for the companies to send their men.

After about three days someone up the line decided it was time to get the troops out of the sun. We moved the battalion into a live and producing rubber plantation about a kilometer east of our former position. This was a wonderful improvement. There was room under the trees for the whole battalion. The three rifle companies and Headquarters Company deployed on the four sides of the plantation and began digging their foxholes a few meters inside the tree line and erecting their pup tents a short distance back from the foxholes. Mess hall tents and the company and battalion CP's filled up the middle of the rectangle.

At the time we arrived in Vietnam it was our understanding that our mission was to provide security for critical installations while ARVN was to take the offensive against the VC. I don't think this plan lasted a

week after we arrived, and General Williamson began preparing us to take the offensive against the VC in jungle terrain. This primarily involved learning how to navigate through jungle, maintain contact with each other and deploy and control our fires and the fires of supporting weapons—mortars, artillery, helicopter gunships and tactical air support by both the South Vietnamese Air Force and the US Air Force.

East of our base camp in the rubber trees was a primary jungle which extended for some 10 kilometers. Beginning on the Monday after we moved into our new camp, General Williamson directed that we send our rifle squads into the jungle for a distance of about four kilometers and return. They were to do this strictly by compass and not follow any trails. On their return they would note how far they were from their starting point and thus how good their navigation by compass had been. The next day this was repeated for rifle squads, but going farther. For the next two days this process was repeated for rifle platoons.

During this same week the companies spent their afternoons loading and unloading choppers and got their first helicopter rides. The company officers and NCO's learned how to break down their units into helicopter loads, how to line the loads up along the field for pickup, how to load the choppers and how to unload them at the landing area. Actually airmobile operations are really quite simple compared to airborne operations, and our paratroopers took to them like ducks to water. On the last day of that week, each company conducted a tactical move through the entire ten kilometers of the jungle, emerging on the other side, where they were picked up by helicopters and flown back to base camp. We were now ready to conduct tactical operations against the VC.

Colonel George E. Dexter commanded the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep), from 1964 on Okinawa, until February 1966, when during Operation Phoenix he nearly lost his life to severe wounds in combat. Colonel Dexter is retired and lives in Albuquerque, NM.

We thank the Colonel for this historical report and have invited him to write about our battalion's activities from May through December 1965, to appear in a future issue of our newsletter, and to which he has agreed. Ed



On Being Airborne

As we all likely do on occasion, I reflect on my time as a paratrooper in the army. It was in the heat of summer in '65, when I somehow made it thru jump school, while many others couldn't or wouldn't complete the course, often giving up on those long and tortuous runs around the Benning grounds; and the 250' tower would cause pause with others who would take their leave to lower elevations, plus the Black Hats scaring the bejesus out of many young lads, would send them packing to a Leg unit somewhere for which they were more suited with their feet firmly planted on the ground. And I'll remember Nelson, an 'old' guy, 30 years old, who returned to the army and wanted to be a trooper, tho his "old" and out-of-shape body had other ideas....but we'd grab him by the arms and get him thru those runs, singing *Airborne, all the way! Airborne, ev'ry day!* ... and even louder and standing taller as we ran past the OCS barracks. Nelson did earn his wings.

There's something special about being a U.S. Army Paratrooper, something we all felt back then and still feel inside today, even tho most of us are now more *Chairborne*. You know what I'm talking about...and those who are not troopers will never quite know.

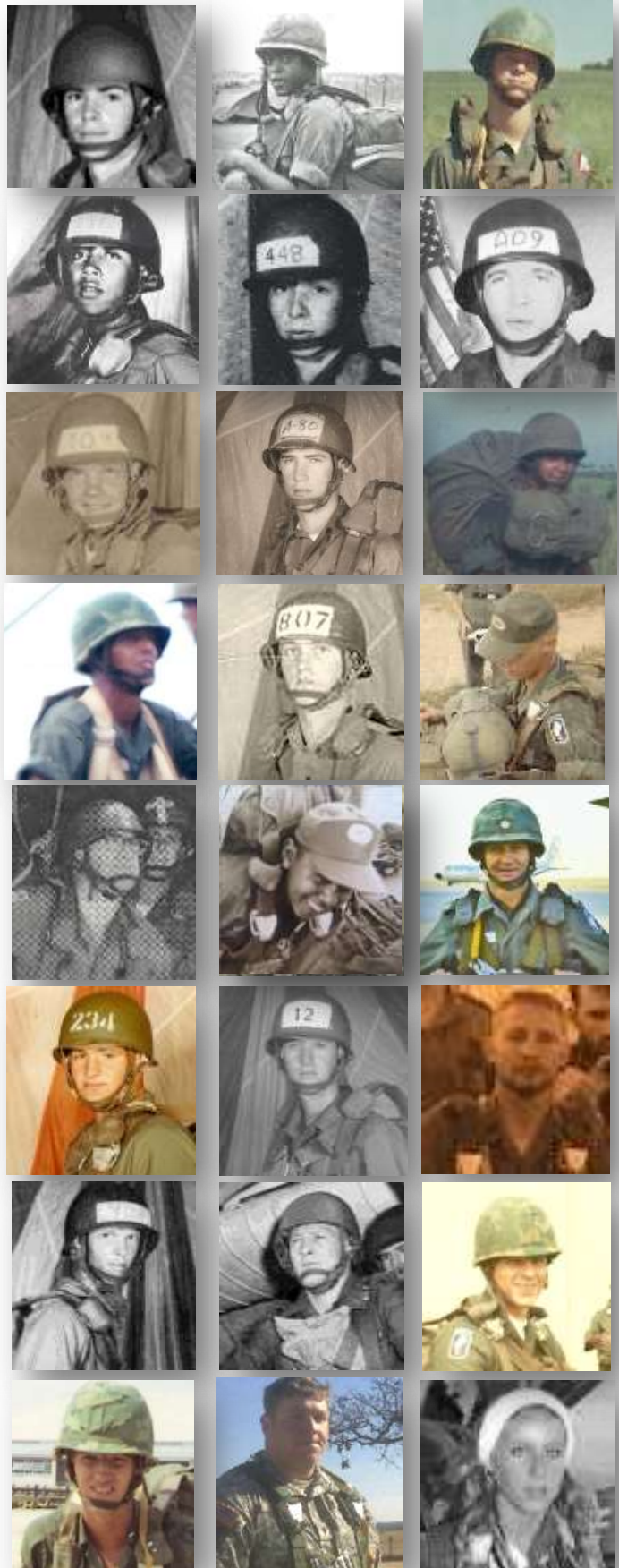
A good buddy from A/2/503 RVN, a retired Top Sergeant, who spent the balance of his career in a Leg unit once said, "*I'm proud to be ex-Airborne.*" I interrupted him, "*Top, you're not 'ex-Airborne', you were a paratrooper then, you are now, and you will forever be Airborne!*" He said, "*Yeah, I guess you're right.*" Damn right, I'm right! Those wings we keep in a drawer or have given to a spouse, grandson or granddaughter weren't a gift to us, they were hard earned, and you troopers reading this know all too well what it took for you to earn your wings.

We stood tall, we were strac and brash, and every one of us will *forever* be a paratrooper -- even after our final jump. AATFW! Ed



All The Way, Sir!

A Few 2/503 Blast-Ready Paratroopers + One



The Origin of the VA Motto

Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address



“As the nation braced itself for the final throes of the Civil War, thousands of spectators gathered on a muddy Pennsylvania Avenue near the U.S. Capitol to hear President Lincoln’s second inaugural address. It was March 4, 1865, a time of great uneasiness. In just over one month, the war would end and the president would be assassinated.

President Lincoln framed his speech on the moral and religious implications of the war; rhetorically questioning how a just God could unleash such a terrible war upon the nation. *‘If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses in the providence of God, ... and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offenses came.’*

With its deep philosophical insights, critics have hailed the speech as one of Lincoln’s best.

As the speech progressed, President Lincoln turned from the divisive bitterness at the war’s roots to the unifying task of reconciliation and reconstruction. In the speech’s final paragraph, the president delivered his prescription for the nation’s recovery:

‘With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.’

With the words, *“To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan,”* President Lincoln affirmed the government’s obligation to care for those injured during the war and to provide for the families of those who perished on the battlefield.

Today, a pair of metal plaques bearing those words flank the entrance to the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA is the federal agency responsible for serving the needs of veterans by providing health care, disability compensation and rehabilitation, education assistance, home loans, burial in a national cemetery, and other benefits and services.

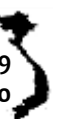
Lincoln’s immortal words became the VA motto in 1959, when the plaques were installed, and can be traced to Sumner G. Whittier, administrator of what was then called the Veterans Administration. A document on VA medical history prepared for the congressional Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and titled, *‘To care for him who shall have borne the battle,’* details how the words became VA’s motto. He (Whittier) worked no employee longer or harder than himself to make his personal credo the mission of the agency. What was that credo? Simply the words of Abraham Lincoln, *‘to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan.’* To indicate the mission of his agency’s employees, Mr. Whittier had plaques installed on either side of the main entrance.

President Lincoln’s words have stood the test of time, and stand today as a solemn reminder of VA’s commitment to care for those injured in our nation’s defense and the families of those killed in its service.”

But now, (again) there is movement about to disband the VA, to shutter the doors of VA healthcare facilities nationwide, and to put asunder and undue the president’s words and commitment, *“to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan.”*

In Issue 68, Page 58, of our newsletter, is a report detailing what some hope to see happen. This same movement would call for veterans to be provided healthcare in the private sector....but, is that what veterans want?

We posed this question to some of our 2/503 Sky Soldier buddies. Following are their views on the matter. Ed



Privatization of the VA?

To: 2/503 Buddies

Gentlemen:

There's movement afoot by some politicians and others to privatize healthcare for veterans and calling for shuttering of VA healthcare facilities. Please send in your thoughts, pro or con, about this possibility for inclusion in our next 2/503d Vietnam Newsletter.

Thanks, and ATW!! Ed

2/503 Sky Soldiers Speak Out About The 'Secret' Move To Privatize VA Healthcare

Great issue. So much information. Good job! We must stop privatization of the VA. A scheme to line pockets of the R's donors. I am extremely satisfied with the care I receive from the VA.



James Allen Jackson
B/2/503, 65'-66'

I'm totally against privatizing... we can hold the government to accountability. But, if a private company goes bankrupt or acts against our best interests, we are fucked. We served our country and our government owes us the respect to live up to their end of the agreement....we lived up to our part. Hope my answer is a part of the majority.



Former Paratrooper and DAV.

Steve Goodman
B/2/503

This is an attempt to dump Tricare into Obamacare. Once again trying to screw the Vets.

Ed Fleming, SGM (Ret) USA
2/503

That is only so they can shift blame and responsibility to an entity not answerable to elected officials. When care becomes even worse than now the ones in government deny any involvement. Much the way that intelligence and police use CIs (confidential informants) for deniability and reduced risk to themselves and trained officers.

Kenneth Parrett
A/2/503

From my personal experience, I have struggled with the service that the VA offers. I truly believe they automatically assume that all Disabled Veterans are homeless and unemployed. The way they treat me and disrespect the fact that I have a full time job, a home, and live 4 hours away is borderline embarrassing. Not to mention, the clinics at the VA Hospital in West LA are only open certain days of the week. So the chances of stacking appointments for a day trip to the VA with 8 hours of driving is almost impossible. This is due to the fact that the clinics aren't even open on the same days. This has been very frustrating and I have not been able to get some of the treatments I need because it is so difficult to schedule them. I have even requested multiple times to use the Veteran's Choice Program. The resounding answer is, "Sure, but you have to come here anyway if you want it." This is unacceptable and invalidates the need for a program like VCP.



So, on that note, I do want Veteran care to be privatized. I want to be able to choose when and where I go to get the treatment I need. Not only the treatment I need, but to be treated with respect when I walk into a clinic or doctor's office and not treated like scum of the earth. I don't want to have to drive 8 hours in a day just for a 1 hour appointment that is only for making MORE appointments. It's insanity. Shut down the substandard, broken down VA Clinics and Hospitals, offer private insurance and truly give veterans quality care and service within their communities that they deserve.

Just my thoughts. Thanks.

Jonathan "Jonny" Benton
Ret SSG, US Army
2 PLT, C Co, 2/503, 173rd ABN (2007-2009)

I have been in the system for about 10 years now and my experience has exceeded my expectations. I have been taken care of by Bay Pines and now the Asheville, NC system. Between my heart disease and PTSD every day is interesting but I know when there is a medical issue I feel confident I will have great service here in Asheville.



Steven Haber
C/2/503

(continued...)



I live in the San Antonio, TX area. I have never had any delays in getting service connected appointments or treatment. Can not speak for others in this area or non-service connected treatment needs. Therefore, I support an area privatization plan for those communities where the backload for VA treatment does not meet the needs of our veterans.

Earl Steck
D/2/503

I have been using private care through the Choice program now for over a year and it has worked out very good. I still go to VA for some services as I was given that choice. I can now see PCP within 24 hours with no problem. But also it took over three years to get approved.

Joe Lucero
CO HHC/E/2/503

My answer is quick and easy. If it ain't broke don't fix it. I don't know where all these guys are dying standing in line et al. My VA service is great since 1974.

Ed Privette, Maj. (Ret)
HHC/2/503



I recently went to the White River Junction VA facility for a fairly routine exam. While there, larger problems revealed themselves; problems that had to be addressed expeditiously. Fortunately, WRJ works hand-in-hand with Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. My entire operation, rehabilitation, and in-home nursing was done completely outside the VA system...and I couldn't have asked for better care. VA picked up the tab; soup-to-nuts.



In MY recent experience, semi-privatization can be a very good thing (D-H has a *superb* cardio-vascular team).

I must add, however, that ALL of my VA care has been exemplary.

In my reading, there was a call for extending the VA treatment system to include out-of-the-system health care...AND there is a call for complete privatization. I view them as different issues and should be treated as such.

CERTAINLY, the subject should be open to thoughtful discussion in The Newsletter.

There; my thoughts. Airborne.

Barry Salant
D/2/503

I do not know which way to go on this as I now get good service at the Richmond, Va. VA Hospital.

Graham Rollings
HHC/C/2/503



I think it is a double edged sword. It might be good because you might be able to get seen faster by a provider near you plus you might not have to drive as far to the nearest VA facility. The other side is how are they going to get the documentation in the system. You will have multiple outside organizations going into one system. (Assuming that they would develop one so that the private organizations can access it). It's worth a try in my book if it is faster care for us vets!

David Cavataio
C/2/503

I think it would be a good idea to give Vets a choice so they could go to VA or opt for private.

Thanks.

David O. Beal
Formerly 1Lt, Co A 2BN 503rd INF 69-70

It's about time. Yes.

George Sutherland
C/2/503, E/1/503

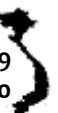
I would venture to say that those politicians are incorrect. The private medical field is already overburdened with patients, especially in Florida. To close all VA facilities, let go all the staff, and then expect conditions to get better would be unlikely. The VA staff are fine, there just isn't enough of them. My clinic staff is working evenings and Saturdays to keep up.

Thanks,

Roger Whittenbrook
C/2/503

"The United States has the most comprehensive system of assistance for Veterans of any nation in the world, with roots that can be traced back to 1636, when the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony were at war with the Pequot Indians. The Pilgrims passed a law that stated that disabled soldiers would be supported by the colony." (VA)

(continued...)



Let's privatize our VA health care as an option to the VA system. VA should cover cost of service connected health care. The veteran should be able to opt out of VA system for specific treatments. It's a 2 hour drive, one way to Dallas VA if you leave at 4am to avoid traffic jams. All that for a 10am appointment that might be canceled when you get there because the specialist you have to see called in sick.

Paul Richards
B/2/503

CON! One of the worst ideas I've heard this year.

Bob Warfield, Maj. (Ret)
HHC/A/B/2/503



Just read your email. Haven't been on-line lately. Let us know how the pros and cons worked out. I know it's late but just sending my thoughts anyway.

My experience with the VA has been great. They see me when I need to see them. The doctors and nurses seem to care about whatever my problem might be and I get to see a specialist when I need to. The wait time is great compared to the local hospital here in Greensboro. To privatize the VA Healthcare would mean waiting months for an appointment, being run through the current local system like a machine, and dealing with a system that expects a doctor to spend no more than 15 minutes per patient. The VA in Salisbury does a great job.

Virgil Lamb
C/2/503

I don't believe that to be a good thing at all. It would be a business based on profit and loss. We would all eventually be too old for a particular procedure to be cost effective. I could rattle on but won't. It seems that most of the staff at Indianapolis care.

David Maxey
HHC/B/2/503



Not in favor, just another way for the politicians to screw the veterans. Vote Trump for any chance to save this country. Any debates get back to me.

AIRBORNE ALL THE WAY.

Bob Baker, A/2/503

While our government is doing a rather weak job of performing this important function, some tasks are better left to the federal government. It would be interesting to get a feel for the costs if it were privatized, however. Thanks!

Sgt. Mike Armstrong
C Co., 2nd Bat/503rd

Of course we all want the most efficient system possible. If someone has a plan that provides better care, is cheaper, and/or faster, let's look at it. My concern is that I am not convinced that any change would be an improvement for the Veteran. I would have to be convinced. Any change must be debated openly. An overriding principal must be "do no harm." No Veteran will have his/her benefits reduced. All details of any change must be known ahead of the change. We cannot let Congress pass something and read it later.

I'm sure you will keep us informed. Thanks.

Joe Day
C/2/503, '67

Bad idea—the VA is best system for Vets!!

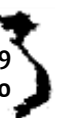
Tom Dooley, LTC (Ret)
B/2/503

Negative on privatization re: VA

Don Yeager
D/2/503
6/68 - 6/69

"Later, the Continental Congress of 1776 encouraged enlistments during the Revolutionary War, providing pensions to disabled soldiers. In the early days of the Republic, individual states and communities provided direct medical and hospital care to Veterans. In 1811, the federal government authorized the first domiciliary and medical facility for Veterans. Also in the 19th century, the nation's Veterans assistance program was expanded to include benefits and pensions not only for Veterans, but for their widows and dependents." (VA)

(continued...)



Other than red tape I haven't had too much problem with the VA. But there is the problem with them – red tape. The medical folks do their job very well. And there are many excellent non-VA medical personnel who can treat our vets. It's the red tape that is killing vets. Even with the Choice Program you have to muddle through VA red tape.



We need to allow vets to go to a doctor of choice without any red tape and have the VA pay for the doctors services without a multitude of restrictions. This will lessen the burden on the VA medical services, which will, in turn, shorten waiting times. As the VA and vets find competency in using non-VA doctors and hospitals, the government can reduce the size of the VA medical structure saving taxpayer dollars. It's a process that needs to be done with care, focusing on the health of every vet, which is paramount.

It will take time to perfect an effective system, and mistakes will be made and corrected. But it needs to be done. Working in government my whole working career, I've learned if you want something done inefficiently, let the government do it. The VA is a socialist institution and socialism, generally, doesn't work.

Airborne!

Charles (Andy) Anderson, Major, USAF (Ret)
C/2/503

This is a tough one. Of course I've read and seen the stories concerning the VA health system.

My own personal experience with the VA in the Boston area has been first rate. Appointments are easily gotten. Both myself and the doctor or staff (example hearing aid clinic) have been on time. I have been to both the Bedford clinic and the hospital in downtown Boston.



My private cardiologist teaches at Harvard and aside from being arrogant, seems no better than the VA doctors.

I have yet to access the VA here in Texas, so we'll see. Best to you,

Jim Robinson
B 2/503

I think veterans need access to both, to insure proper diagnosis and treatment in a timely manner.

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



VA care has been broken for a long time but is gradually being fixed. Junking the current system and starting with a new setup would most likely exacerbate the existing shortfalls. What would happen to the VA facilities?



Some of the more recent initiatives have allowed Veterans to access doctors outside the VA facilities with costs covered by VA. The system is a long way from perfect but I believe at least in the Charleston VA area that improvements are being made.

Ken Smith, Col. (Ret)
CO A/D/2/503

It's a bit of a broad question without having the exact details of the program. In my own experience with the VA, I have had very good fortune getting appointments when I truly need them. Urgent care for colds and minor injuries has always been good. Larger issues take a while to get through all the hoops but it would be the same outside the VA. Having blood draw, urinalysis, X Ray, MRI, pharmacy and primary care all in one place is great.



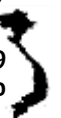
My biggest issue with the VA now is getting specialized care outside the system. The whole process slows down when a private vendor needs to arrange care from a private physician. At least at the VA there is a patient care advocate to talk to with problems in obtaining care and, as we have seen, administrators can be held accountable for problems in getting care.

Based on my personal experience privatizing the VA would be a disaster. We would just be trading one bureaucracy for another. Instead of having a care group dedicated to the needs of veterans we would become just another group seeking care from the private sector physicians.

Gary "Kraut" Kuitert, Recon 2/503

"Following the Civil War, many state Veterans homes were established. Since domiciliary care was available at all state Veterans homes, incidental medical and hospital treatment was provided for all injuries and diseases, whether or not of service origin. Indigent and disabled Veterans of the Civil War, Indian Wars, Spanish-American War, and Mexican Border period, as well as the discharged regular members of the Armed Forces, received care at these homes." (VA)

(continued...)



I've been in the healthcare delivery system for greater than 40 years, and it is my firm belief that the private sector can always outperform the government in the delivery of medical services and with greater accountability.

"Doc" Ray Camarena
HHC/2/503

It would be a big mistake to privatize. I am 100% S/C and I have excellent healthcare insurance between Medicare and the job I worked. But, I choose the VA for everything. Are they perfect? No. But the workers for the most part care and go that extra mile.

