

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

**WE TRY  
HARDER!**

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



March-April 2016, Issue 66  
Contact: [rto173d@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rto173d@cfl.rr.com)

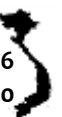
See all issues at the 503rd PRCT Heritage Battalion website:  
[http://corregidor.org/VN2-503/newsletter/issue\\_index.htm](http://corregidor.org/VN2-503/newsletter/issue_index.htm)

## ~ 2/503d Photo of the Month ~



**50 YEARS AGO:** On the afternoon of March 16, 1966, at LZ Zulu Zulu in the heart of the “D” Zone jungle following a ferocious 5-hour battle with enemy forces three-times their strength, wounded troopers of the 2/503 await Dust Off on the edge of the landing zone. During Operation Silver City our battalion alone would suffer 15 KIA and over 144 WIA, not counting allied forces, yet could stake claim to what was deemed to be a major victory during the Vietnam War and one which earned the 2/503d and attached units, the Presidential Unit Citation.

(Photo by RTO Wayne Hoitt, HHC/2/503, ‘65/’66)



# PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION

## (ARMY)



*By virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States and as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States I have today awarded the Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for extraordinary heroism to:*

### **THE 2D BATTALION (AIRBORNE), 503D INFANTRY, 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE (SEPARATE) AND ATTACHED UNITS:**

**2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry, Company A, Company B, Company C, HHC Company  
2nd Team, 3rd Radio Relay Unit; 2nd Platoon, 173rd Engineer Company  
Scout Dog Teams, 3rd Scout Dog Company, III Corps; Vietnamese Interpreters; Forward Air Controllers  
Artillery Liaison Officers and Forward Observers from Battery A, 3rd Battalion (Airborne) 319th Artillery.**

*The 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) with attachments, is cited for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against a hostile force near Phuoc Vinh, Republic of Vietnam, on 16 March 1966. The battalion was participating as part of a large force on a search and destroy mission sweeping a portion of war zone "D" during operation "Silver City", and had been in contact with small groups of Viet Cong during four days of operations in the dense jungle area. On the morning of 16 March the battalion was deployed in a defensive perimeter in preparation for resuming operations. At approximately 0700 hours a patrol from Company "B" had begun to move from its positions to initiate action against the enemy. At the same time, a resupply helicopter was descending into the landing zone located within the battalion perimeter. Suddenly the helicopter came under heavy automatic weapons fire from the enemy and was destroyed, and the jungle erupted in gunfire all around the defensive perimeter. The leading elements of the patrol were caught in this initial concentration of murderous fire. The Viet Cong forces, supported by a tremendous volume of automatic weapons, mortar and artillery fire, attacked all around the perimeter. The enemy exerted considerable force at a point between Company "A" and Company "C" in an effort to effect a breakthrough at this location. Personnel of the two companies, including the wounded, steadfastly remained in their positions, responded at close quarters with fire that was both deadly and accurate, and succeeded in breaking up the determined enemy attack. Maintaining continuous contact around the perimeter, the Viet Cong launched another strong attack to breach the defense. This effort was focused on the center and left flank of Company "B". Time and time again the Viet Cong charged the positions, but the*

*indefatigable and determined paratroopers of Company "B" exacted heavy casualties and beat back the enemy attackers. Regrouping and concentrating their forces, the Viet Cong made a final assault on the flank of Company "C". This time the desperate Viet Cong ran forward in waves under the protective umbrella of a heavy volume of their supporting fires. Again, however, the gallant and resolute paratroopers repulsed the enemy, inflicting severe losses, completely disrupting his efforts to destroy the battalion, and forcing the Viet Cong to withdraw. Documentary evidence indicates that the attacking force consisted of the entire Viet Cong 271st Main Force Regiment, reinforced by two artillery battalions. A total of 303 Viet Cong dead were confirmed by body count. An estimated additional 150 were killed and numerous Viet Cong were wounded during the battle. The courageous and exemplary actions of the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry, in decisively defeating a determined, numerically superior, and well trained and equipped enemy force reflect great credit on the members of the unit and are in keeping with the finest traditions of the United States Army.*

**Lyndon B. Johnson  
President  
4 August 1967**



1967



# **We Dedicate this Issue of Our Newsletter in Memory of the Men of the 173d Airborne Brigade We Lost 50 Years Ago in March & April 1966**

*"Because of your willingness to die for your country, you have left us more than your name  
and memory, but also the impact only a hero can make."*

~ Quote by a high school student on the Virtual Wall

Gartrell Barnette Jenkins, A/2/503, 3/2/66  
L.C. McDonald, 1RAR, 3/9/66

Kenneth A. Bodell  
D/16th, 3/12/66



John Henry Herlihy, Jr.  
D/16th, 3/13/66



James Earlie Butler, Jr., C/2/503, 3/14/66  
Marvin Harper, C/2/503, 3/14/66

Phil Tabb  
C/2/503, 3/14/66



Billy Ray Slade  
C/2/503, 3/14/66



L. J. Baxter, 1RAR, 3/15/66

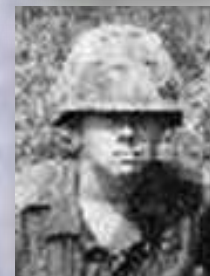
Allan Stegall, Jr.  
C/2/503, 3/15/66



John Henry Beauchamp, Jr.  
B/2/503, 3/16/66



Robert Paul Gipson  
B/2/503, 3/16/66



William O. Gossett, HHC/2/503, 3/16/66

Marion C. Brown  
B/2/503, 3/16/66  
(Virtual Wall states C/2/503)



Jerry D. Lewis  
HHC/1/503, 3/16/66



(tribute continued....)



**Richard Floyd Smith**  
B/2/503, 3/16/66  
(Virtual Wall states C/2/503)



**Charlie C. Walker**  
B/2/503, 3/16/66



*I didn't see Charlie die, but after the battle I saw his body lying under a poncho next to our other fallen brothers. A breeze gently blew the poncho off his face. Charlie's face and the memory of him have been with me for 50 years. To this day, I simply shut my eyes, and once again I am standing next to him. Charlie was from Georgia.*  
~ A Sky Soldier buddy

**Charles A. Zionts**  
B/2/503, 3/16/66



**William Nathaniel Thompson**  
HHC/1/503, 3/16/66



**Charles Arthur Bell**  
B/2/503, 3/16/66  
(Virtual Wall states A/2/503)



*Dear Uncle Charles. I never had the pleasure to meet you, but the family and my father (your brother) speaks very highly of you. My daughter, your grandniece, is 11 years old and is tall and slim just like you. She also plays*

*basketball, and is good at it like I heard you were. She must have got it from you Uncle Scoop, because I can't play basketball to save my life. ;) Love always Uncle Scoop, your nephew, Peyton.*



**Kenneth Max Knudson**  
A/2/503, 3/16/66

(See Page 81 for citation)



*Dear Max, here it is 46 years since your death and it seems that instead of getting easier accepting your death, I think of you more. I think about what life would have been like with you here living it with us, enjoying my children, watching your mother age and us watching you and your family in life. I honor you for your service and your death. Thank you,*

~ Connie K Schultz



**Merwin A. Delano, Jr.**  
C/1/503, 3/17/66



*Your tour of duty started on the 24th of May 1965. I am your nephew David W. Delano Frees and I was born on the 24th of May 1966, the same day you were scheduled to return from Vietnam. Your ultimate sacrifice influenced my life changing decision to serve our country with the United States Navy. You are not only my uncle, you are my Hero!*

~ David W. Delano Frees

**Alexander D. Rodarte**  
A/1/503, 3/19/66



**Lloyd Fields, Jr., E/17th Cav, 4/13/66**

***"As long as a paratrooper walks this earth, they will not be forgotten."***



## ~ FOREVER REMEMBERED ~

*"If you are able, save for them a place inside of you....and save one backward glance when you are leaving for the places they can no longer go.....Be not ashamed to say you loved them....Take what they have left and what they have taught you with their dying and keep it with your own....And in that time when men decide and feel safe to call the war insane, take one moment to embrace those gentle heroes you left behind...."*

Quote from a letter home by Maj. Michael Davis O'Donnell, KIA 24 March 1970. Distinguished Flying Cross: Shot down and killed while attempting to rescue 8 fellow soldiers surrounded by attacking enemy forces.

We Nam Brothers pause to give a backward glance, and post this remembrance to you, one of the gentle heroes lost to the War in Vietnam:

*"Slip off that pack. Set it down by the crooked trail. Drop your steel pot alongside. Shed those magazine-laden bandoliers away from your sweat-soaked shirt. Lay that silent weapon down and step out of the heat. Feel the soothing cool breeze right down to your soul ... and rest forever in the shade of our love, brother."*

From your Nam Band-Of-Brothers

(From a post on the web)



## "KEEPERS OF THE FLAG"

This year **MICHAEL GULLO** and his wife **LINDA** are designated "Keepers of the Flag."

Because Mike contributed his whole winnings from the latest raffle drawing the flag most assuredly was to go to him.