Jim Chieco, SGT
E/2/503

Although I am not a big fan of government, to me this is one case of leave it alone! My experiences with my local VA for the past 11 years I have been using them all of the time I would rate on a scale of 0-100 at about 92. With the exception of a few glitches the paddy couple of visits it would have been 96-97% approval. I would hate to see them screw it up in this late stage of my life.

"Doc" Jim Gore
A/B/D/E/2/503

I, like others, have heard the horror stories about the VA healthcare and I am sure some are true but the experience I have had with the VA has been ok, just as good as the private sector for the most part.



I am not a recent user -- I have been going to the Loma Linda VA Hospital for approximately 15 years, no complaints. I am also 100% disabled, whether or not that has anything to do with it -- I don't know, but they take good care of me.

Lyle Webster
B/2/503

I just have to say that I have never seen a politician press for anything that did not benefit himself or his friends and contributors. That being said, I believe that privatization would only benefit select companies and their administrators, with veterans once again being used like pawns and losing out in the end by being shunted aside in favor of bloated fees and salaries for the bureaucrats.

Sincerely,

Greg Bronsberg
B/2/503, 1969-1970

I think it would be a mistake to destroy the infrastructure that is the VA. Veterans health care is as important as winning wars. We have hospitals, clinics etc. whose mission is to heal the veterans. We have everything needed to accomplish the mission except management.



Let's face it folks, if you move an incompetent manager from say Phoenix to Dallas you have just moved the problem. A good start is to find retired senior managers from places like the Mayo Clinic, Palomar Health, UCLA Medical Center, The Cleveland Clinic, etc. The list goes on and on.

We have evidence-based competence that put these medical centers on the map. You can bet that they never had secret wait lists. They didn't ship incompetent managers elsewhere in their system.

I know the U.S. has a history of chucking everything out and starting from scratch. Doesn't matter if there are other systems in place. NOOOO. We have to have our own system.

Compare El AL Airlines Security to the TSA. If ever there was a cluster f--- it is the TSA. Highly restrictive and totally ineffective.

Just my 2 cents worth. Take what works and chuck the problems.

Bryan Bowley
B/2/503

In response about our current VA facilities....leave it the way it is!!!

Thank you,

Mike Guthrie
A/2/503



"As the U.S. entered World War I in 1917, Congress established a new system of Veterans benefits, including programs for disability compensation, insurance for service personnel and Veterans, and vocational rehabilitation for the disabled. By the 1920s, three different federal agencies administered the various benefits: the Veterans Bureau, the Bureau of Pensions of the Interior Department, and the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers." (VA)

(continued...)



I have been using the VA Medical Center here in Albuquerque for over 20 years and have been completely satisfied with it. Prior to that I used the Air Force clinic at Kirtland AFB, but they only took retirees on a space available basis, and it became less and less available. At the VA I have always been able to get appointments in a reasonable amount of time, and my fellow residents at this retirement home where I live who also use the VA say the same thing.



I suspect that the big flap a couple of years ago indicates that the demand for VA service was exceeding what the VA was budgeted to provide.

Originally the VA only treated veterans with a service-connected disability, and that was usually determined at discharge from the service. When I retired I was not given a service connected disability by the Army, but in view of my combat wounds they recommended that I go to the VA, which I promptly did, and they gave me a 70% disability, and I have been receiving monthly payments from the VA since the day I retired.

The wars of our country in the 20th and early 21st century have created millions of veterans who get older every day and develop disabilities which might be traceable to their military service in their younger days. The VA makes that decision, and many are added to the VA roles daily. I think the VA flap was due either to an underestimation by the VA of these new patients from former wars or a failure by Congress to provide what was requested.

I do not support the privatization of VA medical services.

George E. Dexter
COL, USA Retired
Bn Cmdr 2/503, 9/64 - 2/66

I just returned home from the DAV convention in Atlanta where this matter was discussed extensively. Also, one of the commission members studying this issue is a retired DAV executive. I can assure you that despite what you've heard privatization of VA health care will not happen - at least in our lifetime.



Hope this helps. If you want to pursue this further I can put you in touch with the DAV executive who was a member of the commission.

"Doc" Rick Patterson
Sr. Medic, A/2/503

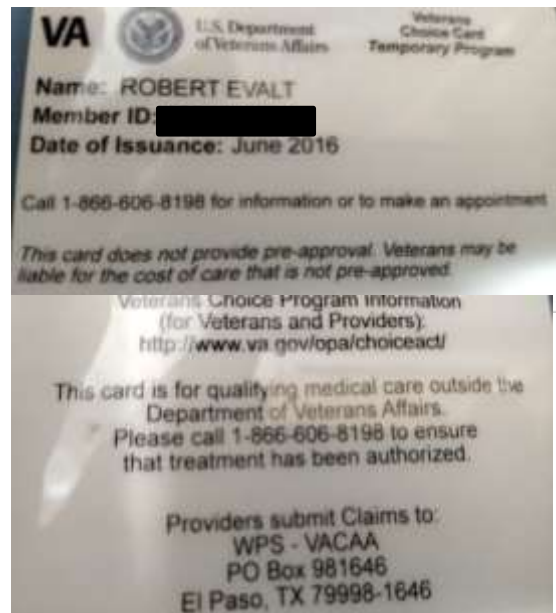
Well, the VA sent me a card with a special ID No., dated June 2016. I'll take a pic of the front and back and send it to you. You can publish it. I'm sure most of us got one from the VA.



I have mixed feelings about this. The VA is so slow! The government controlling anything is weighed down with regulations. Private industry could run circles around the VA. But I can see private industry milking the VA system and doing the same.

As the VA will still have control, they will control what private industry does. They want to make sure your health care is within your disability each and every time you need to see a doctor. I don't think this will happen overnight. There needs to have some legislation passed. There needs to be an automatic judgement for the Veteran in question, so the Vet can get immediate care. This would not be easy to do. It's a new coming battle. Doc Evalt out.

"Doc" Bob Evalt
B/2/503



"The first consolidation of federal Veterans programs took place August 9, 1921, when Congress combined all World War I Veterans programs to create the Veterans Bureau. Public Health Service Veterans' hospitals were transferred to the bureau, and an ambitious hospital construction program for World War I Veterans commenced." (VA)

(continued...)



This is certainly an idea worth exploring in my opinion. With the present VA system, where administrators continue to get bonuses after they have been found gaming the system, after they have manipulated the system with wait times and services, plus the apparent inability to fire them after their egregious behavior, something needs to change.



Like many government programs and agencies, it appears to have become politicized and certainly has become too large to manage. So, maybe the time has come to explore other options — especially those that work and work well. For example, look at the Catholic hospital system.

Quoting Wikipedia, the Catholic Church is “the largest [non-governmental] provider of health care services in the world.” How large? “It has around 18,000 clinics . . . and 5,500 hospitals, with 65 percent of them located in developing countries.” (Considerably larger than even the VA, and it is worldwide). By one estimate, the Catholic Church “manages 26 percent of the world’s health care facilities.” Just in the U. S., one in six hospital beds in our country is located in a Catholic hospital. In at least thirty communities, the Catholic hospital is the only hospital in a 35-mile radius. (This doesn’t even take into account hospitals run by other Christian bodies such as Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and especially Seventh-Day Adventists). They all seem to operate with little to no wait times, in the black, and with excellent healthcare, and they are considerably larger than the VA system.

The American experiment seems to have normally operated best with competition. (It keeps us on our toes and fights our selfish, me-first, sin nature). So, how come the Christian charitable hospital systems seem to offer excellent services and the VA seems to continue to have cost over-runs and questionable service? Maybe privatized healthcare may at least offer an option to explore. (As an aside, I would venture that the best hospitals and healthcare you have in the Central Florida area is the Florida Healthcare system, which is Adventist).

Another point: last year I needed a procedure to remove the plastic tips from my new hearing aids which came off and were stuck in the ear canals. I went to the clinic and there is neither equipment nor an ENT in the entire Jacksonville VA system to remove them. (This is not brain surgery, you understand). They suggested I go to Gainesville, and assuming I could actually get in in a timely manner, etc., it would have been an all day event. So, I opted to go to a local ER and it was done in

an hour. Of course, it cost me several hundred dollars out of my pocket, but it was convenient.

So, if the VA system were privatized, it would be more convenient for more vets who now have to travel to a VA hospital.

Just a couple of thoughts to your inquiry.
Bless you.

Rev. Ron Smith
B/2/503 & 3/319

I'm totally against privatization of healthcare for vets. The VA is the last military benefit that is exclusively for veterans. The idea of allowing vets to go to a private physician when travel distance is a factor is acceptable because that would be a benefit "on top" of those benefits that exist for vets only thru the VA.



Once you open the "Pandora's Box" of private care the vets will be grouped in and competing with everyone else (insured, uninsured, illegal aliens etc. etc.).

Every vet that served our country (combat or not) has earned, and deserves to have, that exclusive consideration that all those who have not "paid their dues" cannot have. To those that say "You veterans think you're something special," I say you're G....damned right we are!

Thanks, and ATW!!

Tony Esposito, LTC (Ret)
HHC/C/2/503

“World War I was the first fully mechanized war, and as a result, soldiers who were exposed to mustard gas, other chemicals and fumes required specialized care after the war. Tuberculosis and neuro-psychiatric hospitals opened to accommodate Veterans with respiratory or mental health problems. A majority of existing VA hospitals and medical centers began as National Home, Public Health Service, or Veterans Bureau hospitals. In 1924, Veterans benefits were liberalized to cover disabilities that were not service-related. In 1928, admission to the National Homes was extended to women, National Guard and militia Veterans.” (VA)

(continued...)



I see this issue twofold. We all benefit from having our healthcare in one place. I live in NM and use the Albuquerque Hospital. Living 2 hours away one way is annoying, however, in many ways it provides consistency of care and staff understanding of Veteran issues. A safe haven, if you will.



I also have signed up for the "Choice" program. As a Nam Veteran I'm aging and as time passes the first paragraph becomes more difficult to physically manage. Old soldiers never fade away, they just die. So, to me a combination of "choice" and your local VA Hospital, given your ability to manage your health care, is a good place to tread water for a while in order to design a PRACTICAL co-existence. Walk, don't run.

For example, I recently went to a local optometrist through "Choice". They discovered a small Cadillac (jokingly) in my shooting, dominant eye. My reason for the request -- I knew something was wrong. I'm very confident that my exam was accurate and straight forward. So as a result of "Choice" I was able to provide the VA with a good recommendation and problematic surgical cure at a much lesser cost plus pre-surgery evaluation.

Had I had the hospital do all of this without "Choice"... I am taking away time spent with Doctors for other Veterans. I am placed in a logical order of need for care or cure at the Hospital and is less stressful and less expensive as freeing up Dr./patient time.

L.B. Burkey
HHC/2/503

I have three kinds of coverage for different reasons - private insurance (Humana), Medicare and the VA. I receive the most complete and timely care from Humana.

VA is slow and limits care. If you need any major surgery or out of ordinary tests or medications, it's an agonizing battle. However, ordinary care & medications are great through VA.

If the VA were privatized, I think on balance it would be better for Vets. You would likely get higher quality care. I wouldn't be surprised if we saved costs by not having to support the separate VA medical facility system. Just my thoughts...

Ken Billings
Old Soldier A/2/503

Negative on privatization re: VA

Don Yeager
D/2/503
6/68-6/69



Madness reigns supreme in modern America. "Privatization" is code for turning our health care over to the same self-serving, incompetent mongrels who keep destroying our economy and running away with the money.

Privatization...NO!

Wayne Hoitt
HHC/2/503



Having worked for the VA for a very short time after retiring I can clearly state that what I saw of the VA were people that were only there for themselves.

Case in point: WWII aged veterans were riding buses from the Texas valley for appointments at the VA. When they were finished with their appointments for the day they had to clear through the front desk. I would ask each of them if they had collected their travel allowance.

One day my supervisor heard me and said, **"We do not ask them if they received their travel allowance because at the end of the fiscal year all the left over monies go into one fund and may be used for anything we need."** I replied, **"It is not your money, these men have earned the allowance and deserve to receive it."** The supervisor quickly transferred me from that desk to a clinic.

Abel Candia
A/2/503

"The second consolidation of federal Veterans programs took place July 21, 1930, when President Herbert Hoover signed Executive Order 5398 and elevated the Veterans Bureau to a federal administration—creating the Veterans Administration—to 'consolidate and coordinate Government activities affecting war veterans.' At that time, the National Homes and Pension Bureau also joined the VA.

The three component agencies became bureaus within the Veterans Administration. Brig. Gen. Frank T. Hines, who had directed the Veterans Bureau for seven years, was named the first Administrator of Veterans Affairs, a job he held until 1945." (VA)



(continued...)



Thanks for the email.

I worked as a full time substitute a couple of years ago on a daily basis with a retired Colonel/LTC Special Forces Mustang who reverted back to Sergeant Major. He was a history teacher after retiring from ROTC Sgt. Maj. NMSU. His Nam record and his later academic record (Hon. PhD military history) were past impressive. I start with this vetting to tell you what he told me.



He said that LBJ took the separate funding for social security and transferred it to the general fund. I have no reason not to believe him.

Think about...secured/dedicated funding out of reach (supposedly) of elected officials.

Categorically, this is what you are asking about...the VA is funded and mandated by Congress, and as such (other than tweaking the Administration politically), the politicians cannot get their hands on the money.

I wonder if a blue chip investment company at the onset of social security had been in charge of our investment and could stave off political piracy and coattail legislation, what our managed share would look like 75 years later (there has been studies/reports of such).

When you ask yourself, what percentage of the population are veterans, this percentage will be almost halved as the Vietnam era vets die off.

Either political party in the out-of-balance executive branch will find a way to change the status quo.

My son-in-law is in Korea with the Frist Cav. The daughter and grandkids are at Fort Hood...their medical is called Tri-Care; don't know which administration this started under, but it is a current quasi-privatization for active military (and probably recent retirees).

If you want to print anything I write, it's not my world anymore.

An athletic youngster (20's) said to me the other day, "Thanks for your service." I told him, "It's your turn."

Thanks.

Tom Conley
HHC/C/2/503

I like my experience...treatment is great, don't close them down.

John Fitzgerald
C/2/503

I served with the Herd in 1969, I am 100% service-connected disabled. VA needs to be dismantled!!!!

David Kaiser
HHC/D/2/503



I moved to the Austin, TX area a few years ago and thought I'd put all my medical treatment under one roof. Big mistake as far as primary treatment goes. Problems with my knees sent me to x-ray, bone on bone, referred to PT. #@*^%! PT for bone on bone???



All I get from primary care giver is renewal of prescriptions, no new meds. Great dental work and plastic surgery on left eye lid, good job there also.

Can't be any worse. YBYA Jim

Jimmy B. Stanford
B/2/503 & U.S. Special Forces

A few years ago our VA here in Madison, WI was slated to be shuttered. After much protest we now have a new 5 story parking ramp, a new long-term care wing, extensive internal upgrading as well as updating throughout the hospital. 90% of all doctors in the hospital are from the UW hospital which is physically connected. This plan has been working great since the 50s. If it ain't broke don't attempt to fix it. As I recall the price of care by privatization will increase considerably. This is the VA I came back to in '67. I'm there two days a week for cardio rehab. ATW



Dave Kies, HHC Recon/2/503

"Dr. Charles Griffith, VA's second Medical Director, came from the Public Health Service and Veterans Bureau. Both he and Hines were the longest serving executives in VA's history.

Following World War II, there was a vast increase in the Veteran population, and Congress enacted large numbers of new benefits for war Veterans—the most significant of which was the World War II GI Bill, signed into law June 22, 1944. It is said the GI Bill had more impact on the American way of life than any law since the Homestead Act of 1862.

The GI Bill placed VA second to the War and Navy Departments in funding and personnel priorities. Modernizing the VA for a new generation of Veterans was crucial, and replacement of the 'Old Guard' World War I leadership became a necessity." (VA)

(continued...)



Hi and "Airborne!"

I retired in October, 2014, and rolled the dice—signed up for VA medical care. My wife's insurance from her airline was going to be prohibitively expensive due to Obamacare. Even though the VA has and is taking major political heat for some serious deficiencies in Phoenix and other cities, I AM ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAS BEEN BLESSED WITH FIRST CLASS, A-1, HEALTHCARE FROM THE OUTSET.



Virtually all of my appointments have been early or on-time, the staff at both facilities I use have all been friendly, professional and caring, and I have has a large number of tests and appointments due to being an aging 70 year old former paratrooper. I receive multiple written and phone reminders about upcoming appointments. My prescriptions are always there when promised and very efficiently so. The VA seems to be a very popular and high-priority target for the mainstream media and liberal politicians who have no problems with the NLRB, EPA, IRS or all the other alphabet agencies which have become bureaucratic behemoths and have overstepped their mandate as unbiased, non-political agencies.

The current head of the VA, Robert McDonald, is an easy and frequent target for sniping from these erstwhile "public servants". He is former Airborne, and I wrote him a letter of thanks as a satisfied end-user/customer, and he sent me back a hand written thank you with "Airborne, All the Way" scrawled at the bottom.

My PCP is a knowledgeable, savvy and very attractive woman doctor who has not hesitated to try and get me the best and most comprehensive care available, and I am very appreciative. As all of you vote this November, and for God's sake VOTE!....remember the leftist liberals in power have gutted the military, lied to and denigrated service men and women and their families, and used the military as their punching bag.

Is there room for improvement at the Veterans Administration? I would say absolutely, yes there is. Accountability is the name of the game, whether it is at the VA or anywhere else in our bloated, ineffective, partisan government. VOTE, dammit!

ATW

Mike Marsh
C/2/503 & A/3/503, '67 '68



I'm an Accredited Veterans Service Officer assisting veterans with their claims for disability compensation or pension based programs with the VA. My office is at a VA healthcare center in L.A.

In the last few years I've had beaucoup contact with the VA healthcare system both good or bad regarding either my own issues or others. I can say with confidence, the VA system is excellent overall in its delivery of care. The only thing the VA is short of is MONEY and that's a funding issue created by Congress. Privatizing the VA would merely create another taxpayer for profit program to dole out to preferred corporations funneled through lobbyists. Nothing new here, the same amount of money or less would be appropriated by Congress, but a cut for corporations would be included for their profit.

Don't have to be a math wizard to see where this is going. The examples of this privatization model are pervasive in modern government. It's called the "Reagan Revolution". The handwriting is on the wall for the Post Office as well. Someday Fed Ex will deliver your first class mail 4 days a week for a buck a stamp.

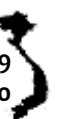
Suck it up, less for more. Be well, Thurston out.

Marc Thurston
D/2/503

"In the 1930s, new national cemeteries were established to serve Veterans living in major metropolitan areas such as New York, Baltimore, Minneapolis, San Diego, San Francisco and San Antonio. Several of them, closely associated with battlefields such as Gettysburg, were transferred to the National Park Service because of the value of their use in interpreting the historical significance of the battles.

In 1973, Public Law 93-43 authorized the transfer of 82 national cemeteries from the Department of the Army to the Veterans Administration, now the Department of Veterans Affairs. Joining with 21 VA Veterans cemeteries located at hospitals and nursing homes, the National Cemetery System comprised 103 cemeteries after the transfer. On November 11, 1998, the President signed the Veterans Programs Enhancement Act of 1998, changing the name of the National Cemetery System to the National Cemetery Administration (NCA)." (VA)

(continued...)



You could write a series of books on this. Pick and choose. The below shows the spread of coverage just recently. In the end, like coverage for the general public, debate is about profit, lack of facilities, expensive drugs and treatments, lack of doctors and trained staff, etc.



From my perspective, the VA presents a huge potential for profit. Note the contracts for TriCare and Express Scripts. The so-called covenant with our troops and veterans is distant and lower priority.

www.google.com/search?ei=REuiV8mXA4imjwP3_K7YDQ&q=privatizing+veterans+health+care&oq=privatizing+veterans+health+care&gs_l=mobile-gws-serp.3..0.11001.21654.0.24822.14.13.1.0.0.0.232.1750.1j11j1.13.0...0...1c.1.64.mobile-gws-serp..6.7.860...0i13j0i13i30.rMOSW38Ujmk

This is one of the better pro and con pieces I have seen.

www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2016/06/28/should-the-veterans-health-care-system-be-privatized

A long but very complete history status and past efforts to privatize VA can be viewed at:

www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/maraprmy-2016/the-va-isnt-broken-yet/

No veteran or American citizen should be left to die alone from the personal impact of PTSD, homelessness or their mental health needs.

Steve "K" Kubiszewski

B/E Recon, 2/503, USA (Ret)

Combat veteran and WA State Veterans Advocate



I have waited to the last minute to reply, but have been thinking all along.



I do not have any complaints about the medical care that I have and do receive from the VA. The administration is another thing. I have never understood the bonus concept. When I hire someone to do a job that they claim to be qualified to do, why would I give them a bonus for doing the job they agreed to do? And in some cases a bonus for not doing the job.

In my opinion what the VA (government or private) needs is someone at the top that is strong, honest, trustworthy, dependable, knowledgeable and will select those that want the job not those that think they are entitled to the job. Someone that knows how and will say "Your Fired! Your final check will be mailed".

Someone like LTG (Ret) Jim Peake that had the position and just about the time when we started to see a change for the good.

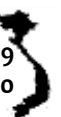
Your out of here buddy.

Pat Feely, LTC (Ret)

C/2/503

"Today, there are 147 national cemeteries in all, with new cemeteries in development. Through NCA, VA administers 131 of them. Two national cemeteries—Arlington and the United States Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery—are still maintained by the Department of the Army. Fourteen national cemeteries are maintained by the Department of the Interior. More than 3.7 million people, including Veterans of every war and conflict—from the Revolutionary War to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—are honored by burial in VA's national cemeteries. Today there are more than 22 million living Veterans who have earned the honor of burial in a national cemetery, including the more than 350 Medal of Honor recipients buried in VA's national cemeteries. More than 19,000 acres of land are devoted to the memorialization of those who served this nation." (VA)

(continued...)



Thank you for soliciting input from us on this very important issue.

I consider myself a free market capitalist, and I believe that there is no doubt a lot of federal bureaucracies that could be made more efficient by talented management from the private sector. However, in my opinion, there are some federal agencies that should only answer to, and be regulated by, elected legislators of the people (veterans), never the free marketplace.

The Veterans Administration is one of these agencies. Privatization, in order to be successful, has to rely on profit. When a private organization, even with possible government subsidies, does not achieve an acceptable profit or EBIT (earnings before interest and taxes), there are only two solutions: Reduce costs or increase the price of products and services. With our volatile market conditions in the US and the uncertain effects of globalization, I really don't want my hard earned benefits to be subject to the whims of Wall Street and shareholder/investors that don't have a dog in our hunt.

Reducing VA health care facilities and staff is only the beginning. Recalculation of compensation tables, reduction in conditions that qualify for compensation, increased medication copays, veteran status reclassification and the elimination of specific claim appeals are all possible in the future under the "cost efficiency" profit goals of privatization.

Re-appropriate my tax dollars to fix the VA and remain a government entity, open more facilities and expand the benefits we have earned. The US Government is the one who sent us in harm's way and it is they alone that should administer the promises made.

As a related side note: One veterans group, the Concerned Veterans of America (CVA), has been spouting solutions to all the problems with the VA, of which we all know there are many. The CVA has been delivering their message of personal choice of doctors and health care facilities through social media, print media and organized meetings with veterans on local and regional levels. I advise my brothers to use caution with this group and understand that the CVA, very well-funded by the privatization oriented Koch brothers, is really pitching long term total privatization of the VA. (The Koch brothers are also pushing for the privatization of Social Security and Medicare).

Please brothers, peel back the onion layers on this organization's rhetoric and look at their true objective.

My 2 cents. AATW

James Wilson, Sgt. E-5
C Co. 2/503, 173d ABN, RVN '67/'68



I certainly hope that veteran's healthcare is not privatized. The so called CHOICE program / option is an indication of what might happen. I tried to use the CHOICE option last Year. For me it was a frustrating failure.

My VA primary care provider authorized it for me because I had a serious skin cancer tumor on my scalp. The Portland OR VA Hospital could not schedule me for 4 months for MOHS surgery and I live about 100 miles from Portland. So I tried to work with Choice. It was a bureaucratic nightmare. I was dealing with people in Arizona. Repeated calls. No "case concept", I had to start over with a different person each time I called. Their promises to call back were never honored.

They had no concept of what was available in the Portland area. None of the dermatology practices I contacted wanted anything to do with CHOICE because of billing problems. After about 6 weeks of trying to deal with CHOICE, I gave up and dealt with the problem using my own resources. So based on that experience, I think privatization is a bad option.

The way to solve the problem is to improve the existing programs and facilities to meet the need.

Fred Henschell, Maj. (Ret)
B/2/503



VA's Mission: To fulfill President Lincoln's promise: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans.

A Message From Secretary Robert A. McDonald

No organization can succeed without values to match its mission. Our mission, as the Department of Veterans Affairs, is to care for those "who shall have borne the battle" and for their families and survivors. Our core values focus our minds on our mission of caring and thereby guide our actions toward service to others. These values — Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence — define our culture and strengthen our dedication to those we serve. They provide a baseline for the standards of behavior expected of all VA employees. They remind us and others that "I CARE".

(continued...)



Here on the Space Coast of Florida we're fortunate to have a state-of-the-art VA clinic in Viera, and a new VA hospital not far away in Orlando. Given the large population of veterans in Central Florida and the state as a whole, plus the influence (read votes) they have on state and local politicians, most likely led to the creation, maintenance and staffing of and for these particular modern and well-equipped facilities. I can see, however, how veterans in less vet populated regions of the country might not be beneficiaries of similar assets in their communities.



As some troopers have mentioned here, a combination of VA clinics and hospitals in larger vet populated areas appears worthwhile and perhaps cost efficient, while private sector healthcare services in certain regions of the land may be more effective and cost wise and timely for others.

In spite of normally excellent care administered by the healthcare providers here at the VA facilities, I keep a separate supplemental medical insurance policy in effect for any 'hospitalization' which may be required.

Almost without exception the staff at these facilities seem to share a genuine concern for the vets they serve, and, no doubt, have undergone special training to deal with the unique demands of caring for former combatants – something those in the private sector just might not understand or even care to do.

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

"Today's VHA--the largest of the three administrations that comprise VA— continues to meet Veterans' changing medical, surgical and quality-of-life needs. New programs provide treatment for traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress, suicide prevention, women Veterans and more. VA has opened outpatient clinics, and established telemedicine and other services to accommodate a diverse Veteran population, and continues to cultivate ongoing medical research and innovation to improve the lives of America's patriots.

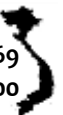


"VHA operates one of the largest health care systems in the world and provides training for a majority of America's medical, nursing and allied health professionals. Roughly 60 percent of all medical residents obtain a portion of their training at VA hospitals; and VA medical research programs benefit society at-large.

The VA health care system has grown from 54 hospitals in 1930, to include 152 hospitals, 800 community-based outpatient clinics, 126 nursing home care units and 35 domiciliaries." (VA)



The new Orlando VA Medical Center at Lake Nona is located on a 65-acre campus in southeast Orange County. The 1.2 million square foot facility cost \$600 million to construct. The first primary care team began seeing patients at the new facility on February 24, 2015.



Department of Defense (DoD) Releases Fiscal Year 2017 President's Budget Proposal

Press Operations
Feb. 9, 2016

Today President Barack Obama sent Congress a proposed budget request of \$582.7 billion in discretionary budget authority to fund the Department of Defense in Fiscal Year 2017 (FY 2017).

The FY 2017 budget of \$582.7 billion complies with the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, giving the department both funding stability and protection from the damage of sequestration in FY 2016 and FY 2017. Within the confines of this negotiated amount, the budget request reflects the priorities necessary for our force today and in the future to best serve and protect our nation in a rapidly changing security environment. The base budget of \$523.9 billion includes an increase of \$2.2 billion over the FY 2016 enacted budget of \$521.7 billion. As specified in the budget agreement, DoD's FY 2017 overseas contingency operations budget is \$58.8 billion, nearly the same as the FY 2016 enacted level of \$58.6 billion. The combined request represents a total increase of \$2.4 billion, or less than one percent over FY 2016 enacted levels.

The FY 2017 budget reflects recent strategic threats and changes that have taken place in Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Russian aggression, terrorism by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and others, and China's island building and claims of sovereignty in international waters all necessitate changes in our strategic outlook and in our operational commitments. Threats and actions originating in Iran and North Korea negatively affect our interests and our allies. These challenges have sharpened the focus of our planning and budgeting.

Addressing these challenges as part of DoD's mission to defend the nation requires new and innovative thinking, new operational posture in strategic regions, and new and enhanced capabilities. As we confront rising international challenges, we are seizing opportunities, developing new operational concepts, pioneering and dominating technology frontiers, reforming the defense enterprise, and building the force of the future.

"This budget marks a major inflection point for the Department of Defense," Secretary of Defense Carter stated. *"Even as we fight today's fights, we must also be prepared for the fights that might come in 10, 20, or 30 years."*

The FY 2017 budget request strikes a prudent balance among the modernization of the joint force, its size, and its readiness, and continues to keep faith with service members and their families.

The Top 7 Most Powerful Militaries in the World

1) United States

Budget: \$601 billion
Active frontline personnel: 1,400,000
Tanks: 8,848 Total aircraft: 13,892
Submarines: 72

2) Russia

Budget: \$84.5 billion
Active frontline personnel: 766,055
Tanks: 15,398 Total aircraft: 3,429
Submarines: 55

3) China

Budget: \$216 billion
Active frontline personnel: 2,333,000
Tanks: 9,150 Total aircraft: 2,860
Submarines: 67

4) Japan

Budget: \$41.6 billion
Active frontline personnel: 247,173
Tanks: 678 Total aircraft: 1,613
Submarines: 16

5) India

Budget: \$50 billion
Active frontline personnel: 1,325,000
Tanks: 6,464 Total aircraft: 1,905
Submarines: 15

6) France

Budget: \$62.3 billion
Active frontline personnel: 202,761
Tanks: 423 Total aircraft: 1,264
Submarines: 10

7) South Korea

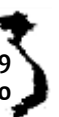
Budget: \$62.3 billion
Active frontline personnel: 624,465
Tanks: 2,381 Total aircraft: 1,412
Submarines: 13

"While the US is still far and away the world's top military superpower, Russia and China are its closest rivals. Canada, however, is the weakest of the twenty countries on the list."

Source: *Business Insider*, Military & Defense

To see the top 20 most powerful military countries in the world, and ranking methodology, visit:

www.businessinsider.com/these-are-the-worlds-20-strongest-militaries-ranked-2015-9/#20-canada-1



A Couple of the 173d's PIO's Finest

Paul Epley (L) and
Don Hall, 173d PIO RVN

"Take-away 100 pounds and
50 years...not so bad...LOL."

Paul Epley



Caserma Ederle (Camp Ederle)

is an Italian post where the U.S. Army has troops stationed located in Vicenza, Italy. The Vicenza Military Community is composed of Soldiers, family members, civilians and retirees with a small number of Airmen and Sailors who are also stationed there. The post serves as the headquarters of United States Army Africa and the 173d Airborne Brigade. Caserma Ederle serves as the headquarters of U.S. Army Garrison Vicenza of the United States Army Installation Management Command, an umbrella for all U.S. military properties in Vicenza. The post is named after Major Carlo Ederle, an Italian hero of World War I and recipient of the French *Croix de Guerre* (French War Cross), among other military honors.

Life on the Caserma

Soldiers assigned to a tour of duty at Caserma Ederle are normally permitted to bring family members when being reassigned there upon a Permanent Change of Station. Still, many of the military personnel assigned to Caserma Ederle are unaccompanied.

The post offers virtually all of the standard amenities present on most U.S. military installations, such as a Post Exchange, commissary, theater, etc. Single or unaccompanied junior enlisted soldiers live primarily in barracks located on the post itself, or in leased government quarters in the local community. Depending on the availability of housing upon arrival, personnel accompanied by dependents can live in housing quarters, Italian houses rented by the U.S. Government, government-owned housing units, or on the economy. Government-owned housing units for accompanied soldiers and their dependents are located in a separate and gated/secure area of Vicenza known as *Villaggio della Pace* (literally "Village of the Peace", but actually named after the street passing near the village and the camp - *Viale della Pace*). Single officers live on the economy.

Farewell Chargin' Charlie Barry "Bear" Hart C/2/503



Barry Lee Hart, age 68, of Paducah passed away Sunday, August 21, 2016, in his home. He was born August 20, 1947, in Lancaster, PA, and attended J.P. Mcaskey High School. He joined the Army in 1965 and served two tours in Vietnam with the Army 173rd Airborne Brigade. He married Patricia Hart in 1968 and made Paducah home in 1975. He was retired from Southside Machine Shop and was a member of the VFW and a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. Surviving are his son, Timothy M. Hart of Helena, Alabama; and daughter, Jacquelyn Sturdivant and husband, James T. Jr.; three grandchildren, Romelo Wilson, James T. Sturdivant III, and Truelee Trinity Patricia-Jade Sturdivant of Ewa Beach, Hawaii. Barry was preceded in death by his wife of 42 years, Patricia Lee Hart; mother Jean Hart and father Paul Clerico of Lancaster, PA. A memorial service was held on August 27, 2016, at Lindsey Funeral Home, Paducah, KY. Memorial contributions may be given to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Paducah Post or your local post in honor of Barry. A strong and proud man, hero and friend to many, not to be messed with, who took no guff and provided for and protected his family at all costs, loving and generous to those close to him. Online memorials may be left at www.lindeyfuneral.com

Rest easy good friend.



Note: See Part I of Jack Leide's "Sky Soldiers...Into The Crab Trap" in Issue 68, Pages 64-77 of our newsletter. Ed

PART II

SKY SOLDIERS INTO THE "CRAB TRAP"

By Jack Leide, MG (Ret)
Commander, Charlie Company
2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment
173d Airborne Brigade (Sep)
April 1966 - December 1966

(July 1966 Time Frame)

Note: I have used this one operation to refer to others to give a flavor for a series of seemingly never-ending missions of differing, but mind-numbing sameness and how they affected my thinking about the tactics and strategy of the Vietnam War.



Charlie Company moves into the "Crab Trap".

I was hoping that the small patrol we had sent to the objective area could and would confirm and possibly add to the sketches of the trail complex which we had gotten from the ARVN and our brigade S-2 section. As soon as the small recon patrol slogged back through our company perimeter and provided us with some confirmatory and additional sketchy, but valuable, drawings of the VC trail complex at the objective area, our leadership group huddled together in order to come up with a tactically sound deployment and employment plan. This mission, again, was going to be really complicated, tricky and, in the end, probably fraught with uncertainty and danger.

The patrol had added some additional information to the very basic tactical sketches of what looked like a somewhat eclectic trail complex, but we had enough to craft a semblance of a deployment and employment plan. But from what we had, did we have enough detail so that we could be able to make our detailed tactical plan?

As we looked at the pattern of trails we saw in the series of sketches, both from the ones we already had and the ones the patrol had made, we were able to decipher some semblance of the reason that the VC had developed and cut them as they did. Although, at first blush, it looked like the trails were just cut into the jungle with little apparent detail of plan or reason -- the more we looked the more of what we saw in the drawings appeared to have some sense of logical planning to them. That reasoning made their logistical capability more effective, but, on the other hand, our basic understanding of the patterns also gave us a tenuous leg up in planning our most effective tactical disposition.

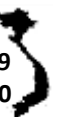
We decided to use the hours of a figurative clock as a guide and initially set up a tight-as-possible series of small ambush positions at key intersections or key areas

covering most of the myriad of intricate trails as described by our composite sketches. We would always have, hopefully, the option to redeploy and reposition our unit areas of responsibility if and when the tactical situation evolved, even under fire. We were going to have to have a really high degree of flexibility in our command and control during this intricate mission. In the end, and above all, Sky Soldiers were always prepared to be flexible and follow orders without questioning the "why?".

Our training and experience had ingrained in every one of us that quick reaction and decisive action and had been burned into our very airborne souls. Mission success and our lives always, always depended on those basic

military combat strengths. Again, we had to make sure, as much as possible, that our small unit fields of fire, such as they were, did not slice through the triple canopy jungle and rip into our fellow troopers with a deadly crossfire. We initially organized our unit line of march from our air-assault LZ through the thick, gnarly jungle towards our objective area by the order of deployment around the "clock".

(continued....)



I truly admired the way our company leadership, the platoon leaders and NCO's, and the smoothness and coolness at which they organized our designated line of march and the approach towards the complicated deployment in and around the objective area.

When we were about a kilometer from the outer edge of the objective area's series of trails, the various designated sections began to fan out from their parent squad formations and moved stealthily towards their clock position on the sketched out trail complex. Within about 30 minutes of arrival in the vicinity of the trails, each small unit was in position for combat action and reaction. Due to the positions of the varied trails, the company was knitted together into a looser, more jagged perimeter than we would have normally organized a company-sized defensive/attack position. We located our small company headquarters in the center of that figurative clock. We had to insure that our troopers and units were in the most tactically effective and stealthy enough positions to spring their individual unit ambushes in the most effective way. This unique and complicated situation would severely challenge the training and experience of each Sky Soldier and the dexterity of the entire company leadership group in order to successfully conduct this very complicated and dangerous ambush mission. This would not be easy and instead of walking portions of the perimeter and interacting with the deployed troopers, as I liked to do at varying times during an operation, I decided to let the small unit leadership do what they did best--lead. I was confident that would happen without my having to depend on my own security blanket.

We tried to arrive at the objective area just before last light in order to find a crease in the VC resupply activity and give us enough light to set into our assigned ambush positions. We completed our deployment plan and preparations just as darkness fell on that black gnarly jungle. That first night in the bush, (30 June/1 July), was very tense, not knowing what would happen, but, particularly, we tried to anticipate what we could expect at first light and beyond, when we felt that Charlie would attempt to move in earnest through the area with his normal critical supply and resupply bundles.

Normally, as we moved into our perimeter, we would almost immediately dig in using entrenching tools to make small individual foxhole-like fighting positions we called "spider holes." As mentioned previously, one of the same problems we ran into in other areas of Vietnam, we encountered in the Xuan Loc area during the monsoon season, and that the rains this season seemed to be especially intense. As soon as we dug into the jungle floor about an inch or two, we hit water. The water table was so high that if we dug deeper and wanted to use the spider holes to protect us we could wind up sitting in a pool of bone-chilling, infested water all night and possibly the next day and, perhaps, beyond. It was another of those myriad of decisions you have to make in a combat environment

between being terribly uncomfortable and accepting the possibility of getting ill or, on the other hand, being more vulnerable to being wounded or killed. This kind of problem sounds like a pretty basic and stark decision, but combat is pretty basic and stark, and generates decisions that one seldom faces in most any other type of lifetime experiences. I know it sounds trite to say, but it's really hard to understand or even visualize combat if you haven't been there. I, along with some others, was able to keep out of the ground water and relatively dry by using an Australian "hammock" and shelter half, which some of us had scrounged from our Australian airborne brethren who were attached to the 173d Airborne Brigade.

The great 1st Battalion of 1st Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), was a sister airborne unit attached to the 173d and fought with us side-by-side with exceptional courage and aplomb. They were superb, professional, highly trained, capable and tough airborne soldiers. We were extremely proud to have them fighting at our side. We also had a New Zealand light artillery unit, the 161st Battery of the Royal New Zealand Artillery assigned to the brigade and they supported us all with dignity and bravery every step of the way. I will never forget our combat and brotherly association with the magnificent "Diggers" and "Kiwis".



Diggers of the 1RAR move thru enemy territory.
(web photo)

We used the very lightweight Australian hammock (seemingly made from rip-stop nylon like material in a parachute) strung very low (butt-close to the ground) between two trees and covered by a tent like shelter half strung in a V-shape over the hammock. We found, initially, that the rain coming down through the trees would stream down the ropes tying the hammock to the trees and go into the hammock, defeating the purpose of staying semi-dry.

(continued....)



We used an interesting field trick by tying a drooping string on the tie ropes on either side of the hammock to induce the rainwater to run down the tie and divert the water from the hammock to the ground. Some really basic shit. But, close, deadly, mortal combat is about as basic shit as you can get.

As I think about it now, my whole Vietnam experience was kind of like a fundamental, to the core, out-of-body experience. That first night in the complicated ambush position seemed interminable, like it would last virtually forever. There were several other things in Vietnam that in fact were interminable: the rain, the mud, the sweat, the tears, the mosquitoes, the leeches, the constant sounds, smells and fear of death, the bamboo, ripping and tearing our cammies into shreds and scarring our arms almost forever, and last, but not least, sleep, or lack thereof.

It is virtually impossible to sleep for any length of time in the bush. At times you would nod off, but never into a very deep sleep. I, especially, could, viscerally, not sleep or in any way get even a semblance of a deep sleep because the lives of our wonderful troopers in the company and our mission success were ultimately dependent on my decisions. The buck really and truly stopped here.



“C” Company’s commander, Capt. Jack Leide, catches a few elusive zzz’s in the boonies.

The crackling hiss of the command radio nets was like a continuous, but necessary, irritant which constantly slapped me out of a nodding “sleep”. Lack of sleep is not only uncomfortable, but is debilitating physically and, more importantly, mentally. As I think back at my time in the 173d, one indicator of my physical and mental deterioration was my weight. Interestingly, when I was a rifle company commander in the 82nd Airborne Division, I was in probably the best shape in my life up to that point (and probably since). We worked out constantly, ran two to four miles every morning and I weighed in at a very muscular 155 pounds. During my time with Charlie Company, 173d Airborne Brigade, given the incredible challenges, physical and mental, my weight was down to

135 pounds. Where did those 20 pounds go to? I thought about that, for some strange reason, that first night of our ambush operation.

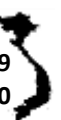
During such crucial and pressure-packed times, the mind tends to wander -- maybe it’s a psychosomatic way to “be elsewhere”. I had to try constantly to guard against anything that took my mind and concentration away from the company leadership mission at hand. We all intently listened and reacted to every sound, human or otherwise emanating out of the black, wet, pungent jungle with stark attention and a feeling of foreboding. Finally, after that long night, slim strips of rain-filtered first light began to stir eerily through the triple canopy jungle and into the ever-present bed of thick undergrowth, insects and mud. The bone-chilling wetness was ever-present in the trees, underbrush; mud, mud, and more mud everywhere on our clothes, in and on our weapons and gear and caking on our skin.



Sky Soldiers of “C” Company cautiously advance toward their ambush site.

In our little company headquarters clutch, we began to listen for whatever tell-tale sounds of threatening activity we could hear or see. During the Vietnam war, it seemed that we were always waiting for the VC or the NVA to take the initiative. We almost always were the hunted, even though at times some considered us the hunter. Although, during the initial part of a mission it may have seemed like we were the hunter, but once we entered deep into the bush, we quickly turned into the hunted. Basic shit, but innately true and that’s the way we ultimately felt and always understood as our most basic threats.

(continued....)