Just got back from Louisville, Kentucky whereupon I presented the flag to he and his wife. This flag flew in Afghanistan over a command post of the 173d. The 1st of the 503d presented it to Chapter 17 for its support.



**Mike & Linda, Keepers of the Flag. Mike served two tours with the 173d Airborne Brigade.**

Every year we place it into the hands of the person who has financially contributed the most to the Chapter. This year it goes to **MICHAEL GULLO**. He was so generous that he gave the entire \$500.00 winnings back to the Chapter. He insisted, though I tried to encourage him to take at least part of the winnings. He was happy to give it all. The Chapter is grateful and we extend a sincere Thank You to our winner.

Everything went smoothly with the raffle. It's our good old bread & butter and, thanks to our membership, it keeps us going.

*Airborne, Mike!*

**William Terry  
A/3/319th  
173d Chapter 17**



## ~ Happy New Year! ~

Here's wishing you and yours a happy healthy 2016. We are well, Raven is very busy with her art and I'm busy being retired. Steve (C/2/503) and Joan Haber have moved to N.C., the SW coast of Florida won't be the same.

So is there a chance of a 2/503 gathering in Cocoa Beach this March?

Here's what we look like:



Raven, rtonh, #3 daughter, Melanie with her 3 year old son Jace, and last but never least #1 son John.

Be well,

**Wayne Hoitt & Family**  
HHC/2/503, '65/'66



Hey RTO, thanks for the good wishes. Great lookin' family you got there. Ed

## ~ USAF GOT ALL THE GOOD STUFF ~

"How come we never got MREs like this?....probably issued to the Air Force."

**Bill Vose**  
A/HHC/2/503



Yeah, but I caught you eating that caviar in the Mekong while the unwashed got the greasy lima beans, and cold to boot! Ed

## Dreaming of a Windy City



Unnamed Sky Soldier, apparently up north, dreaming of home? Let's hope he made it there. (Pic found on the web)

## Thank you, brother



"SAVES LIFE – Charles W. Scrudder of Alpha Company, 2/503d Infantry, clasps Kit Carson Scout, Nguyen Thanh, who freed the paratrooper from the jaws of an armed booby trap." (photo by PFC Paul Sheehan)



## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

### David Milton, LTC (R)

Recon & A/2/503

July 25, 1946 - January 5, 2016

#### **Tribute**



LTC (R) David Armstrong Milton left this earth on 7 January 2016 as a result of complications following surgery. He is survived by his wife Joy.

Dave was commissioned on 2 December 1964 and retired on 27 April 1982. Prior to being commissioned, Dave served in the Army Reserve for almost 7 years.

Dave had the privilege of commanding A Company, 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry in the Republic of Vietnam during the 1967 battles in the Highlands where he was severely wounded. Following an extensive period of recuperation, Dave returned to active duty and excelled both in Infantry and Operations and Force Development assignments.

Dave's decorations and awards include the Silver Star, the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star Medal with "V" device (OLC) and the Bronze Star (2 OLC), the Air Medal with "V" device and the Air Medal (11 OLC), the Army Commendation Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal (OLC), the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, the Master Parachutist Badge and the Ranger Tab.

His military education included the Infantry Officers courses at the Infantry School, the Amphibious Warfare Course and the Command and General Staff College.

Dave met his wife Joy in 2012 in the Philippines where she worked and resided. He subsequently relocated to the Philippines and he and Joy were married on 28 May 2015.

## **Recon Trooper Remembers His Platoon Leader**

Upon reading your E-mail about the death of Dave Milton, my thoughts went back to April 1967, when Dave Milton became the platoon leader of 2nd Bat., Recon Platoon. He introduced himself and gave us a very short Military BIO. I remember him as being of average height, with a down-to-earth demeanor. He presented himself by exhibiting a real concern for his troopers. We did not have much interaction during his short command of Recon.

Within two weeks as our platoon leader, we went on a recon mission...War Zone C or D?. This was his first mission as our platoon leader. Around noon, we encountered a VC machine gun position, and during the exchange of fire, a 19 year old trooper from Alaska was KIA and David Milton was wounded. They were both evacuated. David Milton did not return as recon platoon leader. After recovering from his wound, we were told that he was given command of A Co., 2nd Bat.

In June 1967, the Brigade was assigned to conduct operations in the Central Highlands in the Dak To area. On our first mission, Recon was attached to A Co., during the initial "Search and Destroy" mission in the mountains of Dak To. On June 21, 1967, our platoon sergeant received orders to leave A Co. and to be airlifted back to Dak To. In a rush to get to the designated LZ, our platoon sergeant took a short cut by using what appeared to be beautifully sculptured steps recently made by the NVA. When we arrived at the bottom of these steps, I remember that our platoon sergeant communicated to Capt. Milton, of our discovery of the steps, and suggested that Capt. Milton use caution on his return to Dak To.

We arrived at the designated LZ and we were airlifted back to Dak To. The following morning, "The Battle of the Slopes" commenced.

There was a feeling of sadness upon reading of David Milton's death. He was our leader and brother in arms. My sympathy and condolences to his family and friends. Best always, be well.

**AATW**  
**Augie Scarino**  
**Recon/C/2/503**

*~ Rest Easy Cap ~*



# Remembering David Milton ~ Company A 2/503 1967

By Wambi Cook, A/2/503

**T**he late David Milton's (LTC Ret.) reputation as a military leader has been impugned, reviled, and castigated ad infinitum over the years surrounding his governance (or lack thereof) since that fateful day of 22nd June 1967, more popularly branded as the *Battle of the Slopes*. Seventy-six Alpha Company KIA casualties and over two dozen WIAs fought what historically was the single costliest one-day battle by any solitary American unit of the entire 10-year conflict.

Throughout the ranks, Milton was summarily rebuked for what many analysts perceived as his lackluster control thru the fight.

I counted myself among his harshest critics for over 35 years. As a seasoned Alpha vet of five months, I'd lost many of my closest buddies to this carnage. In the heat of battle, even then, some of us openly conjectured, *"Why Milton isn't he doing more?"* While over half of Alpha was engaged in three unimaginable human wave assaults by an elite enemy numbering anywhere from 500-1000, he remained 100 meters from ground zero, uphill in what resulted in a futile attempt to choreograph the battle from the secure confines of his CP. We were well aware that sister units were close by. Why couldn't they reach us? We were near enough to the Dak To airstrips to hear choppers maneuvering what we hoped were toward us. With our perimeter clearly undetermined, why weren't air and artillery barrages ceased sooner? Why didn't he commit the remaining two platoons into the melee more willingly? Why ponder the imponderable.

My first encounter with Dave was sometime in April 1967. A Company's CO, Ed Carns was wounded earlier in the day and Milton took command that same afternoon. I assumed the two knew one another until I discovered at the 2009 Daytona reunion that they'd never met until I uncomfortably introduced the two of them at the banquet. Small world it wasn't.



Wambi in Vietnam

A week or so after 22 June, I managed my R&R in Hawaii where my wife and I spent a memorable five days. I conveyed to her my optimism that since our ranks were decimated, surely we'd be assigned rear echelon duties for a significant period of time in the coming weeks. How wrong I was. The company was given replacement priority and we began regular operations in the same area as the Hill before the end of June. The only passing reference I made was that I'd fantasized that if Milton survives his tour, I would wish providence intervened and arrange for me a one-time encounter with him as a civilian.

My vindictiveness toward Milton grew exponentially over the years, i.e., until a chance encounter during my first reunion of any kind in Cocoa Beach, Florida in October 2002. My dream was about to become reality. I'd envisioned a scenario of casually approaching him until we were breath-to-breath, and without so much as an utterance, I'd proceed to *"knock the living shit out of him."* A smart about-face would follow. He probably wouldn't recognize my face anyway, but I was confident he'd know why it happened.

Two former Alpha buddies and I had reconnected a year or so earlier via the internet, and prior to the reunion, cautioned me that there was a remote chance that Milton would attend. I was not optimistically skeptical. After weeks of cajoling, they'd finally convinced me that attending this gathering could be good for my mental well-being. I reluctantly acquiesced and headed South.



Alpha Company CO, Dave Milton second from left back row, with some of his fellow Sky Soldiers at 173d reunion – Wambi pictured in back row far right.

(continued....)



The local VFW was hosting a dinner for us that Friday night. It was great reuniting with two brothers that I knew from jump school through the travails of our *No DEROS Alpha* association. Once seeing them earlier in the day, I'd all but forgotten David Milton existed. We exchanged countless long repressed memories, and I soon realized the hatred I bore for so many years had diminished radically over the past three plus decades. Yet if presented to me, could I let a once in a lifetime opportunity slip away? Of course I'd long since put the jungles of Viet Nam in the far recesses of my psyche, but there remained that promise I'd made years earlier. What if Milton actually attends?