As the area in and around the trail complex brightened somewhat, we decided to keep as much ancillary noise down and I decided to have as much radio and voice silence as possible by turning down the squelch on the radios. My ever-faithful Radio Telephone Operator (RTO) and I learned how to communicate with each other by physical signs or even just with our eyes. My artillery forward observer, a first lieutenant, during much of our time together, was invaluable for calling in supporting fire during contact with the enemy. Since he had to know where we were at all times in order to call in critical, life-saving supporting fire, I constantly relied on him to give me an idea of where we were physically on the ground. (My wife has always accused me of having a tendency to get lost going across the street). His geographical location skills were invaluable, especially when the battalion headquarters incessantly and often inane, wanted a Location Status or LOCSTAT - even at times when we were hanging by our thumbs crossing a boiling, monsoon fed river. Not only was my artillery FO very good at apprising me of where we were on the ground, but more importantly, he did an incredible job calling in supporting artillery fire when and where it was required. Interestingly, he was almost unnaturally petrified about possibly getting ripped by a bullet or shrapnel in the back and being paralyzed for life. Whenever we were in contact with the VC or NVA, he would call in supporting fire lying on his back, as I barked my fire request orders for him to relay to the artillery units.



Charlie Company troopers dig in for the night.

In combat each person psychologically develops some innate (sometimes inane) idiosyncrasies. Human nature during normal circumstances can be very difficult to understand, but is magnified almost geometrically during close-in combat situations. As I realized the fact that our “ambush” mission was “open ended”, it really started to reinforce some of my strongest misgivings with the way we were fighting this “war”. I never lost faith in our

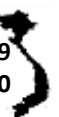
country and never sought to openly look like I was uncomfortable with the way we were prosecuting the war, but really boiled and roiled in my gut about the seemingly unfeeling attitude in our system for the resultant killing and wounding of these wonderful troopers, fighting every day for what they, for the most part, thought was a patriotic cause. It seemed the farther you got away from the individual trooper, the less the feeling of the daily ache, pain and death being faced by our soldiers every single day—even in our cantonment areas where we were subject to indirect (mortars and rockets) and even direct fire periodically. The apprehension, discomfiture and fear were always, always there.

The open ended plan for this ambush mission reminded me of what I thought of the so-called “search and destroy” missions so famous during that ungodly conflict. I got a picture in my mind and could not convince myself otherwise that we at the lowest level of the infantry, involved in the daily crucible of combat, were like crabs being drawn to well-ripened chicken necks that are baked in the sun and ready to be used as bait in a crab trap. We were the crabs and Charlie was the figurative chicken necks and incongruously, their jungle home was the crab trap.

Although, according to learned military historians, we supposedly never lost a battle during this war, we almost always took casualties because the VC picked the time and place of their choosing, and knew the local area so much better than we did. Then after we were bloodied, and they were bloodied and withdrew, we, mostly because of superior training, firepower and fire support had won the “battle”. We killed “slopes” (VC), captured some key materials, weapons, occasionally some prisoners, destroyed some village structures and some “vital” supplies like rice. We then left the area we had “captured”, they, without doubt, re-infiltrated back into the same area and normally rebuilt their basic organization and infrastructure. What had we really accomplished? As far as I could see, little, for the precious lives, effort and economic treasure we had expended.

I was becoming more and more disillusioned. I tried as hard as I could not to show my negative feelings to my troops, but eventually it may have shown at the higher levels of our command, as I continually asked some really hard questions about my mission, its objectives and how it would impact my troops....

(continued....)



I think this queasy, disturbing uncomfortable feeling came from the question: how the higher level command and control system was influencing, on a daily basis, the lower-level units at company and below? That feeling was reinforced during a previous company "search and destroy" mission in the Song Be area.

We had moved from our base camp for about two or three days and were about ready to laager in for the night in the vicinity of a jagged area that looked like a big bowl. As sound, proven tactics would normally determine, we decided to dig in on the high ground in a solid, well-knit company perimeter. First of all, the tactical and even operational basic sense would certainly call for setting up our perimeter, especially at night, on the high ground. Secondly, since it was during the monsoon season, if we dug our fighting positions on the lower ground level, not only would we be at a tactical disadvantage, but again, the ground water table was so high that we would draw water after just a few inches of digging. If we wanted to stay relatively safe, we would have to dig deeper and, again have to sit in hip-level or above, water all night.



"C" Company CO Leide (L) on the horn in his makeshift CP.

Prior to end of our first day in the area, the battalion Executive Officer (XO), a major, radioed that he was in a chopper in our vicinity and wanted to land and have a short meeting with me. Since a portion of the terrain below the bowl-shaped high ground was relatively clear area and could be easily recognizable from the air and used as an LZ, we, fortunately, did not have to pop smoke to guide his chopper in. Sometimes popping smoke can pinpoint our position for miles around. Of course, a relatively loud chopper landing didn't help us either. Incongruity was always present during the Vietnam experience.

His chopper landed in the small clearing and when he stepped off the slick he greeted me like a long lost friend. He was relatively new in the job and I didn't really know

him from a bag of assholes, but greeted him with respect and with some degree of wonderment. He said that he wanted us to stay in the area we were in for a couple of days, before battalion could give us orders to proceed to another area for another mission. He wanted us to set up our company defenses in a perimeter around the small landing zone, rather than the high ground, so that he or others could come in during the next couple of days and "consult" and possibly bring in some ice cream for the troops. (Although headquarters often tried to get us some ice cream, and it was a great gesture to us out in the bush, I to this day think they innately thought that this somewhat inane gesture would more than prove their infinite understanding of our incredibly difficult plight in the bush).

I told him that we had tactically selected to set up on the surrounding high ground, because we were in "Indian country" and the longer we stayed in an area, the more vulnerable we became to ambush or even direct attacks, and that the water table was so high we would have difficulty and discomfort when digging in along the lower ground. He would have none of it. I tried again to explain that as the company commander, I had the responsibility to not only accomplish my mission, but protect my troopers, and that I thought setting up that night and possibly the following days and nights on the high ground would do both. Again, he would have no part of it. I became viscerally upset, and told him emphatically in so many words, that he was a staff weenie and really wasn't in my tactical chain of command and the only person who could countermand my field tactical plan and orders was the battalion commander. I knew that I may have been way out of line, but there are times in your life, and I have had many of those kinds of occasions, that you have to take a stand for what you think is right, no matter the political results, good or bad, and this was one of them. We stared at each other and he would not give in and really started to act like an asshole. My blood boiled and I was starting to have a real airborne case of the ass. I basically told him in so many words to get out of my company area and "*quit fucking with my troops*". I saw my career flash in front of me. He scurried to his chopper in somewhat of a huff, got on and flew out of the area. In the end, after a short wait, (he probably radioed back to battalion headquarters, while still in flight), he radioed back to me that the battalion commander had backed up his directive to me and that I was told to do what he had "ordered". What had he told the battalion commander? Probably not the real tactical situation, but maybe that I was a disgruntled subordinate. We, of course, at that juncture complied with the order.

(continued....)



I have remembered that incident to this day with some degree of wonderment and disgust. Did they know something that we didn't? Why didn't the battalion commander call me, since I was in his immediate command structure, or why did he not innately defer to his company commander on the ground instead of some staff puke? To this very day, that experience still makes me think of how this vignette fits in with the Vietnam experience.

The battalion commander, who I thought was a good guy, should have understood the situation -- if he in fact had known it. If not, why didn't he question it further. (Another lesson learned for my future command atmosphere--rely firstly on those who are actually eyeball to eyeball in the field). Anyway, in the end, I put some really, really strong flank security up on the high ground (fuck 'em).

We stayed in that position for a couple more days, waiting for something to happen and sitting in water-filled fighting positions at night and coping with some small contact at the edges of our perimeter; killed a few VC and took some minor wounded. It seems like those "small" contacts were getting closer and more frequent.

After you become experienced in the bush, you develop a certain, uneasy, learned instinctive sense that something is about to happen and that you were in a vulnerable position. Fortunately, on the third day, we were given an azimuth, a new route of march (misnomer) and a new mission, but I never forgot that lesson, especially as I progressed in rank (small wonder I was ever promoted after that and other incidents) and made decisions on missions and how it would affect the mission and the troops. This is something that I always thought should have been the rule: those that make lofty decisions should have had the experience of what they are putting those they are ordering others to do. I know that is an impossibility as the command level gets higher, but just a feeling that roiled in the gut.

I learned during this tour and throughout my career to **always depend on your instincts, take care of your troops and always, always display "professional courage"** even under the most difficult of situations. Back to the mission at hand.

As we approached the end of the first night (30 June-1 July) and the initial slivers of light were sifting down through the wet and dripping triple canopy jungle, we heard an initial crack of small arms fire and then several series of what seemed like small firefights around the perimeter until it ended with what was a thunderous boom. Then—an almost incongruent silence. Almost on cue, we heard a series of section, squad, platoon NCO's and platoon leaders bark out, almost in unison, loud, but curt orders all over sectors of the company ambush positions, and then again -- an eerie silence. I got a rapid after-action report on the company radio net. It appeared

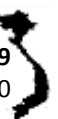
that elements of the second platoon and parts of the first and third, had ambushed a number of VC carrying a large amount and types of supplies, weapons and ammunition. As soon as I got the contact reports, I set into a crouch position and moved to the site of the action along with the field first sergeant and my RTO. Since the series of contacts had happened at just about first light, and as the area brightened, we were able to move along the perimeter to the sites of the individual contacts to assess the results of the contact.

Along the trails where the action had occurred, there were rifles, mortars, ammo boxes, bags of rice, some bicycles and several dead VC strewn on or along the sides of the trails cut through the thick triple canopy jungle. After taking inventory and assessment, we radioed to battalion headquarters and listed the number and amount of booty we captured. In turn they relayed that choppers were being dispatched to pick up the captured VC weapons and supplies at a nearby LZ, which had been selected and designated "LZ Peru." Battalion headquarters then asked how many dead VC we counted. We reported that we physically counted five VC bodies. Battalion then asked whether we had found any blood trails leading away from the contact area. We were tasked to get a 360-degree report on the blood trails leading from our perimeter. I was hoping that the VC hadn't created the contact to draw us out of our defensive perimeter, but we cautiously complied.



"RICE CACHE – Paratroopers of the 173d Airborne Brigade haul a cache of rice and salt from its hiding place in a VC village." (Photo by Sp4 Berni Zawacki USA)

(continued....)



The troops along the perimeter reported six blood trails. Blood trails indicated that VC were wounded and limped, crawled or were dragged away trailing blood from their wounds through the jungle undergrowth. We found that the battalion had later reported eight KIA during our initial contact. Was this a new policy to take half the number of blood trails and count them as KIA? We also found later that it was not a hard and fast rule, but seemed as if the ultimate "body count" for an enemy contact was left up to some number-cruncher to just pick some number out of his ass. Anyway, the choppers began to come in to take out the "booty".

As I saw the choppers come and go all I could think of was that this was like trying to conduct a stealth ambush on a fucking six-lane freeway. This was no longer your standard, every day ambush. We carried the stuff out to the choppers, and they took away all the captured weapons, ammunition and supplies, probably for some dog and pony show back at headquarters, but left the rice bags. Now, bags of rice were not only heavy, but also very difficult to dispose of to the point of uselessness. We tried burning it, but that was really hard because it burned (actually smoldered) very slowly and just at the edges. We could bury it, but that area would be fairly easy to find and the rice could be recovered, or we could throw it in some river or stream. Again, those bags were very heavy and, often, water may not be close by. Rice was a very valuable commodity to the VC and at times, unfortunately, we were forced to leave it behind.

As I assessed our next move, I had a queasy feeling in my gut that now, with our position exposed, we should think about accelerating our tactical ambush plan from section level employment, bypass squad-level and go directly into platoon-level ambush positions for the night of 1/2 July. I quickly thought, after that initial contact, that our time would certainly start running out. If we could make it through the ambush mission this day and night, then we should accelerate our plan and transition into a full strength company defensive perimeter for the next day (2 July) and night (3 July) and stay that way until we were told to stay and hold or evacuate our position and on to another mission and/or return to base camp.

We opted for repositioning into our preplanned platoon-level ambush positions during that day and set in to wait while the VC either continued trying to restart their resupply activities and/or attack us with some degree of force. Again, we had to ensure that our new positions deterred friendly fire situations.

The VC, although masters of, not only the immediate area, and normally had the tactical initiative for much of the day and night, they did not have a robust communications system and normally passed on most of their intelligence reporting and operational planning by courier. I, although uneasily, felt that we might have one more night of possible success. Then, after that, it was a going to be a total crapshoot.

After we repositioned into our new platoon-level ambush sites, we wondered and waited for what would those little bastards might do next. It was always, frustratingly, like that during our experiences in Vietnam. We almost always were forced to wait for the VC to make the next move.

In the infantry (both Army and Marine) we always felt like we were in that proverbial "crab trap". The Air Force and the Navy basically reacted to activity, but from afar. They also had offensive plans to go out and bomb shit when the intelligence and the strategic, operational and tactical plan called for it -- not that they weren't invaluable in many ways to the prosecution of the war, but it was a lot less eyeball to eyeball, personal and close in dangerous. For what they did for me and my troops, I love them dearly to this day. I agree that many were shot down and some taken prisoner, but nothing and, I repeat, nothing is as challenging or more demanding than being an infantryman in combat, no matter when or where it is. You figuratively and often literally are in a one-on-one, eyeball to eyeball, environment. It's either you or me!

As an aside, and I don't know why, I always thought about being in the oven-like heat with the enormous humidity and that as uncomfortable as it was, it was much better than fighting on the ground in bitter cold, blowing snow and ice for days and weeks on end. For some reason, that thought kept coming to mind and not that life then was idyllic in the jungle, but better than frozen feet. Strange what you think about in combat and as you can see, you also never forget. Was I trying to make the incredibly difficult situation in our jungle environment feel better? The mind could procrastinate to the nth degree when under tremendous pressure.

As we waited for the next phase of the next day, I sat next to my ever-present RTO, and chatted, as I normally did, with one of the battalion chaplains, Father John McCullough, a Catholic priest.



Jack Leide (L), attends Father John's service in the field.

(continued....)



The chaplains were absolutely amazing and slogged it out with us on the most dangerous of missions. As a matter of fact, Father Charles Joseph Watters, another 173d chaplain, received the Medal of Honor (one of seven chaplains to ever receive this highest of honors for valor in our military history) for his heroic actions during the incredibly deadly battle at Dak To in November of 1967. He also made the combat jump during Operation Junction City in February of 1967. (Just after I had left my company command. I had made the training jump which was a kick in the ass, and certainly for one of the other brigade chaplains who found himself halfway down a Vietnamese water well. If my memory serves me, I believe it was Father Watters).



**Father Watters
an American war hero**

Our other marvelous chaplain was Reverend Connie Walker, “The Leapin’ Deacon”, who alternately, along with Father John, went out with troops on almost every mission and was, in my words really “*sent from God*”. Not necessarily from the religious side, but on the personal basis, it was just comforting to have them there, their very presence was always reassuring and they provided a great morale boost, even for the less or non-religious troopers. They not only provided spiritual guidance, but just basic human comfort. Even when they would perform some religious service, they were surrounded with most of the troopers who could physically trudge to attend—even those who were not religious in any way.

It’s almost criminal the way chaplains in today’s military are being so marginalized and/or removed from service. It’s an extremely sad and disturbing sign of the times. Anyway, I had a very long chat with Father John that night about the war and how we were conducting it and how wonderful the troops were and wondering how this mission was possibly going to end. (I stayed in touch with Father John after the war until his death several years ago and am still in touch with Connie Walker’s widow to this day).

I finally got back to my small command post and the ever-present damned ever-sizzling and screeching radio. About 0200 hrs. in the morning, all hell broke loose in two areas around our perimeter. Two of the platoons had unleashed what sounded like maximum firepower on what was a long column of VC passing just beyond our outer perimeter. The sound and experience of a close firefight is about as frightening and unique as anything one can experience on earth. The humidity and the density of the triple canopy jungle keeps each sharp, earsplitting sound amplified and reverberating so it feels like the whole world is coming to an end—and for some—it does. It would be

like setting off a huge fireworks display inside of a large warehouse. Just think how those sharp sounds would amplify incredibly.

Then, the almost ever-present sounds of the platoon and squad leaders—a cacophony of gruff, loud professional orders of direction and position grows and then, as if on cue, everything falls into an eerie silence, while waiting for the other shoe to drop. Thankfully, a counterattack never came during that night.

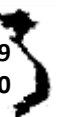
At first light, we reset the perimeter and began inspecting the areas where the actual contacts had occurred in the dark of night. As I crouched and moved along the perimeter talking to the troops and inspecting the damage, both to the VC and to our units, the situation became clearer. We ourselves had two minor wounded that the company medic (“Doc”) had already handled with his usual aplomb and care. We found 3 VC KIA and again numerous blood trails out of the area. (I don’t know how many VC KIA were reported from this contact but assume some inane formula was wisely devised).

We also had captured an even slightly higher amount of military supplies similar to what we had captured the night before except there were a couple of boxes of AK-47’s, one box of SKS rifles and a few 82mm mortars. (An interesting sidelight: The Soviets developed the 82mm mortar knowing that we had the 81mm mortar. In a pinch they could use our mortar rounds in their 82mm mortars but, we couldn’t use their rounds in our mortar tubes). We also captured a bunch of hand and rocket grenades. As per the day before, we reported all this back to battalion. They again sent some choppers out to get the stuff we captured. They also sent out some resupply for us, especially water, our life’s blood, and ammo which we needed desperately.

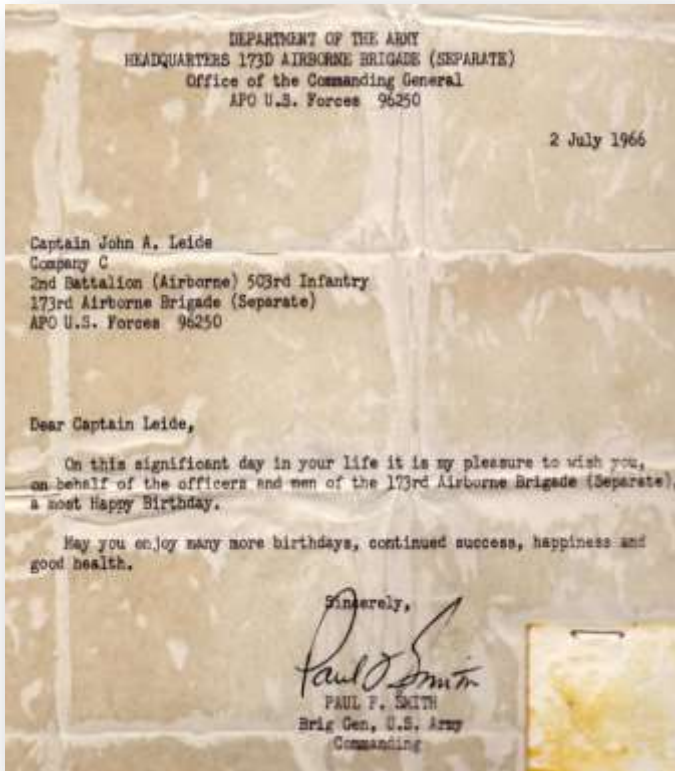


Captured enemy weapons.

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We put one of our wounded troopers on one of the returning choppers, along with the recently captured booty. Interestingly, it was 2 July, which happened to be my 30th birthday. I had not even thought about it until I got a congratulatory letter from the commanding general which was delivered on the chopper that brought in some really needed resupply and taken out the captured material and our wounded trooper.



As I read that letter, I had a myriad of thoughts that swirled around in the seeming quagmire of my mind. I thought of my dear mom, and would I live to see another birthday? Is this a sign of some kind? Every time I have looked at that letter since, it almost talks to me with an awkward combination of hope and dread. Back to reality.

About 20 or 30 bags of rice were left in our "care". I think they knew, well, I *think* they knew, how difficult it was for us to deal with fucking rice while trying to conduct a close combat mission.

We sent a small patrol out to see if they could find the nearest body of water, pond, stream or river within a reasonable distance. They found a small pond nearby and we carried the shit out to the pond and threw it all in and, thankfully, left safely and returned to our perimeter. Now we had to get together and decide what we needed to do for the next phase.

I again called battalion and asked if there was a time frame for our movement out and/or return to our base camp? The answer was the agonizingly same -- no decision on retrograde back to base camp had been made. Stay in position. Ok! Now, I had the distinct feeling the crab trap was now set and we needed to figure out how to evade, or defend against the inevitable springing of that

trap which, I felt, the VC now were being forced to close with us and attack. Didn't they know that back at headquarters? Did it even matter? Was this their plan from the very beginning?

We quickly gathered at the CP and came up with as tight a defensive company-level perimeter as possible, where the trails of ingress and egress were aligned so that we could quickly extricate ourselves and/or call fire in on the VC as they approached or retreated. I quickly noticed the faces of the platoon leaders and squad leaders. Faces in combat are the most telling of all and they looked like they had been in Dachau; unshaven, mud-smearred, sunken eyes (the eyes, the eyes are the most indicative of pressure, determination and love of nation), a stare that only can be imagined, but still professional, still skilled at their trade and ready to fight like paratroopers always have.

Some of us, including me, had a Mohawk haircut. It has been an old airborne tradition to yell *Geronimo!* as we blasted through the door of an airplane and tradition grew from there with many units adopting the Mohawk haircut. Many in my company did the same thing when we deployed to the Dominican Republic in 1965 as part of the 82nd Airborne Division. As I looked around our perimeter, and saw fellow Sky Soldiers with Mohawks, I was steeled to the next phase of this mission. You call on every ounce of training, experience and moral fiber, while grasping at disparate straws, to energize and motivate yourself and, more importantly your troopers during times of tension and peril.

C/2/503 commanding officer Jack Leide sneaks a smoke in the boonies.



A couple of his Chargin' Charlies.