We hadn't gotten ten feet inside when I immediately spotted the devil of my nightmares. I was frozen but couldn't divert my eyes from his person. It was really him. Now what, mister Cook? My buddy vigorously escorted me over to Milton who was holding court at the bar. We arrived as he was apparently regaling a handful of grunts about who knows what, but certainly the subject was Nam. My buddy introduced us, *"This is Wambi Cook. He was on The Hill."* He interjected. Milton coolly nodded my existence then returned to the group.

I was flummoxed. *"What the fuck was that?"* I asked myself. A perfunctory gesture was all I deserved? I suppose I should have been royally pissed, but an unexpected calm came over me. I had carried this rancor for so long, I'd almost forgotten that I'd long since demonstrated my humanity incalculable times since Nam. I was a decent human being! Of this I was certain. I would not nor could not dignify this seeming slight in kind.

I was immediately struck by what I perceived as sadness in his heart. I saw it in his eyes, his body language, and the manner in which he spoke. He'd obviously paid a huge price for what he did or did not do on 22 June 1967. Should he be rebuked in perpetuity, I asked myself?

Since that initial encounter, Dave and I had conversed unconcernedly over varied and sundry topics a dozen or so times at a wedding, a dedication or two

and several reunions. Up until a week before notification of his death, we even kept irregular Facebook exchanges. He'd heard I'd be reading names at the memorial at Ft. Benning a couple years back, and sent me warm words of encouragement. This would be the closest we ever came to broaching the events of 22 June 1967.

In retrospect, my caustic criticisms of David Milton's command 49 years ago were unjustly biased. Of course, my perspective has I've softened somewhat over the past dozen years. At the time, my gut assessment of his decisions were flawed and skewed by the savagery of that day and the personal losses I couldn't/wouldn't accept. I'd placed all the blame on one person whose only fault was that he was a human pitted against inhuman odds.

It took a while, but I thankfully gained a clearer insight into his character and in so doing, I exposed a true sense of respect for Dave Milton. Yeah, I can honestly say, I grew to genuinely like the man. He deserved better.



Wambi & Dave

***"Sweet is war to those who've never experienced it."***

###



# Rod Serling.....

## Paratrooper/Philosopher

***"The tools of conquest do not necessarily come with bombs, and explosions, and fallout. There are weapons that are simply thoughts, ideas, prejudices, to be found only in the minds of men. For the record, prejudices can kill and suspicion can destroy. A thoughtless, frightened search for a scapegoat has a fallout all its own for the children yet unborn. And the pity of it is, is that these things cannot be confined to the Twilight Zone."***

[Above from: "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street",  
Twilight Zone episode aired March 4, 1960]



Sci-fi aficionados and casual couch surfers alike remember the other-worldly, high pitched chords and surreal imagery that introduced each episode of the *Twilight Zone*. Each episode was prefaced by Rod Serling who would step into the foreground and expound the human condition and the strangeness of his fabricated world. Before hosting the famed television show and his script-writing career even began, Serling spent three years in the U.S. Army in the 11th Airborne Division.

Serling was born in Syracuse, New York to a Jewish family. He was extremely talkative as a child and continued for extended periods of time without pausing for others. He was so oblivious when speaking that he went on for two hours nonstop during a car ride and didn't notice that none of his family members contributed. During his senior year of high school, he became interested in World War II and tried to inspire fellow students to join. Despite his civics teacher's attempts to dissuade him, he enlisted after graduation.

Training took place at Camp Toccoa, Georgia for the 511th Parachute Infantry of the 11th Airborne Division. During his time training, he took up boxing as a hobby and competed in 17 bouts. He lost in the second round of division finals and later attempted the Golden Gloves to no avail. In 1944 his unit was ordered to head to the Pacific Theatre aboard the USS Sea Pike.

In November of 1944, the 11th Airborne Division first saw combat on the island of Leyte in the Philippines. They did not deploy with parachutes, however, and served as light infantry. Despite his reputation of hot-headedness and passion for serving the U.S., Serling was transferred to the 511th's demolition platoon. The

leader of his new squad said that Serling, *"Didn't have the wits or aggressiveness required for combat."* It was in Leyte that he witnessed a fellow soldier die from a freak accident, an incident which informed much of his writing.

Despite receiving two wounds on the island, Serling was still ready for combat and deployed with his platoon to Tagaytay Ridge in 1945 and marched on Manila. Japanese forces defended the city with 17,000 troops and laid numerous traps. It took roughly one month to take control of the city. When a city block was peaceful enough and devoid of Japanese forces, locals would celebrate with the Allies. Serling's unit was enjoying such hospitality one night when Japanese artillery rained down on them. He ran into the shellfire to rescue a performer, earning the notice of his sergeant.

When he was discharged in 1946, Serling had earned the Purple Heart, Bronze Star, and Philippine Liberation Medal. The experience of war followed him home, and he experienced nightmares and flashbacks for the rest of his life. Serling said that, *"I was bitter about everything and at loose ends when I got out of the service. I think I turned to writing to get it off my chest."*

When he returned to civilian life, he used his G.I. benefits for medical services as well as a college education. With his Bachelor of Arts in Literature, Serling started his career and went on to become a voice of altruism and philosophy that resonates with us today.

Source:

[www.military.com/veteran-jobs/career-advice/military-transition/famous-veteran-rod-serling.html](http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/career-advice/military-transition/famous-veteran-rod-serling.html)

(Web photos added)



***"...the worst aspect of our time is prejudice...  
In almost everything I've written, there is a thread of  
this - man's seemingly palpable need to dislike someone  
other than himself."***

— Paratrooper Rod Serling





## INCOMING!



### ~ Recon Bikini Bushwack Did Happen ~

Thanks for printing the small piece on Donald Sanders (Issue 65, Page 11). When I read the newsletter I was sitting in the same seat as when I saw his name on the traveling wall. Maybe I spend too much time at this bistro.

The Recon Platoon Bikini Bushwack did happen. I was there. Got leave from Ft. Bragg and drove down to Florida with Thomas Cohen, Roy Haggard and I think Funches. We had a great time. Maybe I'll send you what I remember about it. I know I was still not old enough to legally drink in Florida. Sgt. Marcus Powell felt bad and told me to get in my dress greens. We both went to some places he knew in the county and had a great time. No problem getting served.

Oh ya, when Horst Faas did the article on Recon we were called the Panthers. *Powell's Panthers!* They changed the name to Wildcats sometime after I left in April of '67. We even had a Panther pocket patch made up down in Bien Hoa. I still have mine.

Great job as usual. Might trip over for the March thing and see Powell even though I missed Silver City by a month.

**Gary "Kraut" Kuitert**  
HHC/Recon/2/503



Gary

### ~ Doc Found His Buddy ~

Forgot to send you a thank you for putting my request to find Jerry Mixon in the last issue. Got several replies and located him in Kirkland, Washington. He became a doctor.

Thanks again, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

**Larry "Doc" Speed**  
1/503



A young Doc Speed with his beautiful bride, Georgia.

Now that's cool, Doc! Ed

### ~ Sky Soldier Working for Future Commander In-Chief? ~

Hey, for your info, the new head of Ben Carson's presidential campaign is MG (ret) Bob Dees. Bob was one of my LT's in C/2/503rd in 72-73 at Ft. Campbell, and I believe he was later a CO in the 503rd and Bn CO. I think this is cool. Happy New Year.

**Jim Matchin**  
A/2/503



**Robert F. Dees** (born 2 February 1950 in Amarillo, Texas) is a retired major general in the United States Army. A specialist on national security issues he is currently the chairman of the Ben Carson campaign for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016. He was the vice director for operational plans and inter-operability for the Department of Defense. He was also Assistant Division Commander of the 101st Airborne Division; Commander, 2nd Infantry Division, U.S. Forces Korea; Deputy Commander of V Corps in Europe; and Commander, U.S.-Israeli Joint Task Force for Missile Defense. After he officially retired from the U.S. military on January 1, 2003, he worked for the next two years as the Executive Director of Defense Strategies for Microsoft Corporation. In 2005, he became the executive director of Military Ministry, focusing on soldiers coming home from the war with post-traumatic stress. After writing the *Resilience Trilogy*, he was appointed and currently serves as Associate Vice President of Military Outreach and Director, Institute for Military Resilience, at Liberty University. Dees is also the Defense and National Security Advisor for Republican Presidential candidate Dr. Ben Carson. He and wife, Kathleen (née Robinson), serve as volunteer leaders in numerous outreaches to the military, including Military Community Youth Ministries. On December 31, 2015, he was appointed campaign chairman of the Ben Carson presidential campaign, 2016.



(Incoming continued....)



(Incoming continued....)

## ~ PFC Clifford Garland Burch ~

**A 2/503rd, 173d, KIA 07/09/1967**

First, allow me to say that your work with the 2/503d newsletter is incredible! Thank you for all of the large parts of your life that go into publishing possibly the best military unit veteran's newsletter I've ever read.

Now, let me move on to the mission.

Maryland Public Television (MPT) will be releasing a 3-part, 3 hour documentary next spring about the experiences of Maryland service members in Vietnam. As a military historian and as a veteran of 1/325 ABN and the 2nd Armored Cav, I was asked to join the MPT Task Force and help them locate photos of 187 Marylanders who died in Vietnam and for whom there is no photo on the *Wall of Faces* or the *Virtual Wall* online.

In the last eight months we have located 54 of those service member's photos and got them online so their faces can be associated with their names when we see who sacrificed their lives for their nation. One of the photos we are still searching for is that of PFC Clifford G. Burch, Alpha Company, 2nd of the 503rd. He was killed by friendly fire on July 9, 1967, in Kontum Province.

<http://www.virtualwall.org/db/BurchCG01a.htm>

## Clifford Garland Burch

**Private First Class**

**A CO, 2ND BN, 503RD INFANTRY,**

**173RD ABN BDE, USARV**

**Army of the United States**

**Langley Park, Maryland**

**August 10, 1947 to July 09, 1967**

**CLIFFORD G BURCH is on the Wall at**

**Panel 23E, Line 38**

**for Clifford Burch**



In your collection of materials would you have a photo of PFC Burch? If you do, we would appreciate your sending us a copy, or posting your photo on the *Wall of Faces*

[www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/6728/CLIFFORD-G-BURCH](http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/6728/CLIFFORD-G-BURCH)

Regardless of your response, we appreciate your consideration.

This is a project of the public history majors at Stevenson University near Owings Mills, Maryland.

Following is a link to our blog:

[www.stevenson.edu/academics/undergraduate-programs/public-history/blog-news-events/phist-majors-to-locate-missing-vietnam-era](http://www.stevenson.edu/academics/undergraduate-programs/public-history/blog-news-events/phist-majors-to-locate-missing-vietnam-era)

Regards,

Glenn

[gjohnston@stevenson.edu](mailto:gjohnston@stevenson.edu)

Glenn T Johnston, Ph.D.

Chair, Humanities & Public History

Stevenson University

1525 Greenspring Valley Rd, Stevenson, MD 21153

Reply:

Glenn, thanks for your comments and request. Regrettably, I have no photo of Clifford Burch. A copy of this note is being sent to all A/2/503 Sky Soldiers on my mail list (over a couple hundred) in hopes one or more of our guys will have a photo of Clifford they can send you for your worthy project. We'll also include your request in our March-April newsletter hoping someone in our battalion or brigade might be of help (upwards of 2000 on our list). Thanks for the fine work you are doing on behalf of Vietnam veterans and their families. ATW!

Smitty

**Guys: Please read the above request by Glenn for a photo of Clifford, and help if you can. If someone does have a picture of Clifford, please send it to me as well for inclusion in our newsletter. [rto173d@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rto173d@cfl.rr.com)**  
Thanks!

See Page 38 for additional details about the Stevenson University's project to locate photos of their state's MIA and KIA from the Vietnam War.



(Incoming continued....)



(incoming concluded....)

### ~ B/2/503 Troopers Identified ~

This photo and caption appeared on Page 8 of Issue 65 of our newsletter from Dian Koefod, sister of Rodger Koefod (KIA), along with other photos from her brother.



"This photo was in poor shape. My brother Rodger Magnus Koefod second from left. I do not know who the other soldiers are." Dian Koefod

### ~ Dian's Photos ~

Hi, my name is John Lape and I served on the same recon team as Rodger up until I extended in November of '68. I know the names of the troopers in the picture of four (above) that seems damaged; they are, **John Nelson, Tiglen, and Rodriguez**. I was already serving elsewhere in the Herd and only heard what happened to Rodger later when I spoke with Nelson as he was headed home. If you will give his sister my email address, I have a few pictures and some memories I can share. These pictures caught me totally off guard, but brought back some good thoughts of serving with Rodger. Sincerely,

John Lape  
B/2/503

### ~ DVD From 4/503d 2010 Reunion ~

The guy who had promised to make a DVD of interviews taken at the 2010 reunion in Columbus, GA reunion never did it. **Ron Best** would like to reimburse anyone who paid for the DVD.

Contact Ron at: [docbest173rd@yahoo.com](mailto:docbest173rd@yahoo.com)

Jack Tarr  
C/4/503

## At ceremony for Army pal, Vietnam vet finally finds healing

Written By Stefano Esposito  
10/22/2015



Members of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Andrew Brown, 77, left, and Jose Palacios, 66, placed a wreath at a ceremony honoring Milton Olive at the park on the lakefront that is named for him. (Rich Hein/Sun-Times)

For most of the last 50 years, William Yates has been trying to forget the day in a Vietnam jungle when an enemy grenade blew his buddy to bits.

Not because he witnessed it, but because he didn't.

On Thursday, as five surviving squad members came together near Navy Pier to remember Milton Lee Olive III — the Chicago teenager who on Oct. 22, 1965, fell on a grenade to save other soldiers — Yates was the odd man out.

***"I've never said this to anybody, but sometimes I think about it and it could have been me,"***

said Yates, 69, who lives in Alabama.

Source:

<http://chicago.suntimes.com/news/7/71/1038027/healing-finally-comes-vietnam-vet>



# Get Fat if You Can

*Delta Company Night Laager The Tiger Mountains, 2340 Hours.*



**"Phugas dropped on a tunnel entrance, 19 VC inside, the hottest day of their life. Tiger Mountains near LZ."**

(Photo credit: Casper Platoon website)

From converging streams of green tracers to napalm on a cloud-filled morning, nothing generated fear like a search-and-destroy mission under a Ranger moon. Illuminated by a sense of isolation, memories worked in concert, jarring a man's being from one halting sound to the next.



**Capt. Gary Prisk (L) having coffee with SFC Oscar B. Cruz, 1968, north of the Tiger Mountains.**

Within the confines of the next second, death hung on the GI's boot.

Stubbs was desperate for a foxhole. The smells were a matter of habit; dry and moist clay, damp thatch, dung, rotting vegetation, garlic sweat, urine, palm pollen, rice, the South China Sea. Stubbs set his face to the breeze. He could smell it. He could taste the rain coming.

The starshine chased their silhouettes in odd circles. Shadows pranced on the clay surface of the paddy. Muffled footsteps sounded. Ski stumbled on the till, then fell with a dull rasp. Long-bodied images of lost men skirted the flanks of the cream-colored paddy dike. The dike cast a luminous hue as if beckoning Joe's chose route. The rustling noise in the palm trees rushed their pace; the air was heavy with the coming monsoon. Stubbs and Ski were friends.

*"Get fat if you can."* That's what Stubbs liked to say goading death's wish.

Two columns of men marched in a synchronous wobble as one misstep, and then another, sounded on the furrowed clods sending a man scrambling for offended posture. A weapon slammed the ground with a shout. Shadows crouched, the trail below Hardin's promontory, eighty meters away.

Hardin strained to recognize his friends, breathing through his mouth. He found Rap, then Ski and Stubbs. They were in the middle of the left file. Icy currents of fear flowed over the knoll. The paddy field was plain enough now – empty, except for a band of men, trudging with their muzzle to the ground. *"I could shoot them all,"* Hardin whispered.

Feet began to churn as if they scorned their cowardly pace.

In the penumbra of the night a tenor bell rang out, a clear, sharp note assaulting the gray-black horizon with a gathering knell. The white spire of the temple bobbed in a sea of black palms, shining like a diamond in a goat's ass.

Feet began to clamor.

The bell's echo seized Hardin's chest. A thrust forced his fear when the bell rang a second time, sharpening its edge. Hardin set an ear to Dooley's radio handset.

Stubbs was certain. *"Get fat if you can."*

Hardin drew his weapon to his shoulder, listening, searching. The whispers of panic joined his fear. The weapon seemed to search on its own. He found Stubbs, and then Amps.

(continued....)



Tennessee spit expletives into the handset. Gasping as if he was drowning his words packed the texture of a worn out prayer. The bell rang a third time. Within the bell's call, a thunderous explosion laminated itself into a sudden hush.

The men of Charlie Company disappeared in a cloud and agony set sail.

Frantic voices poured into the moon-filled night, screaming at God.

Enraged, Hardin lowered his weapon. He was guilty of desertion. Staring vacantly into the pall of smoke, at the shadows of the survivors, he waited for the second Claymore to be fired.

Dust and debris hung in the night air like a tethered frog, billowing from side to side. The vapor of young bodies and odor of their blood, mixed with the dung in the paddy field. An ochreous glow attached itself to the men left whole.

Frantic men screamed that other men should stop screaming. Stunned, Hardin listened for the voices he might recognize.

Disbelief rang and rang again.

One scream rang louder than the rest: "My legs. My legs."

PeeWee would die in Spanish.

Rap would die silently, seething with hate.

Men blackened by the night stumbled in the luminescent cloud, the cloud first yellow, then orange where the star shine sent light chasing the tail of a running man. In an instant the wounded were silent. Desperate pods of men search for missing limbs.

Tennessee badgered the radio for a medevac, for gunships, and for mercy. Joe's orders echoed, then hung like an ornament in the confusion. The night air pulsed with shock – soaked by the pleas for morphine and the grief of men still whole.

Broken men clattered in the dark, wishing for strength.