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Jack Leide, on left, with his artillery forward observer calling in arty strikes.

We deployed our entire company into a full, defensive perimeter with a reinforcing and integrated fire plan that would not only be the most effective for holding off and killing our attackers, but would also lessen the abhorrent possibility of blue-on-blue incidents. In fact, here was no compelling need to have holes in the fields of fire because of a worry about that blue-on-blue problem and the possibility of splitting unit integrity. We now had the critical sinews of our company capability knitted together.

I stayed up, whispering in tongues about some inane topics with my RTO and my field first sergeant until about 0200 hrs. in the morning. My RTO, a really down to earth and dedicated trooper from the Midwest, showed me a picture, not of a family or anything else, but of a really neat 1958 Buick convertible he had just finished restoring before he left for the Army and, eventually, the war. He was so proud of the work he did restoring that car. He seemed to especially appreciate that I was a "car guy" and I liked it a lot, and knew various facets of the car including the engine and carburetion. Another unrelated discussion to try to psychosomatically forget the present and reality?



Hunkered down for the night, company commander Jack Leide (L), strategizes with his FO.

The crackle of the company radio net, although something that keeps one awake during the first couple of missions, becomes almost like a mind-numbing sound machine after time. I rolled into my Australian hammock which was so low to the ground that if I rolled too much, my butt would hit the ground, but it kept me out the mud and rain. As usual, I fitfully dozed off and on all night and I woke, just as slits of light were coming down through the dripping wet triple canopy, almost as if a sign to light our way out of that God-forsaken place. As I opened my eyes into tiny creases (almost as if I was not wanting reality to seize me) and saw the early indications of daybreak, I was almost euphoric and started to lay there and try to think of a plan to get us moving in a tactically sound way out of there without taking any casualties.

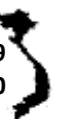
An infantry company commander has an incredible amount of responsibility that is constant and pressure-filled. How do I plan, execute and be successful in the advance of our mission, without taking unacceptable casualties (whatever number that could be by conscience at each level of command)? At about 0615 hrs., I talked to the Battalion S-3 on the radio and he finally approved our moving out that morning (3 July). I was almost euphoric. Maybe, just maybe, we will get out of here without losing our asses.

I got together with my first sergeant and platoon leaders to plan a sound retrograde movement. We decided to move that day to a map coordinate to the West (533059 as is burned into my memory bank). That coordinate was only several kilometers away, but it got us out of the present local crab trap, but not out of what I called "the ring of fire" around Xuan Loc. I calculated that there was a critical sensitive zone around Xuan Loc which was probably a geographical circle of about 20 kilometers and therefore, I called it "the ring of fire".

I reported our movement plan to the battalion S-3 at about 0635 hrs., and as insurance, until full daylight, I requested a "Firefly" mission. A "Firefly" was a UH-1 chopper with illumination (MK-24) aircraft flares to help us identify any movement and as a guide, if we had to move or operate during periods of little light or no light. (The "Firefly" later on had powerful searchlights).

The "Firefly" was normally accompanied by two helicopter gunships just in case we ran into something, and could call in fire. At about 0715 hrs., we engaged in light, sporadic firefights with the VC from various sectors of the company perimeter. After those minimal contacts, I was told that the second platoon had "bloused" 1 VC.

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As always I had to think through the situation and what every event meant for the company and our mission. I thought this VC contact either may be a feeble attempt to cause us some retributive casualties before we left the area or, as I thought more likely, could well be a probing attack trying to discover what our disposition and strength on the ground was. Based on instinct, I decided to call in some artillery missions to possibly discourage any VC idea of a follow-up major attack on our position.

We had one wounded trooper from the short contact and requested that a "Dustoff" (medical evacuation chopper) stand by. At 0733 hrs., as I talked to the Battalion S-3, he suggested that we delay any movement until we had a stabilized situation, without contact, over a reasonable period of time. I agreed with his recommendation. At 0740 hrs., I requested that the battalion prepare a sling load of ammunition, but not to launch the chopper until I requested it. At about 0745 hrs., I had a feeling in my gut and reported that *"this initial contact could build into something significant and we could need reinforcements if the proverbial shit hits the fan"*.



Charlie Company "Docs" come to the aid of a wounded trooper.

As I tried to continue to assess the situation and plan our next move, all hell on earth broke loose. It sounded like the planets, meteors and all kinds of incredibly loud blasts of the most awful experiential noises I had ever experienced. Instinctively, I quickly rolled out of my hammock where I was working on my tactical map, and onto the soggy, muddy ground, grabbed my .45 and tried to get an immediate assessment of what the hell was going on, besides what I knew was some major shit.

I heard sounds of enemy incoming that I had never heard before and it was ominous. What was different during this heavy contact was the low pitched, but loud slow bark of a 14.5mm machine gun (equivalent to our .50 caliber machine gun) and Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG's). This was really bad shit and I knew by the employment of those heavier weapons, that this was not a small VC platoon we were facing. This may well have been at least a company, reinforced battalion or even, God forbid, a VC regiment.

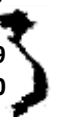
Having assumed that this was a very serious and threatening situation, I left the platoon leaders to do what they do best and lead the defense of their individual platoon areas. I heard them barking orders and now it was time to do what I needed to do, to get some heavy-duty artillery fire in here fast. I ordered the artillery forward observer to call in fire from the on-call direct fire standby 173d artillery battery to place rounds on the areas and trails about two or three hundred yards beyond our perimeter in all directions, but the fire seemed to be coming in mostly from the East and Northeast of our perimeter. The M-102, 105mm gun, used by our 173d

artillery battalion, was reliable and had a higher rate of fire, but it was not as accurate and deadly as the heavier artillery pieces at Corps level, especially the 8-inch gun. The smaller caliber round of the 105mm gun made it difficult to slice through the triple canopy jungle without "pre-detonating" in the upper reaches of the trees, although at times a detonation at a higher elevation could give the shrapnel and dangerous debris wider dispersion. *"Just get the shit in here!"*, I barked to The FO.

I hoped that our perimeter defenses were holding and that once the artillery started to fall, the attack would dissipate, as they had at times during our past company missions. It didn't take long for the friendly artillery rounds to be heard blasting holes in the jungle beyond our perimeter. It was music to my ears and hopefully to the troopers

fighting on the perimeter, as well. The hoped for reaction to our friendly artillery fire on the VC never occurred. They seemed to press their attack even fiercer. The one battery was just not doing the job. It was only able to cover part of the perimeter and it appeared that this attack was a total all-around attack and battle to the death.

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We had been beating up on their critical logistical system and we were to be wasted. I immediately reacted to my latest negative assessment and asked the FO to request additional artillery support and where on the perimeter to put it -- mostly, again, to the East and Northeast but some to the North and Northwest. As usual, the reaction from the 173d Artillery Battalion was magnificent. They put the remaining two batteries of 105's into action to cover the remaining parts of the perimeter that had not been covered. The firepower from the entire battalion around our perimeter was seemingly devastating and we could hear screams of the VC outside the perimeter grow louder and more violent. But, their attack continued.



The 173d Airborne's 319th Arty ready to send a message to Victor Charley.

We were now at about 10 to 15 minutes into this attack phase. (A minute of violent combat in a closed area like a jungle seemed like an eternity). It appeared that our perimeter was holding well and, fortunately, it was now apparent that the VC may well have miscalculated the size and strength of our defensive perimeter. I thanked God that we had moved into the company-level defense at the right place and the right time. Instinct (maybe it's experience, as well) can be a wonderful equalizer at times and I was somewhat relieved that this had been the right time.

At 0753 hrs., the VC appeared to be pulling back or regrouping and I reported that to Battalion. The contact with the VC continued to have its ebbs and flows as both sides made some adjustments, but it was like a continuing nightmare and kept coming back and coming back. I tried to think of what else we could bring in to help.

Finally, at 0800 hrs. it seemed that the situation had somewhat stabilized. But, as was usual on that day, not for long.

At 0805 hrs., the VC again attacked our perimeter in earnest, from the North, Northeast and East. The sound emanating from the contact from the incoming and outgoing weapons was deafening. I quickly called battalion and requested that reinforcements be made available on call. As the VC pressed the attack, some of our units reported that some VC were inside our perimeter. I barked for the platoons to eject them as soon as they can, before we got into any hand-to-hand shit. They responded with aplomb and either killed some of those penetrating VC that we found inside our defenses or caused them to retreat. I then reported to battalion that we had stabilized our perimeter for the time being and that we, as far as we knew, had 3 friendly KIA's and 4 WIA's and that the VC main force was located mostly on the East side of LZ Peru. But, scattered small firefights continued unabated.

At 0817 hrs., battalion relayed to me that an Air Force forward air controller and close air support aircraft were on station armed with at least 500 pound bombs. Air support, which was a great asset to have on your side, was a little iffy because we would have to pop smoke to identify our perimeter and initially I didn't want to risk it although, if things got desperate, I had a plan to call them in. As the situation got more desperate I requested close air support, but not dangerously close to our perimeter. We popped smoke and asked them to look for targets of opportunity at least 400 to 500 meters outside of our perimeter, mainly in the area East/Northeast of the LZ. As I requested that distance from our perimeter, I knew it was fairly close in for air strikes, but what the fuck, we were all in.

The fighter bombers arrived on station a short time later and were revving overhead as the attacks on the ground continued. It felt comforting just to have them there and maybe, just maybe the VC would hear them as well and be reluctant to press the attack. No such luck. The contacts continued in force. I called in close air support requests, got bomb damage assessment reports from the forward air controller, and made corrections for the next round of strikes and strafing runs.

At 0822 hrs., I reported to battalion that we were attempting to maintain contact with the VC and were employing max claymores, but that we expected to be hit again. That was a "no shitter" because shortly after that report, they struck at our perimeter again.

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At 0845 hrs., I reported to battalion that they were hitting us with hand and rocket grenades and automatic weapons of all calibers. Battalion then told me that reinforcing elements (a platoon) of Charlie Company of our sister 1st Battalion were in the area, but the choppers carrying them were receiving fire from the Southwest. Holy shit, from the Southwest?

At 0855 hrs., we reported that three of our now four friendly KIA's were in a crossfire and we were having difficulty getting them back to a more secure area. I also passed on to battalion that we needed more ammunition, mostly M-16 and machine gun rounds. At 0914 hrs., we were still violently exchanging hand grenades and automatic weapons fire with the attacking VC. I asked battalion that a "Dustoff" be launched for 3 of our more seriously wounded troopers. By that time, we had as many as 4 KIA and 7 WIA.



In the thick jungle of Vietnam, Charlie Company troopers caring for their wounded and dead buddies.

At 0928 hrs., we were able to get a resupply chopper into our perimeter at LZ Peru. After we unloaded the ammo and other supplies from the chopper, we put our wounded troopers on board and the chopper got them the hell out of there. At about 0958 hrs., the first lift with some of our Brigade brothers from Charlie Company of the 1st Battalion were able to land at LZ Peru. We were glad to see them. Even though they were not from the 2nd Battalion, they were fellow Sky Soldiers and we welcomed them with open arms. Two more lifts brought in more of the 1st Battalion reinforcing platoon at 1015 hrs., and 1020 hrs. We immediately and professionally moved the troopers on each lift quickly into place, and the troopers from each of the three lifts, about a section or squad of troopers, was attached to each of our rifle platoons, and we quickly readjusted the perimeter. The whole operation could not have been smoother. It was like they had been with us right from the beginning.

Again, Sky Soldier dedication, training, toughness and professionalism paid off.

Paratroopers are paratroopers - period. As time went on, I decided that we needed to bring in some big shit in here to try and discourage those crazy bastard VC, and requested additional reinforcing artillery support and was told that Corps Artillery with 8 inch and 175mm gun batteries were standing by. Where did I want them? I knew the 8 inch (203mm) had the reputation of being the most accurate artillery piece in the world and was high trajectory which meant it could penetrate the thick jungle better than the lower trajectory, higher velocity 175mm long barrel gun. Both were on the same carriage, but the 175mm, because of the problem with barrel wear, was less accurate, as well.

I requested that we use the 8-inch on the possible reinforcement (and egress) trails several hundred yards from the company perimeter, mostly to the East and Northeast. I also requested that the 8 inch guns hit the VC about 600 meters out from our perimeter to catch any VC reinforcements that were moving into or moving out of the area. I also asked that the 175's plaster an area just a couple of hundred meters beyond that at the Northeast shoulder of LZ Peru.

At about 1035 hrs., we reported that we were consolidating our position after the 1st Battalion reinforcements had arrived and that we had received some 60mm mortar rounds that fell short of our perimeter. We also reported that we had at least 15 VC KIA and had seen numerous blood trails both in and around our perimeter.



VC who paid the ultimate price of war.

(continued)



At 1100 hrs., we decided, in coordination with battalion, to keep all lift aircraft out of the area so we could take maximum advantage of artillery and close air support without endangering our choppers. We were told by battalion and the Air Force Forward Air Controller (FAC) to pop red smoke all along our forward positions. We coordinated that very carefully with each platoon. It was critical that we pop the right color smoke in the right place in order that we not have a potentially devastating blue-on-blue air strike. Popping smoke to identify our company perimeter is sometimes a crapshoot as well. After we pop the smoke grenade, the emitting smoke dissipates into the humid wet triple canopy jungle. Our constant hope was that the smoke is able to get above the trees in a fairly accurate representation of our perimeter disposition. It's sometime imprecise and of course, dangerous if it can't get out of the triple canopy, or spreads and makes it difficult to be an accurate indicator. Again, another variable that could be helpful or dangerous. Never sure, never dull.

At 1120 hrs., we heard huge, ear-splitting explosions Northeast of our company perimeter. Great! The "fast movers" (fighter-bombers) had plastered them good! Just where we had requested! *Good spot! Good spot! Go get 'em guys!*



At 1135 hrs., that round of air strikes was terminated. Soon the artillery units started to shell all around our perimeter at staggered distances. The whole atmosphere was unbelievable; chaotic, ungodly loud, and, to be honest, terrifying. As the battle raged, I felt the VC were as determined to eliminate us, seemingly, as to risk everything. They kept coming.

The platoon leaders asked for more artillery -- I couldn't get them more, but I could get it closer. The brigade artillery fire missions were now placed just outside the perimeter, and as I mentioned they were not the most accurate. I couldn't bring in the bigger guns because of the danger of large corrections from where they were now. (You normally would make smaller corrections, especially as you approach the friendly troop positions).

I told our artillery FO to give the order to our brigade artillery guys to "*drop Two Five (25 meters) and level your*

bubbles." (There were leveling bubbles on the artillery aiming device). This gets the incoming artillery rounds closer to the friendly perimeter, but also raises the possibility of getting artillery shrapnel (hopefully spent shrapnel) inside the perimeter. After I had told my FO to send that correction, he got the ominous reply from the artillery battalion, "*Danger Close*". That was a pro-forma response from the artillery fire support coordinator to let me know this was going to be some dangerous, close-in shit. I told my FO to acknowledge the "*Danger Close*" and repeat the fire correction request. He of course, lying on his back, as usual, called in and repeated the correction. "*Drop Two Five and level your bubbles*". It wasn't the most dangerous correction, such as bringing fire within our perimeter itself, but it was in fact going to be dangerously close. It was now or never.

As I was giving the final artillery correction, I could hear some huge explosions again in the distance. It sounded like 250, 500 and even 1000 lb. bombs. I thought those magnificent bastard A-1's and even F-100's (I heard the familiar F-100 jets powerful swoosh roaring in the distance, and the continuing growl of the A-1's mammoth radial engines) were looking for and finding targets of opportunity well outside the perimeter and were probably pummeling reinforcements and or those possibly trying to get away (hoping). After the bombs had been "pickled" one could hear the strafing runs they were making on the VC reinforcing units and some of their resupply or, again hopefully, those retrograding back from forward positions. After a final huge burst of fire and brimstone, the VC finally began to grow silent and move away. We then called an immediate cease-fire for the Brigade Artillery close-in fire, but requested that we keep the Corps artillery blasting away at the remnants slinking away in the distance. We could still hear some close air support fighter bombers screaming down and dropping their ordnance and, then, strafing targets of opportunity. God bless them.

I heard our leaders around the perimeter shouting to their troopers to cease-fire and be prepared and on the alert for a possible re-attack. Damn! Those guys were magnificent. I was so proud of them. I felt that it was time I low crawled around the perimeter and find out how many casualties we had taken, but also how many VC we had "bloused" during the attack. What we had gone through seemed like an eternity (an absolute eternity in full combat mode). I could only think the worse for our guys. I was fretting and thinking that maybe 15-30 troopers KIA was a possibility. I was hoping on the other hand, we had taken a bloody and high toll on the VC.

(continued....)



As I moved around the perimeter and was taking an assessment I was amazed that we had taken “only” four KIA and several wounded, almost all taken in the initial “surprise” onslaught. I was devastated, even though we had 4 KIA. We really had to wait to move out of the perimeter to see about VC casualties. I could see some mangled KIA through the underbrush where defilade fire and artillery had ripped it away. Again, four friendly KIA was a relatively terrible price, but, frankly, better than I had feared. Again, three of the four appeared to have been killed during the initial attack as they started to move from their water-filled fighting position as the first light appeared and all had been quiet. The initial grazing fire from those 14.5mm machine guns and grenades was devastating.

When I got back to my company CP, I saw that the initial 50 caliber raking fire had ripped holes in the nylon in my Australian hammock. If I hadn’t rolled to the ground so quickly, I may have bought the farm that morning. Some of the wounded needed to be evacuated and treated back “home”, but the Doc did the best he could to make them as comfortable as possible. Now we had to clean up the perimeter and send out some small patrols beyond the perimeter after an appropriate tactical pause in time. Meanwhile, I continued my walk around the perimeter, talking to the troopers and giving them all a pat on the back and ass and telling them job well done, but to remain alert. Always remain alert.

There were a couple of incidents, as I made my rounds, that stick in my mind to this very day. As I moved along the perimeter, I found one trooper sitting in the water in his fighting hole, with a Detroit Tigers hat cocked on his head, his weapon and steel pot at the ready, nonchalantly reading a comic book called “Sergeant Fury and His Howling Commandos”. Good God, here he was, after an intense deadly firefight and he’s reading a fucking comic book! I looked out beyond his fighting position and I saw one disfigured dead VC and there may well have possibly been more beyond. The American paratrooper (really, the American soldier) has never, ever ceased to amaze me.



A dead enemy Viet Cong outside perimeter who would be buried, later to be recovered by his comrades.

As I moved further along the perimeter, I saw another trooper burying a dead VC into a shallow grave fairly close to his fighting position. The sight I will never forget was when after he had buried most of the body, a foot with a VC sandal was sticking out of the dirt and he was pushing it down nonchalantly with his mud-caked jungle boot. I thought I heard him humming some kind of a tune while he was doing it. Holy Shit! I know constant combat makes you act in strange ways, but Holy Shit! Frankly, I thought, in a way, that this may have been a good sign because he, evidently, had remained calm during a storm of incoming and outgoing fire. On the other hand, was he dangerously close to being immune to the cruel humanity of it all? Were we all? That question continued to nag at me frequently during my days in combat and afterwards.

As I have expressed frequently, there is a very fine line between quiet professionalism and being callous to the point of danger-laden carelessness. I then returned to my company headquarters area. Now, we had to plan our next steps. I thought to myself: “*Are they still lurking out there waiting for us to make a false step?*” We needed to make a final tactical assessment and our next step-when, where and how to get the hell out of there.

We found as many as 14 dead VC within or just outside our perimeter. So the 14 we found, plus the one the trooper had buried, meant we had a total 15 confirmed “warm hand on cold ass” dead VC. We continued to tentatively probe around and just outside of our perimeter and it seemed that the VC had disappeared as quickly as they had appeared. As I mentioned previously, I don’t like to calculate blood trails in the casualty figures but, in this case, there in fact were not only blood trails leading everywhere, but numerous body parts as well.

As we moved out further we saw a lot of signs of mortal devastation, including more body parts and evidence that numerous bodies had been dragged away. As far as we could calculate up to this point, the artillery and air support missions had caused massive casualties. We held off the VC from our perimeter, but the fire and brimstone that they faced from the artillery and air, not only discouraged their pressing of their attack on us, but probably they suffered scores of KIA and wounded from artillery and air. We all did it together. A great effort all around. The only other devastating attack that I had seen was even worse. It was after an “Arc Light” (B-52) mission. It was SOP that after an Arc Light mission, an infantry unit had to go in do a bomb damage assessment of the strike, normally, after a flight of B-52’s had dropped their ordnance. At the time a B-52 loaded to the hilt had 84 internal 500 lb. bombs and externally, on the wings were 24 more 750 lb. They flew at 30,000 ft. and not a sound could be heard from that altitude.

(continued....)



We had conducted a bomb damage assessment in the area of the strike and I have never seen anything like it. When asked what they feared most the VC virtually unanimously said "a B-52 strike". As we went through the VC base camp that had been hit, you could see collapsed tunnels, dead VC everywhere, bleeding from their ears and noses from the unbelievable concussion. The B-52 in Vietnam was an absolute "stud", an incredible whispering death machine and worth its weight in gold. Back to our mission at hand.

After doing our battle damage assessment and reporting back to battalion as best we could, we were ready for our next step. We gathered our company leadership together and quickly and ultimately decided that there was nothing but trouble staying in this God-forsaken position. The VC probably figured that they had given us a blatant and deadly warning – "stay here on this valuable piece of our ground, or you ain't ever going to be able to go back home". As usual, they still had the initiative to reattack us at any time and we didn't have the power to at least discourage them any more than we had done. What a fucking war!



Charlie Company Sky Soldiers looking forward to returning to Camp Zinn.

I called back to battalion and reported that we would be planning a retrograde movement out of our present position and, eventually, back to our base camp (from Xuan Loc to our base camp at Bien Hoa was about 60 or so kilometers due West) and whether we can select an LZ where we can be picked up and/or at least get our dead and wounded out as soon as possible. We gave them a final after-action report and then got orders to move to LZ Peru, but only to get out our dead and wounded. I was really grateful for that, but why not get the whole company out? I asked that those choppers bring in a hefty supply of ammunition, rations and water, among other requirements. I thought to myself, hadn't we

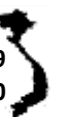
accomplished our mission and been through enough? A question for the ages. I kept yelling at all of our leaders, and they in turn, down the line: "Stay alert! Stay alert!" I knew from their professionalism and dedication that I really didn't have to emphasize that, but it felt like I needed to reinforce that order.

As we broke from our perimeter, our first priority was getting our dead and wounded out of there and get to the LZ. The weather turned wet and blustery -- nothing new. We, therefore, knew it was going to be a hard, wet muddy slog. I insured that we put out very strong flank security and if I had found it necessary, I would have ordered a flanking reconnaissance by fire all the way to the LZ. Normally, by definition, reconnaissance by fire is used when placed on a suspected enemy position in order to cause an enemy to disclose his presence by moving or returning fire. I would really call what we in Vietnam described as reconnaissance by fire at the time was really suppressive fire. Reconnaissance (suppressive) by fire was an option that we had used previously during some desperate situations: A friend received a note from a retired sergeant major who was a junior NCO in Charlie Company. He wrote:

***"The commander had a policy,
'never send a trooper
where you can send a bullet."***

He continued: "I remember a situation when one of our sister companies was pinned down. We in Charlie Company were about a click (kilometer) or so away and were tasked to move as quickly as we could to relieve them. Slogging through the bush would have taken much too long to get to our brethren in trouble. We got the order from the company commander to get on the road (something that normally was an anathema to me). We almost double-timed down the road towards the company in trouble. The company commander ordered that a couple of M-60 machine guns and M-79 grenade launchers be brought forward in the line of march. We burned up the wood line, as we rushed down the road. With the amount of heavy reconnaissance by fire we put out, an ant could not have gotten through to us. We broke through and relieved the besieged company, cut an LZ and were able to get dead and wounded out and bring in water, ammo and other supplies that we needed." This vignette, again, illustrates the incredible number and types of difficult decisions infantry company commanders, platoon leaders, key NCO's and even the individual troopers have to make throughout each minute, each hour and each day, throughout virtually every combat mission.

(continued....)



The most glaring impression one gets from being an infantryman in combat is in a simple question: what other 17-30 year-old American would be charged with making the incredibly difficult, pressure-packed and innately dangerous decisions made by infantry officers and NCO's, and even individual combat troopers, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute in the most intense crucible of life experiences? Virtually and almost always, it feels like a fight to the death between two scorpions locked in a death grip of actions and decisions. Bottom line, decisions that may or may not cost precious paratrooper lives. Back to our redeployment towards our base camp.

It started to rain in sheets. We wrapped the dead in their mud splattered ponchos and had a trooper (sometimes two) on each end carrying them through the heavy wet undergrowth. Carrying dead comrades through the wet jungle was about as difficult a job as you can imagine. First, the psychological thought of carrying a dead comrade was really debilitating mentally, and have you heard of carrying "dead" weight? The visual that has gotten to me, like a punch in the gut, was the sight of one our dead comrade's muddy boots sticking out from the end of the poncho. This was, just a couple of hours ago, a living-breathing fellow brother-in-arms. This kind of scenario was, undoubtedly, viscerally burned into the very soul of any trooper who has had that emotional experience in that shithole. How could it not?

In the back of my mind I innately knew that the VC were not going to let us off this "easily" and would try to continue to punish us enough, so that no other such mission of this type would be planned or executed in their area of operations. We broke camp and began moving towards LZ Peru. It of course was not only the closest LZ to our perimeter, but the one we could secure best. I ensured that we had the most effective flank security as we moved to the LZ and set up a temporary company perimeter around the LZ. As we moved around the LZ, we could see, again, the signs of devastation caused by the artillery missions and air support. There were body parts and blood trails everywhere. What would we have done, where would we be without them? As I reflect back on the signs of utter devastation and carnage that we saw around our original perimeter and around LZ Peru, some caused by us and much by the artillery and air support, that we, maybe inadvertently, had sprung a huge fucking crab trap right back on those little bastards.

The Dustoff's landed in a flurry, their rotors sending a fusillade of rain pellets all around their landing area and, eventually, we evacuated our dead and wounded and got our resupply of ammo, water, rations and other logistical items. As I saw them leave, I had a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach -- one that I will never forget. I felt sullen, when I thought about our dead and wounded brethren, and an ache in my gut that we had a long slog through some potentially bad shit until we got "home". But, once they were gone I had to put it out of my mind

and think about the mission at hand. We still had to get the rest of the company back to our base camp, either on foot or hopefully, at some time during our slog, an evacuation by chopper. We were once again on our way on a semblance of a map azimuth back to our base camp, still tens of kilometers away.

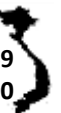
As I did an assessment, I felt that we still needed to move about 20 kilometers before we get beyond the "ring of fire", which as I have described as an area beyond the extremely sensitive VC areas around Xuan Loc. We were now into our fifth day. We had been out in the bush on other missions for much longer periods of time, but this time it was different. This time we felt that we were being closely watched and would be constantly harassed and it would not end soon. That night we went into a tight company bivouac and were constantly on high alert. We still did not have much sleep in our future.

As I keep mentioning, one of the most debilitating and dangerous problems one encounters during combat is lack of sleep. The constant tension, heat, humidity, the wet and thick jungle surroundings are really ungodly difficult to deal with, but unless you can get more than one or two hours of sleep a night, after a period of time you almost begin to feel like you are sleepwalking -- not good when the situation dictates that you need to be incredibly alert. Lack of sleep seemingly, as time goes by, piles up on you and, in the end becomes very dangerous and debilitating. Being alert is the primary thing that keeps you safe and able to defend yourself and your fellow troopers. Again, lack of sleep, combined with the absolutely stifling and grinding pressure involved and you've got a situation where one small mistake can cost precious lives.



Fr John steals a few moments of desperately needed sleep.

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After a fortunate uneventful night, we broke camp early that morning (4 July). As we arranged the line of march for the sixth day, we felt some relief that maybe, just maybe, we were out of the most dangerous part of our local crab trap, and closer to moving out of the “ring of fire”, as well. We looked forward to finally reaching our base camp in about three days of some pretty tough slogging. I still was hoping that someone “back there” would have some common sense to get us out of there by chopper. We still had some difficult terrain and possibly dangerous areas to get through. We were all exhausted from the lack of sleep, the constant pressure of possibly being attacked again, and ever on the alert.

In the morning, the monsoon rains began to rage again and as we slogged and slogged ahead into the early afternoon, we stopped for a short break. We again started to move out on what seemed like our interminable march to nowhere. As we kept on cutting and slashing through the thick underbrush and bamboo during the early afternoon, a scourge of gunfire raged from concealed positions through the brush and poured into our positions. It again sounded like the end of the world. No matter how much you experience a close-in firefight, you never get used to the absolute terror and fear that you feel - especially the initial sound of incoming.

I hugged the nearest tree, not really knowing which side would be the best, but it felt so good and secure, then tried to make a quick assessment. I try not to put myself in the middle of the small unit leaders doing the job they were trained to do. They were schooled into skilled jungle fighters, mostly by sometime terrifying experiences. Our guys poured out return fire and after about a minute (how does a minute seem like an eternity?), the firefight stopped and we were left with an incongruent, but comforting silence. As I got the reports from the platoon leaders, I found that two of our troopers were KIA. As we secured the area for a possible reattack, it was difficult to assess how many VC there were, whether they were ready to pounce again or had moved out taking their possible wounded or dead with them.

After a sound period of time (“Sound” is a purely relative term in this atmosphere of intermittent calamity), we needed to get out of there, and carry our dead troopers to a point where we could get them out on a “Dustoff” evacuation chopper. The rain began literally pounding us again and in earnest. As we broke out, the ground was so slick and the undergrowth more so that it took two sets of four fellow troopers to carry our fallen comrades wrapped in their ponchos. I called ahead to battalion and told them that we had friendly KIAs and they needed to send a chopper to get them out. They responded that a medevac chopper would be on the way in 10 minutes and to give them a coordinate for pickup. Not knowing what kind of terrain was ahead and whether there was a clearing we could use as an LZ, we quickly gave them a coordinate just ahead

of our line of march. When we got to that point there was no suitable landing zones anywhere near our recommended coordinate. I had some scouts move out in all directions but not far, to see if they could find a useable LZ. No luck!

The chopper was enroute to us so the only way we could get our dead troopers out would be to blast a semblance of an LZ out of the jungle floor using detonation cord (“det” cord) wrapped around a circle of trees. We set off several charges and even a couple of pounds of C-4 placed where they could be most effective. After about 10 or 15 minutes of blasting a hole in the jungle, we radioed for the waiting evac chopper to come in.

The troopers all pitched in to get large, heavy jagged branches out of the way, so that the chopper could approach. We popped white smoke, radioed him to tell him the color of the smoke so the pilot could properly identify us as friendly when he reached our position. We set out a 360-degree perimeter around the embryonic LZ. There were still some rather high stumps sticking up and the LZ was not very wide, so all the chopper could do was to hover just above the stumps. The chopper pilots in Vietnam were incredibly brave and invaluable to morale, especially the “Dustoff” medevac pilots.



Charlie Company troopers cut an LZ out of the jungle floor.

As the chopper hovered, it blew all kinds of crap all over the place, even though much of it was wet, and it whipped all around and ripped into us. The wood chips from where we had hacked away some of the trees and branches were like pieces of wooden shrapnel. They dropped a stretcher down to us and we placed our dead troopers on it one at a time and then secured each with rope. Led by the “Doc”, five or six of their fellow troopers lifted the men as high as they could, until they were able to get each man above the skid of the chopper where the crew was able to reach down and lift them up into the bowels of the chopper for the ride back to base camp and eventually back to their loved ones. God bless them.

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A fallen Sky Soldier, a brother of Charlie Company, begins his long, silent journey home.

Once we got our fellow Sky Soldiers on the way back in the chopper, we reconstituted the company line of march and went off back into the dark, wet, stinking quagmire of that damned fucking jungle. We still had at least two more days of the seemingly interminable trudge, until we could at least approach within the perimeter of our base camp at Bien Hoa. Thankfully, we made it through that night uneventfully.

The following day, we finally broke out of the jungle thicket and hit a rice paddy and vegetable farming area where there were actual clearings and some small villages. Although this was much better than triple canopy jungle, it presented a new set of problems of security and the prospect of testing our ability to fight.

We were now relatively out in "open" territory and had to really be extremely careful as we moved that day and as we laagered in for the night. We dug in for what hopefully would be our last night before we would be able to make our final agonizing, but hopeful grinding haul to our base camp.



Charlie Company troopers, now in the open, working their way back to base camp.

We found a small-unoccupied dilapidated hut where we set up company headquarters (sounds like a really heady

description for four guys). The platoons set in for the night by digging fighting positions in a company perimeter without actually drawing water and spending the night in dry spider holes. We were dangerously out in the open, but on the other hand we had great observation and fields of fire. We put out small listening posts towards the edge of the jungle to insure we were not surprised from the dark undergrowth. I thought guardedly, but positively about our chances of reaching the nirvana of our base camp. I hadn't thought that positively for quite some time, then dozed off until about two in the morning.

I awoke in a start to the bark of weapons snarling from an area behind the hut, cleared my head and slithered outside towards the area of the activity and called out to the field first sergeant who had crawled out ahead of me. He yelled that there were one or two VC just outside the back of the hut and the close-in security posts had heard sounds sifting through the light brush in the rear. After a short and strange silence, I heard some furtive scurrying in an area to the left and behind of the hut, then two sharp resonating screaming pops and again silence. One of the platoon sergeants barked that there had been one VC crawling around the brush towards the shack and that he had "bloused him". He said that it looked like he was alone. When we got to the dead VC, I could see that he was dressed in a loin cloth. As we looked further, we could see a very small hole in his forehead and a huge hole blasted out the back of his head. The M-16 round had been designed to destabilize as it entered a body and then rip horizontally through whatever it hit.

We discovered by his identification papers that he was a VC first lieutenant reconnaissance platoon leader who had detonation cord and some C-4 strapped on his back and hips. He was planning to cause some real damage and it looked like he was after my little command post shack. The VC were not giving up trying to punish us, but it seemed that their efforts were getting weaker the further we got from the "ring of fire" and the closer we got to our base camp.

We broke the perimeter early in the morning of the ninth day and tried as much as we could to pick up our pace of march. That quick pace did not last long, as the sun came out and with it what seemed like an awesome vengeance. As we trudged along in the raging humidity, the struggles of the last nine days took a toll on our guts—big time. We must have looked like a lost brigade -- unshaven, mud splattered, sunken eyes, but still putting one muddy jungle boot in front of the other. Whenever I got totally degraded, both physically and mentally, I would always say to myself "*one foot after the other, step by step*" and it worked then and, for the most part, for the rest of my life.

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I have that picture of me with the Mohawk on my wall taken after the 3 July attack on our position. I always look at my eyes in that photo and whenever I had a problem later in life would say to myself, *“this is nothing compared to that.”* Just look at the eyes, the eyes. Eyes, in a combat situation can tell very much about how people are faring physically and mentally and are indicative of how they see a situation evolving and affecting them and their psyche.

In this photo is a typical look of a trooper after an incredibly difficult crucible of fire, sweat, fear and bravery. The eyes, the eyes!



“A young paratrooper with a mud-smeared face stares into the jungle in Vietnam on July 14, 1966, after fire fight with Viet Cong patrol in the morning. He is a member of C Company, 2nd Battalion, 173d Airborne Brigade.”

(AP caption and photo/John Nance)
[Capt. Leide shown on far left of photo. Ed]

Finally, we had to cut through another “short” stretch of that god-forsaken jungle before we emerged into the cleared area around our base camp. The heavy rain had started again and, then, suddenly and finally stopped as we beat our way out of those last clumps of bamboo and into a cleared area around our base at Camp Zinn. We still had about a half of a kilometer or so to go and we pushed as hard as we could, as debilitated as we were, and it seemed that we were being given a cruel, final grueling endurance test. The sun beat on us with what seemed like a last effort of vengeance, and the moisture in the air and ground caused our breathing to be heavy and difficult, almost unbearable and stifling.



Charlie Company troopers’ home, Camp Zinn, near Bien Hoa AB. “C” Company hootches along the top edge of photo.

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

As usual the NCO’s were doing their jobs, still barking orders to the troopers to keep up and pushed all of them almost to the breaking point. They kept growling and yelling: *“You keep goin’!, You keep goin’! You’re not gonna get this far and fall out now!”* Finally, we had the base camp in sight and pushed and pushed and would have crawled if we had to, in order to “get back home”.

We finally reached the perimeter line of wet sand bags and rusted barbed wire of the base camp. As we passed the perimeter guards, we almost in unison, as if rehearsed, yelled *“Airborne!”*, and as we did, our postures went from bent and almost broken to braced and proud. We were back in our “womb”, proud paratroopers, proud Sky Soldiers and, finally, finally we could clean up and sleep in our own “home”— for a while.

I quickly reported to the battalion CP and told them that I wanted to make sure the troopers got settled into their tents, take a shower and get some real food and, maybe, just maybe, a cold beer. I got to my hootch, showered (hard to describe how basic things such as people, surroundings and what we take for granted in peacetime, become so enormously magnified in combat). I felt almost human again -- almost. My first thoughts were that I had some of those damned, dreaded letters to write to the loved ones of our KIA and to get over to see our wounded troopers. Once I saw that the troops were being well taken care of, I had a cold beer, then before I could finish it, crashed and burned on my cot and slept like the dead.

I had promised myself on the 3rd of July when we were in the middle of those continuous attacks by the VC, that when I got back to base camp, I would go over to the 173d’s 3/319th Artillery Battalion and thank them personally for the incredibly great fire support they gave us and that it was probably the ultimate decider for our ability to fend off those determined attacks by the VC. The first chance I got, I went over to the 319th’s Headquarters and had lunch with their officers and NCO’s and some enlisted “cannon cockers”. During that lunch and afterwards, they described how they had just about run out of ammunition, that the gun tubes were almost red-hot and they had every man, including the cooks, bakers and candlestick makers carrying and loading ammunition in our support. I went around the 319th area during my visit and shook as many hands as I possibly could.

Everyone, but everyone, in the battalion said that they were not going to let us lose that fight if they could help it. It was camaraderie in the purest form -- Sky Soldiers all, and I never, ever said a derogatory word about artillery guys for the rest of my career, or life for that matter.

(continued....)



I'm not sure whether they had experienced anything like an infantry company commander making a point of personally thanking them for their support before, but it sure made me feel good to do it. Lesson learned—always thank those who have helped in your success.

For the next few days we were able to rest while maintaining our bodies, weapons and equipment. During that period, I laid there in my hootch and reflected on what we all had been through, all of the surrounding circumstances, the dead and wounded, and what it meant for my future in the Army. What should I do now? Anything different?

I grimly thought about the incredibly difficult six letters of condolence I had to write to the families of our fallen brethren and thought about how many of those gut wrenching letters had been written by other commanders and how many more will have to be written for the rest of this stinking war. Each of these letters is agonizing, both to write and to receive, and I thought about how each family would take the loss of their loved one. I continued to think about how would my mom and dad take it if I "bought the farm". I perished the thought. It was eating away at me. I'm supposed to be a tough, dog-eating paratrooper. How can I be thinking this way? I thought that each and every mission was a new and incredibly difficult experience and the chance of getting your shit blown away was always, always there. Even when we went on a mission that was not considered very dangerous there were other situations that may or may not change your life.

I recalled that we were sent out on a mission just outside of our base camp to make sure the VC hadn't reinfiltrated back into the security zone around our camp and Bien Hoa Air Base. The security zone was as far out so that, at least, VC mortars were out of range. The area we travelled was nothing but previously cleared areas of rice paddies and vegetable fields, dotted with small Vietnamese villages. As we conducted our patrols on the second day, I began to feel like crap, but thought that this too will pass. However, on the third day it was much worse. I asked the Doc to take a look and after he took my temperature, it was almost 104 degrees. Bad shit! He recommended that I be medevaced back to our base camp and have a real doctor take a look.

I barely was able to crawl up on to the chopper and once we got back to the base camp medical facility, the doctor, after some initial diagnosis, said that I probably had dengue fever. Dengue is contracted from mosquitoes, as is malaria, but does not recur later in life as malaria does. I started to have a numbing pain in my joints and got a mild rash on my body. The medics put me in a big barrel filled with ice and water (talk about some cold shit) in order to get my temp down, and forced fluids into me. After a couple of days, my temp was down and I felt better. I told the

Doc that I needed to get back to my men and was prepared to walk if I had to. He knew I was half kidding but saw the look of determination in my eyes and said ok and recommended that I take the next chopper out to join my company, which I did. I still didn't feel great, but I certainly felt better than I did a few days before.

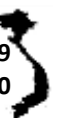
As I was being flown out to be with my guys, I felt an exhilaration that not only had I survived that bullshit, but I would be back with the guys in my company soon. I was ready to rock and roll again. About a day or two before we were scheduled to return to our base camp, the rains came, and came, and came. It was a deluge and it never stopped. On the morning before we were to return, I woke and was ready to prepare to move out and thought that I would reach into my rucksack and get out an old fruit bar that I had put in before we left. As I dug into all the shit I had in that ruck, something bit me on the finger and the pain was excruciating. I yanked my hand out and tried to figure what the fuck had bitten me. Come to find out it was a pretty big scorpion which had crawled under the flap of my ruck to get out of the rain and wet. I called the Doc and once he found out that it was a scorpion that had bitten me, he gave a shot of some kind of shit and asked if I wanted to be evaced. I asked him if it looked like it may be serious or even deadly; he said he didn't know, but didn't think so. I thought to myself, crap, if I get evaced again, I'd feel like some kind of malingerer, so I told the Doc to do what he can. My hand and arm got very swollen and red, but after several hours and whatever the Doc shot me up with, it started to dissipate.

Additionally, as I think about all the other things that could "get you", besides bullets and shrapnel, I thought about the fact that we at times had our shirt sleeves rolled up and as we trudged and cut through the brittle bamboo. It had been sprayed with agent orange, and we wound up with cuts all over our bare arms. Because of the humidity, such wounds were difficult to heal and each time we crashed through the bamboo again, the cuts would break open. Undoubtedly, we set in motion, which for some would, in retrospect, auger related illnesses for the rest of our lives.



U.S. aircraft spraying Agent Orange in Vietnam. (web photo)

(continued....)



The Vietnam War gave us a lifetime of playing Russian roulette with our bodies both during and afterwards. As for our minds, I have mentioned previously that mental gymnastics in combat can play with your mind, but we didn't know what it scientifically was called then, if anything, but, for some, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was possibly in our future as well. I surmised in the end, if it wasn't Charlie or the NVA, it was and is a bunch of other bullshit that could get you. What a fucking war! But, I digress. I still had some unfinished business with the 173d.

There was a planned mission, "Operation Junction City", that called for the 2nd Battalion to make a combat jump on the Cambodian border, probably in February, to clean out some VC and NVA base camps and logistical areas fed out of the Ho Chi Minh trail. The battalion was also to act as a blocking force to prevent the NVA from retrograding into Cambodia while other US forces were attacking from the south. It was supposed to be like a hammer and anvil type operation. I knew from my short period of time that I spent in the Brigade S-2 (Intelligence) office prior to my taking command of Charlie Company, that they would be jumping into a really bad area.