The screams enveloped Delta Company. The war had had its way. Night screams did not travel on oscillating waves. They seared a man's throat like an arrow's shaft, burning, pulsing with pain, each scream the caliber of shattering glass.

For Hardin the screams brought resentment and the resentment became whole as he fought to lay claim to the casualties. The questions would not stop. What really happened, what it meant – and why was Joe moving at night?

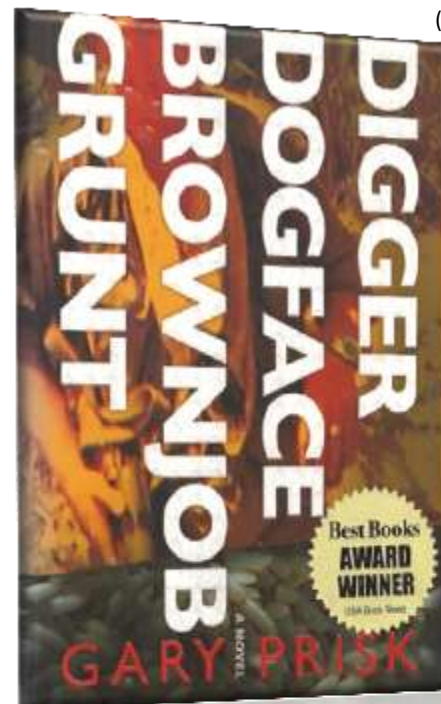


*Cap, center, with two of his 'Hill People'*

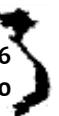
Excerpt from:  
***DIGGER DOGFACE BROWNJOB GRUNT***

A 173d war novel by Gary Prisk  
CO C/D/2/503

(photos added)



Available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

### *Rickie Gene Tabor*

June 23, 1943 ~ January 31, 2016

#### **Tribute**

Rickie Gene Tabor, departed life on Sunday, January 31, 2016, at age 72. His longtime friend and companion Ann W. Edmondson was at his side during his passing.

Rickie was born in Pulaski, VA to Ralph and Ethel Tabor (both deceased). Rickie served in the US Army from 1967 – 1969 in the 173rd Airborne Infantry Brigade attached to 5th Group SF where he fought and defended our country and expected nothing in return.

Rickie was highly decorated during his tour. He was passionate about music and was an exceptionally talented musician, singer, and DJ. During his career he performed in nightclubs along the east coast.

Rickie is survived by his brother, Kevin Collier and his wife Corinne of Suffolk, VA; his daughter, Rachael Pattison-Tabor of Boardman, OH; life-long friend, Eddie Hall and his wife Roberta M. Hall of Norfolk, VA; companion and caretaker, Ann W. Edmondson; longtime friend and fellow US Army service member, Bryan W. Edmondson, also of 5th Group, both of Norfolk, VA. Rickie T. was a man that loved his family and friends and loved life.



## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

### *Larry Jackley*

COL USA (Ret)

#### **Tribute**

LARRY JACKLEY, 4th Battalion Commander dies.

Ted Arthurs, 4/503d SGM, informed me that **Larry Jackley**, COL, USA (ret) died in his sleep in early morning of February 16th at his home in Virginia. He had been ill the last several months. Ted was notified by Mrs. Jo Jackley.

Funeral services and burial will be privately held for family members. LTC Jackley was the second Battalion Commander of the 4th Battalion (2 Feb 67 - 2 Aug 67).

[From Peyton Ligon, B/4/503]

###

# Is it true that newly-separated veterans can receive free dental care from VA? What is the eligibility for this service?

#### **Veterans Authority FAQ**

Free dental care is available in VA: to be able to qualify for this, you need to be on active duty for ninety days or more, plus your DD214 must provide the proof that you got all your necessary dental care not less than ninety days following your separation. You will need to register for VA to get dental care in a period of 180 days (six months) after your separation.

Source: [www.VA.org](http://www.VA.org)

## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

### *Robert G. Richards*

#### **Tribute**

Robert G. Richards, age 63, of Allentown, passed away peacefully with his family by his side, on Friday, February 5, 2016.

Beloved husband of 43 years to Linda S. Richards; loving father of April (Bob) Bowen and John (Candi) Richards; dear brother of Phyllis Cronin, Rita Kush, Angel McAfee and the late Norma Gaetano, Donna Richards, Fran Kestner and William Richards; cherished Pap of Bobby, Kaitlyn, Erin, Damian and Evey; also survived by nieces and nephews. Bob was an Army veteran serving with the 173rd Airborne. He was a member of Teamsters Local #341. He enjoyed spending time at camp, but his greatest joy was being Pap.



# Sunnyvale: WWII vet re-enacts parachute jump that almost killed him 70 years ago

By Julia Prodis Sulek

[jsulek@mercurynews.com](mailto:jsulek@mercurynews.com)



**Thomas Boyd bailed out of the B-24 on which he was a tail-gunner during WWII.**

BYRON, CA -- Seventy years after he was shot down by the Germans and bailed out of a B-24 bomber on his 19th birthday, World War II veteran Thomas Boyd of Sunnyvale jumped out of another plane -- this time on his own terms.

On his 89th birthday Saturday, Boyd went sky diving over eastern Contra Costa County to commemorate the terrifying ordeal when the handle of his ripcord broke off and he limped under cover of night for days to safety. It was important, he said, to bring closure to the nightmares that haunted him for years.

A half-dozen buddies from his Friday breakfast group called the ROMEOS (Retired Old Men Eating Out) gathered in the Byron airport hangar to cheer on one of the last in a dying breed of World War II veterans. They

watched him get suited up with an instructor who would fly tandem with him.

"Tom, when that B-24 was going down, did you have help?" one friend, Bob Lewis of Sunnyvale, joked.

"I wish I had," said Boyd, who is so fit he can still zip up his old flight jacket and take two stairs at a time to his bedroom on the second floor of his family home.

On Dec. 20, 1944, Boyd was lucky to survive.

A tail gunner on his second Army Air Corps mission, Boyd and his crew were flying over their target just outside Vienna, Austria, when the plane was hit by ground fire. A bullet grazed his left knee and the plane sputtered for another 100 miles or so into Yugoslavia when the pilot saw the looming Alps ahead and rang a bell twice, the signal to prepare to bail out. The third one meant jump.

"I dove out headfirst and started falling," Boyd recalled.

He counted to five and pulled his ripcord, but the handle came off in his hand. He plunged about 9,000 feet, piercing through the clouds below before managing to grope over his shoulder and grab the loose cord.

"It felt like an eternity," Boyd said.

The parachute deployed, and he floated downward, he said, calmed by the "pleasing sound of the air going through the parachute."

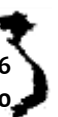
He landed in a snowy orchard, spraining his ankle as he collapsed on the same leg as his bullet wound. A farmer's wife and daughter quickly hid his parachute and harness in the barn and invited him inside. They contacted members of the Nazi resistance movement known as Tito's Partisans, who reunited him that night with all but one of the crew who had bailed out safely. The pilot, they found out later, had been captured and ultimately released when the war ended six months later.

That night, the crew remembered Boyd's birthday, he said, and they celebrated with plum brandy. But they were far from safe. Every night for at least four nights, he said, they trudged through fields of snow so thick and mixed with heavy plowed soil that they could barely lift their boots.

"Lord," he said, "you pick them up, and I'll let them down."

By day, they slept in barns and were fed cornmeal by locals. On the third or fourth night, while crossing through a valley, they ducked German gunfire from a hillside.

(continued....)





**741st Bomb Squadron (web photo)**

*"I was scared," he said. "Everyone was."*

The only time he used his .45-caliber pistol was when they arrived at the secret British mission that housed them. At a nearby lake, he shot a fish for everyone to share for Christmas dinner.

More than a week had passed when an American rescue plane landed on a makeshift runway in the mountains to fly the young men from the 741st Bomb Squadron back to their base in Italy to rejoin the 455 Bomb Group there.

He went on to fly another 24 missions before the war ended, and he made the military a career for another 20 years after that. He married and had three children and in the late 1960s moved to Sunnyvale and worked at Lockheed. But for years, he would awake in a fright, dreaming of falling through the air, clutching the handle of the broken ripcord. His wife, Ann, who died last year after 63 years of marriage, helped calm him.

*"She was patient with me. We talked a lot, and she understood me a lot, that I still had a bunch of stuff on my mind," he said. "With her help, I got through the bad parts, and we lived a good life."*

She would often tell him that she never felt safer than when she was with him. But not until the last few years did he tell his children -- now in their 50s -- what he had endured.

He was a loving father, his two daughters said, but their father's story *"explains a lot,"* said daughter Vickie Brewster, 56, who said he could often be anxious. *"When you don't talk about something and keep it inside -- any stress like that can have an impact."*

Saturday's jump, she said, showed that *"he's finally accepted what happened and he's coming to terms with it. It's a release for him."*

Cindy Keppler, 58, a director of logistics with California's Air National Guard, jumped with her father. *"I feel like my mom,"* she said as she climbed into her harness. *"As long as I'm with him, I'll be OK."*

With a low cloud cover Saturday, Bay Area Sky Diving's twin turbo prop took off over the green fields of Byron. Instructor Justin Johnson, who hooked himself to Boyd's back, pulled the ripcord this time. He handed off the steering lines for Boyd to maneuver before taking over and landing softly in the muddy earth.

Boyd's buddies let up whoops and cheers.

It was too soon to know whether the veteran achieved the closure he had sought. But the experience was *"great,"* he said with a smile, and *"brought back memories."*

*"Did I do OK?"* he asked the instructor. Johnson nodded his head and gave him the thumbs-up: *"You did awesome."*

Source:

Contact Julia Prodis Sulek at 408-278-3409.

Follow her at [twitter.com/juliasulek](https://twitter.com/juliasulek)

Posted on the web 12/22/2014 at

[http://www.contracostatimes.com/breaking-news/ci\\_27184397/sunnyvale-wwii-vet-re-enacts-parachute-jump-that](http://www.contracostatimes.com/breaking-news/ci_27184397/sunnyvale-wwii-vet-re-enacts-parachute-jump-that)



**WWII vet, Thomas Boyd, re-enacts parachute jump that almost killed him 70 years ago. (web photo)**



# Remembering Operation Marauder

By Herbert Murhammer  
B/2/503, '65/'66



Annie & Herbert Murhammer enjoying a low-calorie coffee break in Bavaria to conclude a month-long trip.

First of all, although a little late: Very Happy and Sparkling New Year to you, your families and all those who are dear to you (meaning: all of us and then some).

Recently, it was January 2. Here is how I remember that day of 50 years ago. It was on this very 2nd of January 1966, 50 years ago, that I earned my Purple Heart.

The day before (New Year's Day), B Company of the 2nd Battalion camped out next to a small pond in Bao Trai (did I tell you that "Bao Trai" means precisely "little pond"?).

The night was mild, we had pitched our 2-man tents, lit some campfires ... life was good. To make it even better - and to improve on our C-rations - and knowing that I wasn't any good at fishing, I caught ourselves a duck that came nosing around too close.

To make the story short: After having cooked that duck on a spit over our campfire for a "certain time," we shared our animal, only to find out that it was absolutely inedible. The soles of our boots would have been more tender.

On the morning of January 2, we were flown out to face the day and meet our fate. Pinned down by small arms fire as soon as we got out of the choppers, we slowly proceeded through the muck in the rice paddies in order to have a closer look at whoever it was that didn't want us there.

After a while we reached a more important canal not more than 5 meters wide [that is about the width of a

regular living room) with a slightly higher dike, behind which we found some protection and where we took up positions. We looked right at a tree line, some 300 meters out front, where we suspected the Viet Cong were located.

It was around that time when we observed the O-1 "Bird Dog" (light observation aircraft) making its rounds way up in the air, only to witness some short moments later, in utter disbelief, its tragic destiny. Over all these years, I was of the belief that this plane was shot down by the VC; only recently was I informed that it unluckily flew into one of our own artillery barrages.

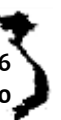
Anyway, after the artillery "preparation" of the countryside in front of us, we stuck out our heads to size up the situation...and were in for a nasty surprise. If the tree line was 300 meters out, Victor Charlie was closer, much closer. In fact, the VC were right on the other side of the canal, hiding behind the opposite mud dike. Exposing oneself by peeping over the wall and taking potshots did not only show poor results, but also was unreasonably risky because the other side didn't hold back shooting.

In the end, we wound up throwing hand grenades at each other. And that is how they got me. I felt a big "thump" on my shoulder - it didn't hurt! At first I thought that someone had tapped me on the shoulder to tell me something, but nobody was there. Then I tried to reach the area where I had felt the "thump", but to no avail, it was in a spot inaccessible for the fingers, between the back of the neck and the shoulder blades. Slowly I began to have an uncomfortable burning sensation there. So I crouched behind the dike and asked the buddy next to me (as much as I try to, I don't remember who it was) to have a look. "Oh shit," he says, "you're bleeding like hell!" and immediately he yelled "Medic, we need help. Herbie got hit!"

The rest went fast. A medic rushed towards me, took off my gear...and from this point on I don't remember a thing. Did the medic pump me full with a powerful sedative(?), or did I pass out by myself? I don't have the slightest recollection of how they got me out - by dragging me through the rice paddies' muck(?), by carrying me(?), by means of a stretcher?

I faintly regained consciousness when somebody asked for my personals, but that was already back in Bao Trai, at the emergency medical facility set up for Operation Marauder. But how did they get me there?

(continued....)



In January 2002, 36 years later, at the reactivation of the 2nd Bat at Vicenza, Italy, I met Floyd Riester from Rochester; he was there with his wife Karen and his daughter Ashley. As I told him my adventure, he said that it is not impossible that he himself patched me up in Bao Trai, as he was on duty at this field hospital on that particular day.

Next thing I remember -- I was walking around in base camp at Bien Hoa. But once again, I don't have a clue on how I got there, who brought me there, whom I reported to, what happened to the gear and the weapon I left behind...

It turned out that my wound was nothing to worry about, just a missing chunk of flesh, and would heal rapidly.

Now here's the sunny side of this dark story: A few days later the whole *Playboy* crowd with Playmate Jo Collins was to arrive in order to deliver the first *Playboy* magazine of the lifetime subscription that the "Bravo Bulls" had ordered. My squad buddy, Marvyn Hudson, had been designated as Jo's official "grunt" escort during her visit. Marvyn was out in the boondocks (operations Marauder and Crimp), **but I was here!** A sergeant called me and said, "*Soldier, get yourself a clean uniform, I have a job for you.*" The rest of the story has been told.



**Playboy Playmate of the Year, Jo Collins (G.I. Jo) meets the Bravo Bulls at Camp Zinn on Jan. 13, 1966**

Anyway, here's a few pics from Bao Trai and the place where I was wounded. These photos were taken when Annie and I toured Vietnam in 2002.



**The "little pond" in Bao Trai. In 2002 it had already been transformed into a children's playground.**

Within the park there's also a small local war museum, relating all the atrocities committed by guess who?! But I did not encounter any hostility when I identified myself and explained the reason of my visit.



**Communist propaganda billboards, just across the road from the pond. You see them all over Vietnam.**

Right behind these panels was one of the heliports during "Operation Marauder".



**The famous canal where we and the VC were playing ping pong with hand grenades. This whole area has been resettled with young folks brought in from the North. Only few of the original families remain; the rest has been "re-educated", displaced to the North, or...**

It's easier now to cross than back in 1966. There are plenty of other more primitive, single-beam, monkey bridges. My wife Annie being less than 100% sure-footed (see following pictures), we opted for this more comfortable variety of crossing.



(continued....)





Walking along the narrow dike of a rice paddy (I firmly believe that this was "my" rice paddy from "Marauder"), Annie followed my explanations with her customary 100% attention, promptly stumbled, lost her balance and landed down in the paddy. Fortunately, this was in March, the rainy season had not yet begun (though it wasn't far away) and the paddy was dry. The earth around it had recently be burned by the farmers, you can notice the transfer of color to Annie's pants. Back on the safe side, Annie tends to her appearance under the bemused eye of our guide.

Other times, other battles.



**At the Oktoberfest 2009 in Munich.** The guy next to me is Erich Kecht, a childhood friend from the 'hood" (now a retired US Army Sergeant Major living in Olympia, WA);

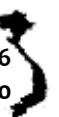
across from him his daughter Patricia. They both were in Munich to visit with Erich's brother Richard (with the green hat, next to Patricia). Across from Richard is Willi Steinlehner. Willi, Richard and I went to elementary school together and then, along with Erich, were part of the local boy scouts.

This trip took us from Geneva to the Black Forest, then more or less following the Danube river to Regensburg. From there to Munich, Berchtesgaden, Salzburg, Linz, then once again following the Danube on the left bank to Vienna. Turning south, we crossed eastern Austria into Slovenia, then Venice, Vicenza (hooking up with some old Bravo Bulls and young sharp troopers). Next we passed through the Dolomite mountains on the way to Innsbruck. Continuing north we re-entered Bavaria and passed through Mittenwald, Garmisch, Kochel (I symbolically greeted Traudl and Hermann on our way through), Ettal, Bad Tölz, Bad Wörishofen, the Lake Constance region, the Black Forest once more (my sister lives in Freiburg) and finally back to Geneva.

Enough said for now! Keep up your fantastic work.