The jump may be somewhat benign because it probably would be a surprise, but the NVA in that area were in divisional strength and their logistical supply lines were much shorter. But before that combat jump, the battalion was to be put through some pre-operational jump training. The plan was to have us trucked down near Saigon to the Vietnamese airborne training area to be put through a series of jump refresher training and then have a "training jump" prior to the actual combat jump. As we were on our way down to Saigon, I kept thinking that although I would not miss that abominable "crab trap", I sure would miss my troopers.



Chargin' Charlies pre-jump training for their blast.

We went through the normal pre-jump training that we were used to and it sure brought back memories of jump school at Ft. Benning, GA, and my jumpmaster training and

jumps with the 82nd Airborne, and we were going to do what paratroopers were born to do -- *jump*. After the pre-jump training was over, we motored back to our base camp at Bien Hoa. The morning of the jump, the mouth got dry and the juices were flowing. As we got to the assembly area we were each issued our chute and our ever reliable and comforting reserve. It seemed like old times in the 82nd—the wonderful feeling of being among the elite.

I took my position as one of the jumpmasters and made sure every trooper's equipment was safe and secure. The sun was peeking out of the horizon over the triple canopy jungle like someone beckoning for us to come on and do what many of us thought we were born to do. Chutes on and checked, we all laid on our chutes on the tarmac in our prearranged "sticks" in order to load the C-130's. The back ramps were down and it was like the aircraft was beckoning us to enter the gaping hole and prepare for one of the best experiences in the world--jump as part of an airborne infantry unit. I was first of my stick to trudge up the ramp because I asked my assistant jumpmaster to actually "pass" the guys out the door; I was going to "stand in the door" (be the first out). Once we all had waddled in and sat in the fabric seats, we buckled up, anxiously awaiting the inevitable—the ramp to close and the engines to rev up.

The engines coughed, whined and started up. We were all fairly silent and relatively relaxed since at least we weren't jumping into that goddamned crab trap - this time. Once the four engines were running smoothly the ramp moved up and slammed shut. We sat in the muted semi-darkness as the plane moved to its place in line for the takeoff. As it ground to a final stop, it lurched ahead very slowly at first and as the four engines began to really roar, we got to take-off speed and there we went into the wild blue yonder.

As we approached our jump altitude, which was normally, in peacetime at a stateside drop zone, 1250 ft., we began to level off at about 900 ft. Combat jumps are normally at 900 ft. and on occasion as little as 400 ft. with little or no chance at that altitude of pulling your reserve if a problem occurs with your main chute. We started our jump sequence and when we got to the last one "stand in the door", I leaned into the sides, hands outside the door and on the command, **Go!**, jumped out into the prop blast. Once the chute popped, and I felt that hard, but comfortable jerk, I felt free as a bird, loving every minute of it. I crashed into the drop zone, a vegetable field, with a slight roll and came to a dragging halt. It was great. It was "Airborne" and nothing, but nothing can compare.

(continued....)



So this was it! Once we got back to base camp, I wouldn't have much time left with these wonderful soldiers. In the meantime, I enjoyed the post jump slaps on the ass, handshakes and the usual jump stories. I would be gone for the next one and, I thought, these poor bastards would be jumping right squarely into the biggest of all "crab traps" and probably be fighting, not the VC, but hardcore North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units. Under my breath, as I talked to them, I said a prayer that they would be safe in their difficult and dangerous mission ahead.

The following week I got my shit together, had a round of farewells with the guys in the company and friends in the battalion. The company officers and NCO's gave me a company guidon, with all of their names embroidered on its face. What a wonderful parting gift. I felt not only very proud, but also very, very emotional. I have that guidon on my wall to this day.



I could not help but think to myself, "How many of the guys whose names are on this guidon would survive this tour and/or the next?" Every time I look at that guidon, I wonder, as I look at the specific name, vivid memories, some good, some bad, but all with a unique feeling of airborne camaraderie in the pit of my stomach. Why is it with Vietnam veterans there is a different look in the eyes? I know, I keep going back to the eyes.

I gave a speech recently on Memorial Day at our local county veterans memorial and reflected on how the monuments to veterans both dead and alive, treat all veterans equally. Even we Vietnam vets, who were treated with scorn or worse on our return home. That is why when Vietnam vets, even to this day, see, meet or recognize a fellow vet, they greet each other with a somewhat muted, and misty-eyed "Welcome home brother". That greeting seems to be not only said in a somewhat somber tone, but also seems almost cathartic. God bless them all.

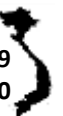
John (Jack) Leide, Major General USA Abn. Inf. (Ret)



MILITARY CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- 33 years of active service in the US Army
- Served in four combat tours:
 - Three as an airborne company commander: 82nd Airborne, 173d Airborne, 101st Airborne.
 - The fourth as General Schwarzkopf's Director for Intelligence, J-2 for Desert Shield/Desert Storm
- Battalion Commander, US Army Special Forces.
- G-2, 82nd Airborne Division
- Military Intelligence Group Commander
- Only US Graduate, Chinese Army Command & General Staff College
- Defense and Army Attaché to China (including during the Tian An Men incident)
- Director for Operations, Defense Intelligence Agency
- Combat Infantryman's Badge, Master Parachutist Badge, Special Forces Tab
- Inducted into the US Military Attaché Hall of Fame
- Inducted into the US Military Intelligence Hall of Fame
- Inducted into Intelligence Wall of Torch Bearers at Defense Intelligence Agency
- Graduate of Georgetown University, Syracuse University College of Law, Harvard University John F. Kennedy School

(Except as noted in captions, all photos are from Cap Leide's photo collection).



And to the Men of Charlie Company Who Entered the Crab Trap and Gave Their Full Last Measure, We Honor You

Julius Collins, Jr.



Born: 1/06/1945
KIA: 7/03/1966
Home: Blackville, SC
Rank: PFC

Terry Kenneth Wilkins



Born: 4/01/1948
KIA: 7/03/1966
Home: Las Vegas, NV
Rank: PFC

James Theodore Noss



Born: 6/29/1945
KIA: 7/03/1966
Home: Bruceton Mills, WV
Rank: PFC

Elmer Wayne Scarborough



Born: 4/28/1945
KIA: 7/04/1966
Home: Romulus, MI
Rank: PFC

Eric Ribitsch



Born: 2/20/1943
KIA: 7/03/1966
Home: Ridgewood, NY
Rank: PFC

Theodore Williams, Jr.



Born: 7/18/1946
KIA: 7/04/1966
Home: Robbins, IL
Rank: PFC



Talking Paratrooper Dog!

A guy was driving around the back woods of Tennessee and he saw a sign in front of a broken down shanty-style house: "Talking Dog for Sale"

He rings the bell and the owner appears and tells him the dog is in the backyard.

The guy goes into the back yard and sees a nice looking Beagle sitting there. "You talk?" he asks. "Yep," the Beagle replies. After the guy recovers from the shock of hearing a dog talk, he says, "So, what's your story?"

The Beagle looks up and says, "Well, I discovered that I could talk when I was pretty young. I wanted to help the government, so I told the CIA and they had me sworn into the toughest branch of the armed services...the United States Army Paratroopers. You know one of their nicknames is 'The Herd', well I was part of the Herd. The 173d Airborne Brigade. In no time at all they had me jumping into one country after another, sitting in rooms with spies and world leaders; because no one figured a dog would be eavesdropping. I was one of their most valuable spies for eight years running, as they would secretly drop me behind enemy lines. But the jetting around really tired me out, and I knew I wasn't getting any younger. So, I decided to settle down. I retired from the 'Herd' (8 dog years is 56 paratrooper years) and signed up for a job at the airport to do some undercover security, wandering near suspicious characters and listening in. I uncovered some incredible dealings and was awarded a batch of medals. I got married, had a mess of puppies, and now I'm just retired."

The guy is amazed. He goes back in and asks the owner what he wants for the dog.

"Ten dollars," the guy says.

"Ten dollars?! This dog is amazing! Why on earth are you selling him so cheap?"

"Because he's such a bullshitter ... He never did any of that. He was in the Navy!"



[Sent in by Ray Chapman, RAA]

~ Corrections ~

Dumb Yank Newsletter Guy

Thank you my brother. Just a quick one mate. *Anzac Day* is misspelled (See Page 52, Issue 68). Just an oversight no doubt bro. Love ya mucho mi Hermano.

"Aussino"

A.B. Garcia

HHC/2/503, '65/'66

You're right Aussino, we spelled it incorrectly as *ANSAC*, twice! We never said we're good spellers. Xin Loi G.I. Our apologies to all you Diggers, but no pushups for you. Ed



Not Campbell

In some of the initial copies of Issue 68, our July-August newsletter sent out, *Fort Campbell, KY* is named twice when we meant to say *Ft. Benning, GA*. The editor, having served as a Puking Buzzard at Campbell, often makes this same mistake as he suffers from CRS. Dropping now for 20. *One.....Two.....* will do the rest later. Ed

Words of Wisdom

by

Sir William Golding

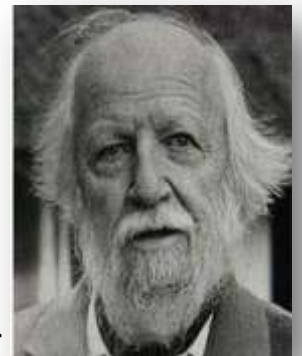
British Novelist, Playwright & Poet, 1911 – 1993

"I think women are foolish to pretend they are equal to men. They are far superior and always have been.

Whatever you give a women, she will make greater. If you give her sperm, she will give you a baby. If you give her a house, she will give you a home. If you give her groceries, she will give you a meal. If you give her a smile, she will give you her heart. She multiplies and enlarges what is given to her.

So, if you give her crap, be ready to receive a ton of shit!"

Sent in by Bob Clark, 1st/5th SF



From the archives....

Engineers – “Let Us Try”

“Let Us Try” is the motto of the 173d Engineer Company of the Airborne Brigade.

Whether there is an airfield to build, a demolitions task to be accomplished, streams or rivers to be crossed, roads or trails to be hacked out of the dense jungle, a minefield or barrier to be laid or erected or perhaps a schoolhouse to be built for the local people, it can and will be done by the 173d Engineer Company along with its other various missions.

As can be seen, this small but vital portion of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) stands prepared and willing to execute any and all missions.

Its reservoir of ingenuity and professional knowhow contributes to the success of the brigade combat elements and the Engineers history is replete with occasions when it also fights as combat infantry.

Source: *The Reporter*, August 14, 1965



2nd squad, 2nd Platoon of 173d Engineer Co. in early '67. From left to right: Paul Swedenborg, Dale Morgan, James Nelson and Mike Newton



Wes Thompson, “LT”, of 173d Engineers, at 2/503 reunion in Cocoa Beach, FL in 2006.

173rd Airborne ... All The Way

Story by Capt. James Oliver

New Concept

On 25 June 1963 there occurred a new development in the structure of the United States Airborne forces with the activation of a separate airborne brigade on Okinawa. Initial reorganization began in March of 1963 when Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the new brigade was formed. Activation brought a new concept to today's modern Army: formation of a force augmented not only in manpower but in mobility and firepower. One dominant feature remains unchanged – the will to win.

History Records

The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 503d Infantry are the lineal descendants of the WWII 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment of Corregidor Fame. These battalions continue the traditions of the famous regiment.

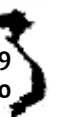
The 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment was the first regiment of paratroopers formed in the United States Army in August 1941 at Fort Benning, Georgia. This is the only airborne regiment with a memorial at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York.

During WWII the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment participated in numerous campaigns in the Pacific area of operations which culminated with the renowned parachute and capture of the fortress island of Corregidor in the Philippines in April, 1945.

This island stronghold was bitterly defended by the fanatical Japanese and was only secure by the 503d after two weeks of bloody fighting.

In June 1960, the 2nd Airborne Battle Group, 503d Infantry arrived on Okinawa from the 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to become the forward striking element of the United States Army in the Pacific. It was subsequently reorganized in to two Airborne Infantry Battalions of the 173d Airborne Brigade. Each Battalion has a headquarters and headquarters company and three rifle companies.

Source: *The Reporter*, August 14, 1965



~ From '65/'66 Photo Collection of Col. George Dexter, 2/503 Bn Cmdr ~



General Williamson decorates Capt. Bob Warfield during award ceremonies at Camp Zinn.



Troops digging Operations bunker in rubber trees.



Battalion Motor Pool in rubber trees.



LTC Dexter with COL Bob Duddy in "D" Zone.



Fr Kennedy conducts Mass in Pleiku.





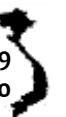
Troops in Pleiku load C-130's for return to Bien Hoa.



Visit by General Westmoreland to Camp Zinn.



Chopper bringing in rations at Ben Cat.

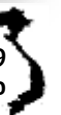




Troopers fire 81mm mortar in Ben Cat.



Preparing to move out to Iron Triangle.



~ Reunions of the Airborne Kind 2016/2017 ~



~ 2016 ~



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



Delta Co., 2nd Bn, 8th Cavalry (Airborne), 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), 2017 D.C. Reunion, May 17-21, 2017 Crowne Plaza Dulles Airport.

Contact:

Angry Skipper Association, Inc.

Web: www.angryskipperassociation.org



118th Military Police Company (Airborne) Association, June 2-4, 2017, Fort Bragg, NC.

Contact:

Web: www.118thmpcoabnassn.com/home.html



Casper Aviation Platoon Reunion, June 19-22, Nashville, TN.

Contact

Web: www.casperplatoon.com/Reunion2017.htm



173d Airborne Reunion in Vicenza, Italy, July 10-14, 2017, hosted by Capter 173.

Contact:

Web: Skysoldier.net



2017 National Convention, The 100th Anniversary of the formation of the 82nd All American Division, Orlando Chapter, August 9-13, 2017, Rosen Center, Orlando, FL.

Contact:

Web: www.paratrooperdz.com/2017-convention-registration/2017reg



2/501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Abn Reunion is being planned to celebrate our departure to South Vietnam 50 years ago. December 13, 2017. Fort Bragg, Fayetteville, NC.



11th Airborne Division Association Reunion, to be held in Boulder, CO. Dates to be named.



B/2/501st Reunion 2017, Great Falls, MT. Dates to be determined.

Contact:

Web: <http://b2501airborne.com/reunion.htm>



509th Parachute Infantry Association Reunion 2017, Shreveport, LA.

Contact Web:

<http://509thgeronimo.org/reunions/freunions.html>

~ 2017 ~



Snowbird Reunion, 101st Airborne, February 8-12, 2017, Marriott Westshore, Tampa, FL.

Contact:

George Buck

Web: www.101abnfgcc.org

Phone: 727-823-6970



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



1st Battalion, 50th Infantry Association 2017 Reunion, May 2-5, 2017, Hampton Inn and Suites, Phenix City, AL.

Contact:

Web: www.ichiban1.org/html/reunion.htm



Firebase Airborne Reunion, May 12-14, 2017, Nashville, TN.

Contact:

<http://beardedarmenian.wix.com/fsairborne>



173d Airborne Association 2017 Reunion, hosted by Chapter 18, May 17-20, 2017, Oklahoma City, OK.

Contact:

Web: Skysoldier.net

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.



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~ In Memory of Our 173d & 503d Buddies Who Made Their Final Jump ~



BILLY TWO MOONS, AENOHESO, "Charging Hawk"

was born Nov. 25th 1948 to parents Austin Two Moons Sr. and Hilda Hart Two Moons. The Oldest son, he was traditionally cared for and looked after by his Grandmother Margaret Risingsun. He received his early education at Northern Cheyenne Tribal Schools. He attended and graduated from St. Labre Catholic School, where he was a member of the 1967 Boys State Champion Basketball team. After high school he married Mary Jane Limpy in Sheridan, WY and had 4 children from this union. They later divorced. Billy enlisted in the U.S. Army, serving 2 years during Vietnam. He was a member of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. After being injured in Vietnam, Billy returned home. Billy went on to attend college at Concordia University in Seward, Nebraska. After College he returned home to Busby/Rosebud creek, Mt. He then worked for the Tribal H.I.P. program for many years; and later worked many years for the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Security until he retired. Billy later met his companion of 30+ years Arvelos Whitewolf, and they made their home in Lame Deer, MT.



DON DALI passed away peacefully at his home in Rancho Cordova, CA on June 20, 2016 surrounded by his beloved family. He was 75 years old. Don was born in San Jose, CA on April 14, 1941 to Domenico & Giovannina Dali. He graduated from San Jose High School and studied at San Jose State University. He proudly served his country in Vietnam as a combat medic with the 173d Airborne Brigade. He is survived by his wife, Cathy, and an extended family. Don had a very successful career as a consultant/civil engineer including 17 years as the owner & CEO of Rail Technology, Inc. Over his lifetime and career, Don made many wonderful friends who will miss him dearly, including his "brothers" from the 173d Airborne Brigade. Hooah!!



JEROME J. BECKREST "Jerry", age 87, a lifelong resident of Northeast Ohio, beloved husband, devoted father, favorite uncle, Korean War Veteran, and Republic Steel retiree passed away on May 7, 2016 with his family at his bedside. Upon graduation from college, Jerry served his country proudly in the Korean War as a 1st Lieutenant with the 503rd Airborne Infantry Regiment of the US Army. While stationed at Fort Campbell, KY, he met the love of his life, Betty Jean Coke of Clarksville, TN. In 1956, they married and returned to Ohio to raise a family.



RUSSELL CLARK FAULKNER, III, 68, passed away at home the morning of April 23, 2016. An Arizona native, Russ was born in Florence, AZ on June 2, 1947 to Barbara and Russell Faulkner, Jr. He grew up in Coolidge, AZ, Austin, TX and Flagstaff, AZ. Russ served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam and was awarded a Purple Heart and Bronze Star. He treasured his fellowship with other Sky Soldiers, serving a term as president of chapter 20, the Desert Chapter, of the 173rd Airborne Society. He is survived by his wife of 30 years, Susan, and an extended family. Russ loved his family and friends, enjoying get-togethers, where he was usually the life of the party. He relished time spent outdoors fishing, hunting, camping and cooking on the grill. Russ was a unique individual and truly one of a kind. He will always be missed and will be in our hearts forever



(continued....)



BRADD GRAY, 66, passed away March 9, 2016, at home, from COPD. He was born March 31, 1949 in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada to Garth and Dorothy Gray. He was a resident of Las Vegas for 60 years. Bradd proudly served in the U.S. Army and was an artilleryman with the 173rd Airborne, "The Herd," unit in Vietnam. He was employed by REECO at the Nevada Test Site as the only saw and tool sharpener, a skill he learned upon discharge from the Army. He later, with his wife and business partner, opened Nevada Carbide and Cutter at a time when the big building boom was beginning in the 80's. He is survived by his loving wife and best friend of 31 years, Patricia Gray, and their extended family.



background. His exile took him first to Portugal and later to Brazil where he supported himself by agricultural work on a coconut plantation. In 1940 he was able to immigrate to the United States, arriving in New York harbor on a very cold December morning. His plan now was to find a job and enroll for study in some university. His studies were interrupted in 1944 when he was drafted into the American Army. He volunteered for service with the Paratroopers and served with the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team in The Philippines. He was awarded 2 battle stars and the Combat Medical Badge. Returning to Syracuse after the end of the war and brief service in Japan during the occupation he continued his studies, receiving his PhD in Physics in 1951.



GLENN N. HAMPTON, 71 of Eau Claire died on Wednesday, July 6, 2016 at Mayo Clinic Health Systems-Eau Claire. Glenn was born August 6, 1944 to Harold and Celestine (Blackbourn) Hampton in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. He graduated from Bloomington High School in 1963. After graduation, Glenn went to Madison Vocational Technical School and received a two year diploma for Chef Training. He then joined the Army and served with the 82nd Airborne Division state-side and in the Army 173rd Airborne in Vietnam. After the war, he attended UW-Stout and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Hotel & Restaurant Management in 1972, and then he also attended the UW-Eau Claire and graduated with a Bachelor in Business Administration with emphasis in management.



MYRON KEN HAYASHIDA, 74, passed away peacefully on May 30, 2016 in Honolulu. He was born and raised in Honolulu and graduated from Roosevelt High School, class of 1960. After earning his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, he began his career in the United States Army, serving in assignments across the United States as well as in Germany and Japan. Myron served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam and was the Adjutant General for United States Army, Japan. He earned his Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Georgia. After retiring from the Army as a senior officer in 1984, Myron transitioned into a private sector career, specializing in information technology and facility security. Following the attacks on 9/11, Myron led a joint venture which sent security teams to upgrade the security of U.S. embassies and diplomatic posts worldwide. He retired as the President and CEO of BP International in 2008 and moved back to Honolulu in 2014. Myron is survived by his wife of 52 years, Carol Ann, and an extended family.

DR. ERICH HARTH passed away on June 27, 2016. He was born November 16, 1919, in Kritzendorf, a small town on the Danube near Vienna. He was brought up in Vienna by his mother, a nurse. At the age of 9 he entered a prestigious gymnasium from which he graduated in 1937. There followed a period of military service in the Austrian Army. His dream then was to become a pilot in the newly formed Austrian Air Force. The end of this dream came in 1938 when Hitler invaded and annexed Austria. Shortly thereafter, Harth had to flee Austria because of his part-Jewish



(continued....)