Your airborne brother,

Herbert



## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

### *William E. Austin, Jr.*

November 12, 1950 ~ December 23, 2015

#### **Tribute**



William E. Austin Jr., age 65, known to his friends and family as "Night Hawk" was the son of the late William Sr. and Margaret A. Austin. Born in DeLand, Florida, November 12, 1950. Night Hawk graduated from high school and entered Bethune-Cookman College when he was drafted into the U.S. Military, a Viet Nam Veteran, 173rd Airborne Brigade, AKA "The Herd". He departed this life on December 23, 2015, at Silver Cross Hospital. He leaves to mourn a devoted wife, Tracy Smith-Austin; mother-in-law, Betty Smith; two sisters, Bettye Gavin (Archie), Joliet, IL and Karen Scruggs (George), Decatur, Alabama; one brother, Wayne Austin (Nora) Seville, FL; children; one daughter, Patronda Austin, DeLand, FL; sons, William Austin III, Joliet, IL, Kevin Woody, Palm Beach, FL, and Richard Austin, Atlanta, Georgia; godson, Mar'Shawn Tyrel McCullum; six grandchildren, six great grandchildren; cousins, Ronnie and Timothy Williams. Special friends Elmer Wright, Juan Garcia and a host of nieces, nephews and friends. Interment was held at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, Elwood, IL.

## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

### *Unice Leon Kesterson*

June 21, 1946 ~ December 4, 2015

#### **Tribute**



Unice Leon Kesterson, age 69, passed away December 4, 2015 at Parkwest Medical Center. He was born June 21, 1946, was in the 173rd Airborne Brigade and was a Vietnam Veteran. Unice retired as a brick mason. He enjoyed camping, boating, sitting in his man cave and his many friends. He will surely be missed. Preceded in death by father, Otis Kesterson. Survivors: Wife... Amy Kesterson; Mother... Macel Byrd Kesterson; Sister... Faye; Niece... Lori; Nephews... Dean, Jerry; Children... Lisa, Sonya, Bryan, Brandy, Dax, Heatherly and Amberley; 12 grandchildren and 1 great grandson. His precious Nevaeh, Sierra and Desiree.

*~ Rest Easy Brothers ~*



# 2/503RD AT RADCLIFF & UPLIFT

By Thomas Ayers  
COL (Ret), A/2/503



Alpha Company's First Sergeant Willard Dockery (back to camera) supervises the loading of the Company's weapons locker in preparation for 2nd/503rd's move from Landing Zone English and Bong Son to Camp Radcliff and An Khe. 1SG Dockery served three tours with airborne units in Viet Nam, and participated in the Battalion's Combat Jump during Operation Junction City on 22 February 1967.

~ PRECIS ~

The 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade was stationed at Camp Radcliff from late November 1970 through mid-March 1971. No combat-related deaths were reported during that period. The Battalion was then stationed at Landing Zone Uplift from mid-March through mid-August 1971. The earliest recorded death in the Battalion during that period was that of **CPL Gregory Stone** of Headquarters Company on 24 March 1971, while the last was that of **PFC Alan Goff** of Alpha Company on 06 July 1971. In its last five months in Viet Nam, 14 "Sky Soldiers" of the 2nd Battalion died of combat-related causes.

~ BACKGROUND ~

The inauguration of Richard Nixon on 20 January 1969 and new policies designed to fulfill his campaign pledge to end US involvement in the War had direct effects on 2nd/503rd. In the Fall of 1971, the entire 4th Infantry Division re-deployed from its divisional base camp at Camp Radcliff in An Khe, western Binh Dinh

Province, back to Fort Carson, Colorado. In turn, the 2nd/503rd was ordered to Camp Radcliff to provide security while it was turned over to the Vietnamese.

The "Sky Soldiers" of the 173d Airborne were no strangers to Camp Radcliff: the Brigade Rear was located there during the Battle of Dak To, the 2nd Battalion had refitted and retrained there following that battle, and the 173d Support Battalion had been stationed there before moving to Phu Tai during 1969.

~ CAMP RADCLIFF ~

In preparation for the Battalion's move to Camp Radcliff, all combat missions were terminated, all troops were called-in from the field, and everything on the Property Books was packed for shipment.

Right around Thanksgiving of 1970, everyone and everything was loaded onto trucks for a four-hour convoy move: from LZ English South down Highway 1, then West up Highway 19 to An Khe.

Upon arriving, the Battalion and Company Headquarters elements occupied the facilities of what used to be a brigade headquarters -- first for a brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), later for a brigade of the 4th Infantry Division. The four line companies occupied the bunkers along the 18-mile "Green Line" perimeter of the Camp. Echo Company served as a reaction force.



Shown here are the four members of the 2nd/503rd's Civil-Military Operations Section. Riding "shotgun" is 1LT Joe Brandt, Battalion S-5; behind him is Mr. Tri, Chief "Kit Carson Scout"; on his left is Sergeant Terry Smith, S-5 NCO.

(continued....)



Vietnamese farmers toil in their rice paddies, seemingly oblivious to the westward passage of the entire 2nd/503rd on Highway 19 en-route to Camp Radcliff.



The time spent at Camp Radcliff was a disaster for discipline and *esprit de corps*.

Everyone could see that everything portable in the Camp was being “liberated” by Vietnamese profiteers. Motivated soldiers were confined day and night to filthy, vermin-ridden bunkers on the “Green Line” and began to overuse alcohol and drugs. One-ounce vials of heroin were available from “Hooch Maids,” who brought them into Camp in condoms which they had stuffed into their vaginas. When a First Sergeant was “fragged” (unsuccessfully!), the knee-jerk response was to confiscate all hand-grenades. One trooper was murdered. NCOs assaulted officers. When the Battalion Commander said to his officers, ***“If you don’t like it, you can get the hell out,”*** several of them did. At midnight on New Year’s Eve, AFVN radio played Jimi Hendrix and *“All Along the Watchtower.”*



Here is an image from the internet showing a portion of the 18-mile “Green Line” defensive perimeter encompassing Camp Radcliff. America’s finest soldiers were confined to these soggy, sagging, vermin-ridden hovels for over three months.

During February of 1971, the profiteers were ready to “liberate” the former brigade headquarters facilities that were occupied by Battalion and Headquarters elements. The latter were thus obliged to move into a “Tent City,” which had been erected along an emergency airstrip at the far eastern side of the Camp. Around the same time, the 2nd/503rd was notified that its mission at Camp Radcliff was just about complete, that it would be returning to Binh Dinh Province, and that it would resume combat operations upon arriving at Landing Zone Uplift.



Shown here is a portion of the Tent City that Headquarters occupied during the final month of its stay at Camp Radcliff. The tents were erected along an emergency airstrip at the far eastern side of the Camp, paralleling Route 19. Standing at the right side of the jeep is Mr. Tri, Chief “Kit Carson Scout.”

~ BINH DINH PROVINCE ~

In his book entitled *Sky Soldiers*, LTC(R) F. Clifton Berry, Jr., wrote that ***“Binh Dinh Province was always a tough province for whoever tried to control Indochina from the 1930’s onward...The 3rd North Vietnamese Army Division operated from mobile basecamps in the mountains. Its three infantry regiments - the 2nd, 18th, and 22nd - had operated with impunity in the area for years. The 1st Air Cavalry Division had fought the NVA and VC in Binh Dinh through most of 1966, with heavy casualties on both sides.”***



(continued....)



LTC Berry continued: *“Although repeated operations had been run through the Province by the ARVN, Korean, and US forces, control of Binh Dinh was not in the hands of the South Vietnamese government. In fact, the population was still very much still in the balance. Everyone since the Japanese had taken a shot at pacifying Binh Dinh. Now it was the 173d’s turn.”* (p. 127)