MICHAEL R. JOHNSON, 67, a longtime Ninilchik resident. died Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2016, at his home from natural causes. Michael was born June 10, 1948, in Vancouver, Wash. He received his education at Bonney Lake Elementary in Seattle and Reynolds High School in Portland, Ore. He also received education in the military and had served as a chaplain. He served in the U.S. Army 173rd Airborne from 1966-77. 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. Michael moved to Alaska in 1977 and lived in Anchorage, where he worked as a chef at the Captain Cook Hotel. In 1986, he moved to Ninilchik, where he worked as a smoker chef for Deep Creek Custom Packing. He retired in 1989. "Michael was very reclusive, especially this past year. He loved painting and spent most of his time doing so. He was affected for life by his duty in the military during Vietnam and after. Michael had a very difficult life with a lot of problems, some of which he brought on himself. He served for 11 years active duty and was very proud to be a soldier. After his military career he worked in various hotels around the state of Alaska. He loved the arts and was a very happy individual. It will not be the same without him. He always helped everyone he could," his family wrote.

MICHAEL MERLE JORDAN, passed away at home on June 1, 2016. He was born March 22, 1942 in Gillette, Wyoming to Merle and Naomi Jordan. Michael was raised on the family ranch in the Savageton community, and graduated from Gillette High School in 1960. He attended the University of Wyoming and graduated in 1964 where he earned a degree in Electrical Engineering and completed the ROTC program. Michael was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army on September 27, 1964. In his military career, Michael served with the 1st Special Forces in Okinawa, Japan, the 82nd Airborne, the 101st Airborne, and 173rd Airborne Brigade, and served 3 tours in Vietnam from 1968 to 1971 for which he was awarded the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star with oak leaf cluster. Upon returning to the States, Michael met and married his wife, Janet, in Ft. Campbell Kentucky, and adopted her six children.



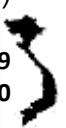
JOSEPH H. LEAR, III, 65, died unexpectedly on Feb. 23, 2016, at Eastern Maine Medical Center. Born at Bar Harbor Hospital on Aug. 23, 1950; graduated from Bar Harbor High School in 1958. He served in the U.S. Army in Vietnam from October 1969 for a period of three years as a Green Beret, Co-A-4th Bat. 503 Div. Inf.; 173rd Abn Bde. He received the honors of: National Defense Service Medal; Parachute Badge; Vietnam Service Medal; Vietnam Campaign Medal. He is survived by his eldest son Todd B. Lear and his girlfriend Tonya Ingrisano; the mother of his sons and best friend, Sue Lear.



KEITH LINCOLN was born on July 10, 1962, and departed this life on June 14, 2016 in Denver, Colorado. Keith spent his entire life as a Denver native. His mother recalls each of her children asking for prayer while they entreated God for each other when they were sick. She also recounts Keith's caring and protective nature when he, without fail would always volunteer to go first when seen by the doctor, since his twin sister always lost her composure at the sight of a white coat. Keith was active in ROTC when he attended John F. Kennedy High School. He took delight in participating in drill competitions. His acquaintance with the military came in the form of a Sky Soldier as he served beside those in the Army's 173rd Airborne unit. Keith had a heart set on service, his caring nature endeared him with those he loved most.



(continued....)



MICHAEL A. MALONE, 68, passed away on June 27, 2016 after a lengthy battle with cancer. He was born in La Crosse on September 22, 1947. He graduated from Onalaska High School in 1965 and joined the army within a few months of graduation. He was with the 173rd Airborne Brigade and was part of the first combat jump in Vietnam. Upon his discharge from the army in 1968, he decided to stay in Colorado where he continued to hunt and fish, both of which he loved from the time he was a young boy in Wisconsin. Mike is survived by an extended family and his former wife Wilma.



MICHAEL EDWARD SPARKS, 66, of Grant, Florida passed away May 29, 2016. He was born in Buffalo, NY on April 13, 1950. He graduated from Bethel Park High School in Bethel Park, Pa. Michael served in the Army in the 173rd Airborne Brigade. He received the Purple Heart for injuries sustained in Vietnam. He also received the National Defense Service Medal and Vietnam Service & Vietnam Campaign Medals. He operated an Automotive Repair business in Sebastian prior to being employed by Piper Aircraft Corporation from which he retired. He was also part owner of The Final Touch Cabinets in Vero Beach. He was a past Fire Chief with the Micco Volunteer Fire Department and Captain with the Sebastian Volunteer Fire Department. He is survived by wife, Natalie and daughter, Isabella Lynn.



BURL WILLIS MARTIN, 92, passed away Sunday, June 26, 2016 in Athens, TX. He was born March 17, 1924. Burl grew up in Maud, OK and joined the U.S. Army at the age of 19. He served in the 503rd Parachute Infantry during WWII. Burl took part in the liberation of New Guinea, Southern Philippines, and Fortress Corregidor in Manila Bay. Among many other decorations, Burl was awarded The Bronze Star for his heroic service in combat. Burl served 22 years with the Dallas Fire Department and 10 years for the Van Zandt County Sherriff Department. He enjoyed horses, trail rides, and rodeos. Burl was a member of the Living For the Brand Cowboy Church in Athens and a lifetime member of the VFW. He is survived by his Wife, Wilma Green Martin and an extended family.



JOHN C. SWAIN, 67, passed away on June 27, 2016 at his home in Williamston after a long post stroke battle. He was affectionately known as "Little John", "Wild Man" and "Mongo". He was born on September 21, 1948, in Quincy, Michigan to John E. and Helen E. (Potter) Swain. He attended Milan High and Webberville High School where he excelled in athletics. He was drafted into the United States Army in 1968 where he proudly and bravely fought in Vietnam as part of the elite Army Airborne Rangers from 1969-1970. He was part of the 75th Long Range Patrol, 82nd and 173rd Airborne regiments. He married his high school sweetheart, Marsha Lott, on June 18, 1969. After returning from Vietnam, John accepted a job at General Motors where he was employed 29 ¼ years before he suffered a massive stroke at age 50. He is survived by his dedicated and loyal wife of 47 years, Marsha, and an extended family.



JOHN H. SEYLE, III, was reunited with his beloved wife, Dominica "Mickey" Seyle on July 15, 2016. Born in Savannah, GA, he was the son of the late John H. Seyle, Jr. and Esther Seyle, dear brother of David Seyle (Claudia), devoted father to Michaelle Mullins (Richard) and John H. Seyle, IV (Ann), and loving grandfather to RJ and Courtney Mullins, Chase and Grayson Seyle. He also leaves behind many special cousins, close friends, and his faithful puppy, Reece. Having served in the United States Army, and part of the Special Forces, 173rd Airborne Unit, John was a proud Vietnam Veteran, Lifetime Vietnam Veterans of America and American Legion member.



(continued....)



JAMES KEVIN TARPEIN, 64, of Bowling Green, passed away Sunday, May 22, 2016, at the Boone Medical Center in Columbia. James was born May 2, 1952, the oldest of four children. He is survived by his wife Mary Ruth McClintock Tarpein as well as his children and an extended family. After



graduation in May of 1970, he entered the US Army at Fort Campbell, Ky., for basic training and then went to Fort Polk, La., for advanced infantry training and Airborne School at Fort Benning, Ga. He deployed to Vietnam serving with the 173rd Airborne Brigade in the Central Highlands of Vietnam as an Infantryman RADIO Operator, M203 Grenade Operator, and M60 Machine Gun Operator. He was deployed to Fort Campbell, Ky., with the 173rd Airborne and was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. He was commissioned US ARMY as Regular Army Officer 2nd Lt. and reported to the Military Police Officer course at Fort McClellan, Ala.

NELSON “NIKK” THOMPSON

went home to be with his Lord and Savior on Friday, Aug. 5th, 2016. Nikk was born and raised in Lee’s Summit, MO. Nikk leaves his wife Cheryal of 32 years, and an extended family. Nikk was born Sept. 22nd, 1951. He graduated from Lee’s Summit High School in 1969. After



graduation, Nikk was accepted into West Point Academy. As he prepared to go, Nikk made the sudden decision to immediately join the 173rd Airborne Brigade - “The Herd” - and left for Vietnam in 1970. After returning from Vietnam, Nikk received many Letters of Commendation from the Department of the Army Headquarters. He served as a liaison non-commissioned officer at Fort Ord, California, where he assisted in fine tuning the Special Unit Enlistment Program implemented by the 101st Airborne Division, which became an effective all volunteer force and highly successful. Nikk also taught at the West Point Academy in 1972 and received a Letter of Appreciation from Colonel, Richard L. Gruenther, Infantry, Director of Military Instruction for outstanding performance of instructing, advising and evaluating cadets and platoon and company tactical training. Officer Nelson “Nikk” Thompson was a decorated Police Officer who served the Lee’s Summit Police Department for 27 years.

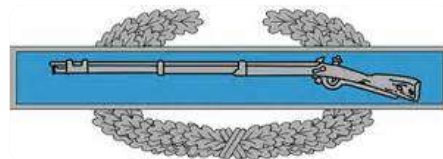
ROBERT L. TODI of Trumansburg passed away at home on Thursday, May 12, 2016 at the age of 67. Bob was born in Ithaca on May 17, 1948. After graduating from Ithaca High School, Bob joined the United States Army. He served his country during the Vietnam War



as a member of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, earning a Purple Heart. After being honorably discharged, Bob’s time in the service would weigh heavy on his heart throughout his life. Bob was a member of the International Laborers’ Union 785 in Ithaca for many years prior to his retirement. A keen auto mechanic, his love of cars stemmed from rebuilding a roadster himself to watching NASCAR. Bob was a quiet man who found peace in the nature on and around his property. Bob is survived by his wife, Geraldine Todi and an extended family. Bob was preceded in death by his brother, John, who was killed while serving his country during the Vietnam War.

MELVIN JOSEPH VALASEK was

born on June 28, 1947 in Columbus, Nebraska, and passed away on January 26, 2016. He grew up in Omaha where he attended Blessed Sacrament Catholic grade school and graduated from Omaha North High School in 1965. As a young boy, Mel enjoyed fishing and supported himself with a paper route. Following high school, Mel worked for Union Pacific for a year before he was drafted and served in the United States Army as a Medic for two years, including 11 months overseas as a combat medic assigned to the 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 50th Infantry in Vietnam...seeing service attached to the 1st Cavalry Division, 4th Infantry Division and 173rd Airborne Brigade. Mel married Marsha Garafolo on October 17, 1970.



(continued....)



JOHNATHAN E. WALDEN was born on April 28, 1981 and passed away on Sunday, May 15, 2016. Johnathan was a resident of Speedway, Indiana at the time of his passing. John graduated from Danville High School in 2000. He decided to enlist in the United States Army on May 21 2009. He served in the Afghanistan war zone for eleven months as an Ammo Bearer-Gunner. His military occupation was Infantry Airborne Paratrooper. John earned the Army Achievement Medal, 2 Army Service Medals, NATO Medal, Overseas Service Medal, Combat Infantry Badge and Afghanistan Campaign Medal. He completed his tour of duty with the 173rd Airborne in Vicenza, Italy.

JOHN CARL WALSH, age 70, passed away peacefully in his Greenwood home on Thursday April 14, 2016. Beech Grove High School class of 1963. He served in the U.S. Army 1966-1969, 173rd Airborne Brigade, 3rd Armored Division, during the Vietnam War, and was a Bronze Service Star recipient. He worked at Allison Gas Turbine for 30 years, retiring in 1995. A member of UAW union, John is survived by his son, Kyle Walsh; and daughter, Andrea Walsh.

DONOVAN ELSWORTH WASSON, a World War II veteran and retired foreman for Blaw Knox Co., died April 21 at home on Grand Island. He was 94. Mr. Wasson was drafted and entered service in August of 1942, where he spent two years in the 772nd Tank Destroyer Battalion in Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri. He later volunteered to join the 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team. Mr. Wasson served in the Battle of Corregidor. His most prominent honors include the Good Conduct Medal, Distinguished Unit Badge, American Theater Service Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Theater Service Medal, and Philippine Liberation Ribbon with two Bronze Stars. He was also on guard when Gen. Douglas MacArthur returned to Corregidor to raise the American flag. Mr. Wasson was a proud veteran and enjoyed telling his stories from the war and his days in service. He met his wife, Anite (Kunde), after returning home to Mora. They were married on June 14, 1947, and together raised five children.



Flag raising on the Fortress Corregidor.

THOMAS IRVIN WHELAN, 66, of Dixon, died Monday, May 9, 2016, at OSF St. Francis Hospital in Peoria, IL. He worked for thirty years as a senior nuclear maintenance mechanic for ComEd, prior to his retirement in 1999. Thomas was born August 31, 1949, in Flora, IL. Tom is survived by his two sons, Clay (Mary) Whelan of Dixon and Jason (Brandy) Whelan of Polo; and an extended family. At 17 years old, Tom joined the army and served in the Vietnam War with the 173rd Airborne Brigade and the 75th Airborne Ranger Battalion. Tom was awarded one Gallantry Cross with a Silver Star, four Bronze Stars for Valor, four Purple Hearts, one Army Accommodation, and four Air Medals. Of those heroic and public accolades, what Tom was privately known for was his generous, thoughtful and caring ways, always thinking of how he could help the less fortunate.



~ Rest Easy 503 ~
**Rest easy you men of the 503,
 your time has come, your job is done,
 and our thoughts remain
 with thee.**
**From the sky you fell, oft times into hell,
 yet refusing to take
 a knee.**
**We miss you now but will join you soon,
 on that drop zone far
 away.**
**We'll slap your back as we share a laugh,
 while singing
 Airborne, All The Way!**

A Sky Soldier

Regret to Report

Sadly, we've arrived at a time when we are losing fellow Sky Soldiers and WWII 503rd troopers at an alarming rate. In future issues of our newsletter we'll continue to include written memorials of 2/503 buddies who have passed, and include a list of Sky Soldiers from sister units and WWII 503rd troopers who have left us. Thanks for your understanding. Ed

(continued...)



In Honor & Loving Memory of Colonel Richard Henry Boland (Ret) AKA "Rawhide Boland", From His Family

Born January 4, 1921, in Quincy, Mass. He came from a low-income family who struggled. Not much is known about his father. He had a brother – John Boland. His mother was the family matriarch who kept the family together. As a teenager, he contributed to the family by fishing and doing odd jobs. He was a strong and energetic boy with great physical strength and agility. He had a natural talent for knowledge and did well as a student. He graduated from Quincy High School.

1935 - Member of Civilian Conservation Corps. and War Guard. He loved boxing, and his skills as a boxer became very noticeable in the Boston area. During the Great Depression, he supplemented the family income by boxing.

1942 – August - he voluntary entered Army Air Corps to become a pilot. Washed out on an eye test. Army Air Corps sent him to basic infantry training.

1943 – May - Paratrooper training in Georgia under Col. Sink. Following graduation he was assigned to physical training duties at Ft Benning.

1943 - Assigned to 501st P.I.R., "C" Company. Trained in England for WWII operations.

1944 to 1945 WWII campaigns with 101st Airborne Division

- * Normandy on D-Day
- * Holland – Market Garden
- * Bastogne
- * Hitler's Eagles Nest

Although he was well known as a smart and effective soldier, he was rowdy and often got into trouble.

1945 - December - Returned home as PFC, chose to become inactive Army Reserve.

He married his first wife Gloria who was from New Brunswick.

1946 to 1948 - Worked in a Massachusetts steel mill.

1948 - August – During Russia's attempt to take Trieste, he ignored letters from Army to report back to duty. He was arrested at the steel mill and given an ultimatum to either:

1. Spend time in Leavenworth
2. Enter OCS



1948 - August - He entered OCS at Ft. Benning. Graduated at the top of his class and was assigned to the 508th P.I.R. Subsequently sent to Ft. Campbell to reactivate the 101st ABN.

1951 - December - Sent to Korea and assigned to 187th ABN. As a 1st Lt, he led a successful night raid on Hill 472 with 2 ABN rifle Companies, a regular Infantry platoon and Tank Company after the commanding officer lost his life in combat. He also carried an injured man to safety during the raid. He was awarded the Silver Star and promoted to Captain.

1953 to 1956 - He held several tactical training positions at Ft. Bragg and Ft. Benning. He was a personal aide to General Sink. On July 17th, 1954, Gloria and Richard had their first and only child, Terri Boland.

1956 to 1957 - Assigned as Combat Training Officer for 101st at Ft. Campbell, KY.

1958 - As outstanding officer at Ft Campbell he was promoted to Major.

1958 to 1960 - Assigned as an Advisor to Vietnamese Airborne Brigade Vietnam.

1960 to 1963 - Assigned as Combat Training Officer at Ft. Benning. Promoted to LT. Col.

1963 to 1965 - Selected as the Battalion Commander of 1/503rd, 173d Airborne Brigade, Okinawa.

* Trained 1/503 troops on Okinawa, Philippines, Taiwan, Irimote, etc.

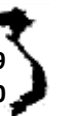
* Deployed with the 173d to VN May 5, 1965.

* Led operations from the 1/503rd original base in Vung Tau.

* Led operations from Brigade Base at Bien Hoa Airbase.

1965 - Assigned to teach at Ft. Benning Infantry School.

(continued....)



1967 to 1968 - Returned to Vietnam and was assigned as War Planning Officer MACV - Saigon. Promoted to Full Colonel. During the TET Offensive he was placed in charge of the defense of Saigon and routed the VC who attacked the city.

1969 - Left Vietnam and was assigned to the 8th Army Headquarters at the Presidio in San Francisco. He was subsequently assigned to lead the National Guard Operations in the Bay Area.

1970 - He was sent to Ft. Dix to train combat officers. He conducted numerous joint services field operations that led to many Army tactical advances.

1972 - He retired from the Army, at rank: O6, Colonel. He moved to San Leandro, CA, and became a businessman.

Colonel Boland was a highly decorated combat soldier with some of the Army's top awards. These include: two Silver Stars, three Bronze Stars, two Purple Hearts, The Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, and three Army Commendation Medals. In his thirty-plus years of service, Colonel Boland earned almost every Army medal with the exception of the Army's Good Conduct Medal, due to his rough, and ultimately independent and free spirit.

Everyone he knew or ever met can attest to his massive, larger-than-life personality. His attitude, huge presence and low baritone voice demanded attention. He was well known for disciplining his soldiers by ripping their stripes off; although he probably never followed through with filing the necessary paperwork to lower a soldier's rank. His dedication to his men, the mission and his God given talent for leadership and bravery caused a general consensus among his men to develop; that they were safer in combat with Colonel Boland. Many of the men he led accredit being alive today because of him.

In 1972, Richard, Gloria and Terri moved to Fremont, CA where they lived for nearly 25 years. In 1999, Richard and Gloria moved south to North Hollywood CA. Richards's wife Gloria passed away in 2007 due to Alzheimer's disease. Soon after, Richard moved back to Northern California. In 2009, Richard met Thyra Ladyman. The two were married in 2012. Richard and Thyra moved to Upper Lake, CA. These were his final years where he lived in peaceful leisure on the lake.

Colonel Boland had an absolute soft spot in his heart for children and animals; especially animals in need. During his time with Thyra on the lake, Richard rescued a duck, goose, 2 dogs, a baby squirrel, 4 cats, a grown possum stuck in a wall (he took a sledgehammer to the wall). He was a friend to many more animals as well. When people came to visit, he wanted their animals to visit as well. Richard grew close to Thyra's three year

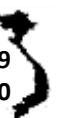
old granddaughter, Stella Brand. They would sit together and eat candy, and he would sing to her in his signature, deep baritone voice. Colonel Boland would be visited by many of the soldiers he led during his time with Thyra on the lake. They would tell stories, laugh and reminisce about their time in service. Colonel Boland loved his soldiers deeply.

Colonel Richard Boland passed away, peacefully with his wife by his side, on July 18th, 2016. He is survived by his wife, Thyra Ladyman, his daughter, Terri Diver and his grandson Aaron Richard Driver.

A celebration of Colonel Richard H. Boland's life will be held on October 15th, 2016, at 2850 Lakeshore Blvd. Upper Lake, CA 95485, at 12:00 hours. For more information or to RSVP to the event, please contact Thyra Ladyman (707) 239-8077.



Colonel Richard "Rawhide" Boland (holding mic), Bn Cmdr 1/503 RVN, addresses 173d troopers during a reception at the Association's reunion in Daytona Beach, FL, with his friend (the late) Colonel Bob Sigholtz, Bn Cmdr 2/503 RVN, standing with him.



173d Airborne Association Membership Application Form

PLEASE PRINT AND FILL-OUT THIS APPLICATION

Mail Application and Payments to;

Please **circle** the appropriate boxes below

Membership Secretary, Dennis Hill
97 Earle Street
Norwood, MA 02062-1504

New	Renewal	Change of Address, <i>Change of Chapter</i>	
Annual Membership			
Ends on 31 December of each year - \$ 24.00			
Regular *		Associate	
Sky Soldier	Veteran	Gold Star	Spouse of deceased Sky Soldier
Life Membership \$ 173.00			
Regular *		Gold Star (Parent or Spouse)	

Make checks payable to:
173d Airborne Brigade Assn

*Regular Membership open to those assigned or attached to the 173d Airborne Brigade

Please print current or updated information below:

Service Number (B446349): _____
(Use first Letter of last name and last 6 of service number)

First Name: _____ Initial: _____ Last Name: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____ City: _____

State or AE: _____ Zip: _____ Country: _____

173d Service Dates (02/2003-02/2005): _____

Unit while with the 173d: (A-1-503rd or Co A/Support BN): _____

Chapter Affiliated to: (4, 18, At Large): _____ Send Magazine: [] U.S Mail or [] Via Email

Gold Star Relationship (Wife, Mother)(PFC Mike Smith 11-08-67): _____

My Email address: _____

After we receive your payment (\$ 24.00 or \$ 173.00), please allow two weeks for processing.



Please make check payable to:
173d Airborne Brigade Assn.

Mail Application & Check to:
Membership Secretary, Dennis Hill
97 Earle Street
Norwood, MA 02062-1504