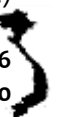


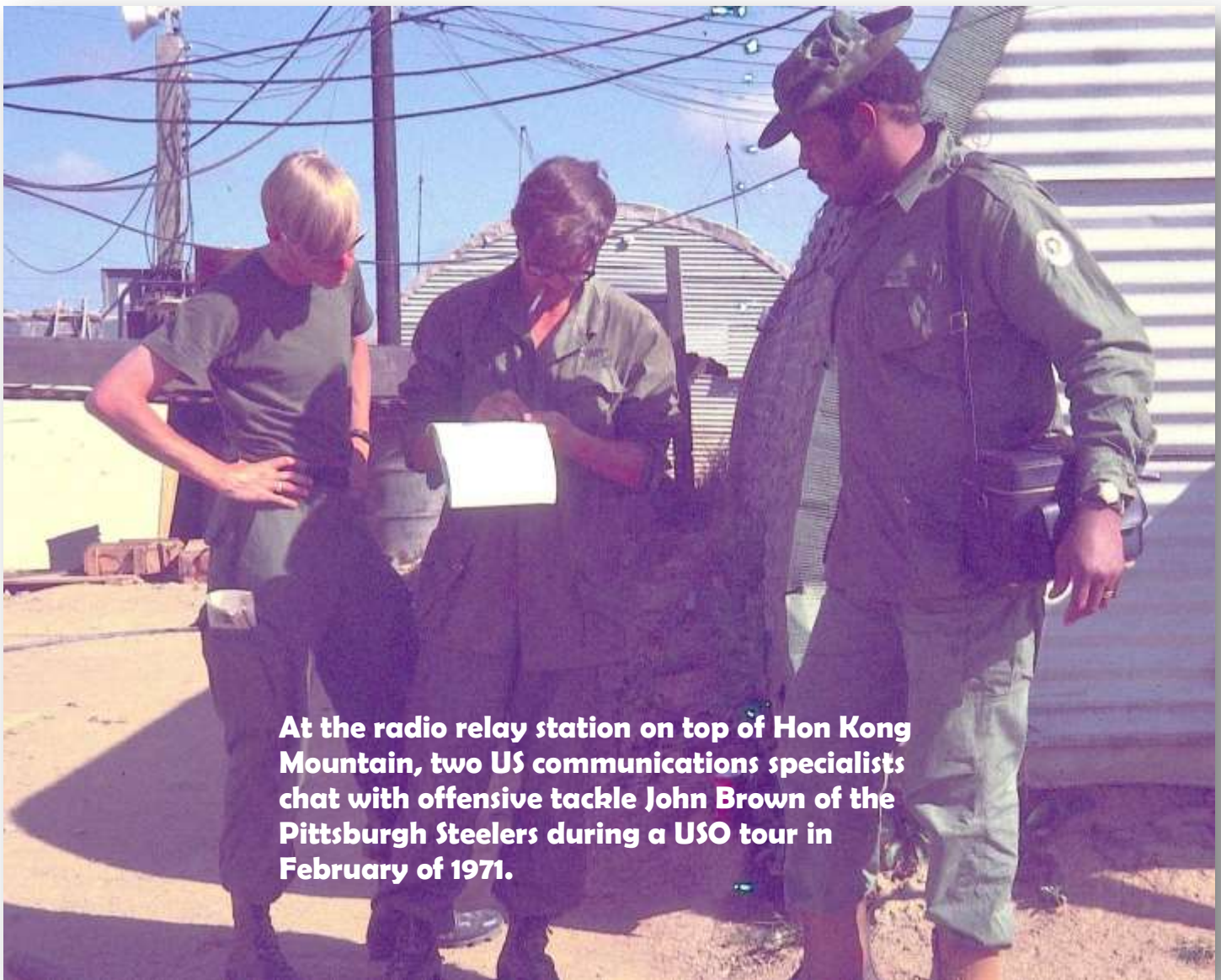
Shown here is Hon Kong Mountain, the predominant landscape feature of Camp Radcliff. A US radio relay station occupied the top, but enemy forces were said to have occupied caves in the Mountain proper. Also visible are acres of vacant buildings which once hummed with activity supporting the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and then the 4th Infantry Division. It was structures like these that the Battalion was “guarding” for various Vietnamese profiteers.



Shown here is an eastward view from the top of Hon Kong Mountain. To the right are some dead, defoliated trees ~ signs that the Mountain had been sprayed with Agent Orange. Toward the bottom are former ammunition bunkers and a portion of the “Green Line.” In the distance are Route 19 and the town of An Khe.

(continued....)





**At the radio relay station on top of Hon Kong Mountain, two US communications specialists chat with offensive tackle John Brown of the Pittsburgh Steelers during a USO tour in February of 1971.**

### ~ LANDING ZONE UPLIFT ~

The 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) built LZ Uplift in January of 1967 when it was operating in the Bong Son Plain. In the wake of the Communist Tet Offensive on 30 January 1968, and the subsequent redeployment of the Division to I Corps, the 173d Airborne Brigade inherited their area of operations in northeastern Binh Dinh Province - to include the two-battalion basecamp at LZ Uplift.

When the Brigade arrived in Binh Dinh in March of 1968, it was tasked with fielding six Infantry battalions: one at LZ North English, one at LZ English, two at LZ Uplift, and two for Task Force South in the vicinity of Tuy Hoa. The 4th/503rd and the 2nd/503rd were always stationed at North English and English respectively....

*(continued....)*



**Heading North on Highway 1 to LZ Uplift, the 2nd/503rd passed a tiny Vietnamese village surrounded by acres and acres of nearly-ready-to-harvest rice fields. A stretch of the Crescent Mountains is visible in the far distance.**



....The 1st/503rd was always stationed at Uplift, but the remaining three requirements were filled in a rotating manner between Uplift and Tuy Hoa. Playing “musical battalions” were 3rd/503rd Infantry, 3rd/506th of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), and the 1st Battalion (Mechanized) of the 50th Infantry Regiment.

By September of 1969, the Task Force South mission was over and the 3rd/503rd joined the 1st/503rd at LZ Uplift. Then, in February of 1971, the 1st/503rd was ordered to case its colors - to be backfilled by the 2nd/503rd.



Shown on this map is a portion of northern Binh Dinh Province in South Viet Nam. In the center is LZ Uplift, next to Highway 1. To the North/up are LZ's English and North English and the Bong Son Plain, to the East/right is the South China Sea, to the South/down are Phu Cat Air Base and Qui Nhon, and to the West/left are the Crescent Mountains. LZ Uplift is where the 2nd/503rd spent its last five months in Viet Nam. “Duster Hill” is where NVA General Vo Nguyen Giap erected a monument to demonstrate his disdain for 173d Airborne Brigade for the brutality it inflicted upon the NVA and Viet Cong between 1965 and 1971.

In preparation for the Battalion's move to LZ Uplift, all security operations were terminated, all troops were called-in from the “Green Line,” and everything on the Property Books was packed for shipment. In mid-march of 1971, everyone and everything was loaded onto trucks for a three-hour convoy move: from Camp Radcliff East down Highway 19, then North up Highway

1 to LZ Uplift. Upon arriving, the Battalion occupied the now-empty facilities of the 1st/503rd in the northern portion of the LZ and commenced combat operations immediately.

## ~ COMBAT OPERATIONS ~

Upon returning to Binh Dinh and the Bong Son Plain, the Battalion resumed using “Hawk Teams.” Instead of using conventional tactics in battalion- and company-sized operations, that is, the 2nd/503rd fought the Viet

Cong guerrillas using unconventional tactics – thereby taking-back some of the initiative as to where and when to fight. With one company held in reserve (i.e., berm duty), the other three companies were assigned separate, non-supporting missions.

Within a given company, the headquarters element and the three platoons conducted parallel patrolling operations - and within a given platoon, it deployed as a unit, squads conducted separate night ambushes, and the next day the platoon regrouped with itself and moved out. One platoon might not see the others until the patrol ended, and a single platoon might operate independently.

In his book entitled *Soldier*, one-time 2nd/503rd commander LTC(R) Anthony Herbert wrote that ***“The purpose of an ambush is, plainly and simply and precisely, to kill. It takes little skill - but it does require patience, good discipline, and courage. You must be silent, keep your weapon ready, and stay alert. When they come, you slide the safety***

***off silently, blow the clay-mores, and open up with everything you have. You fire at every moving object until there is nothing left but dust, and then you break it off and sit and wait some more - just as quietly as before, just as patient, just as alert. At daylight, you search for the bodies, take care of your wounded, and move out.”*** (p. 146)



(continued....)





Here is an image from the internet showing the layout of LZ Uplift from "Duster Hill." In the foreground is Highway 1. The entrance on the right/North led to the 2nd/503rd's area, while the entrance on the left/South led to the 3rd/503rd's area. The helipad is indicated by the dark area between the two Battalion areas. Visible in the near and far distance are some of the lesser and greater peaks of the Crescent Mountains.



Here is a South-facing view from 2nd Battalion Headquarters with its concrete sidewalk, guardrails, and pathetic plants. Visible in the mid-distance are a truck convoy that has just arrived, a portion of the LZ's perimeter, and a CH-47 "Chinook" coming in for a landing. Also visible at the far left is a hillside along Highway 1 that had all of its vegetation removed by "Rome Plows."

Sign reads:

*"You are now leaving the area of 2nd Battalion (Airborne) 503rd Infantry,  
the best fighting unit in Viet Nam."*

(continued....)





Here is an East-facing view of the 2nd Battalion's Tactical Operations Center, the helipad in the center of the LZ, the neat rows of buildings in the 3rd/503rd's compound in the mid-distance, and "Duster Hill" across Highway 1. Compared with the facilities which the Battalion occupied for three years at LZ English and initially at Camp Radcliff, things were much more primitive at LZ Uplift ~ and much work was needed to repair neglect and to improve them.



Here is a North-facing view from the 2nd Battalion's area. A portion of the LZ's perimeter is defined by the dirt berm in the foreground. Also visible in the distance is another firebase along Highway 1 known as "8-inch Hill."

*(continued....)*





Here is a photo of the northern end of LZ Moon taken just prior to landing on its southern end. The freshly-turned earth indicates that this landing zone was carved-out when the 2nd/503rd initiated combat operations in Phu My District.



Here is a photo taken on the southern end of LZ Moon as troops and equipment are off- and on-loaded onto one of the Casper Platoon's UH-1H helicopters. In the left distance is a portion of the Bong Son Plain, bisected by Highway 1.

*(continued....)*



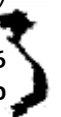


Here is a photo taken on the northern end of LZ Moon showing the saddle linking the two ends of the landing zone. Also visible is a CH-47 "Chinook" helicopter as it prepares to deliver cargo to the helipad and mortar section situated on the southern end.



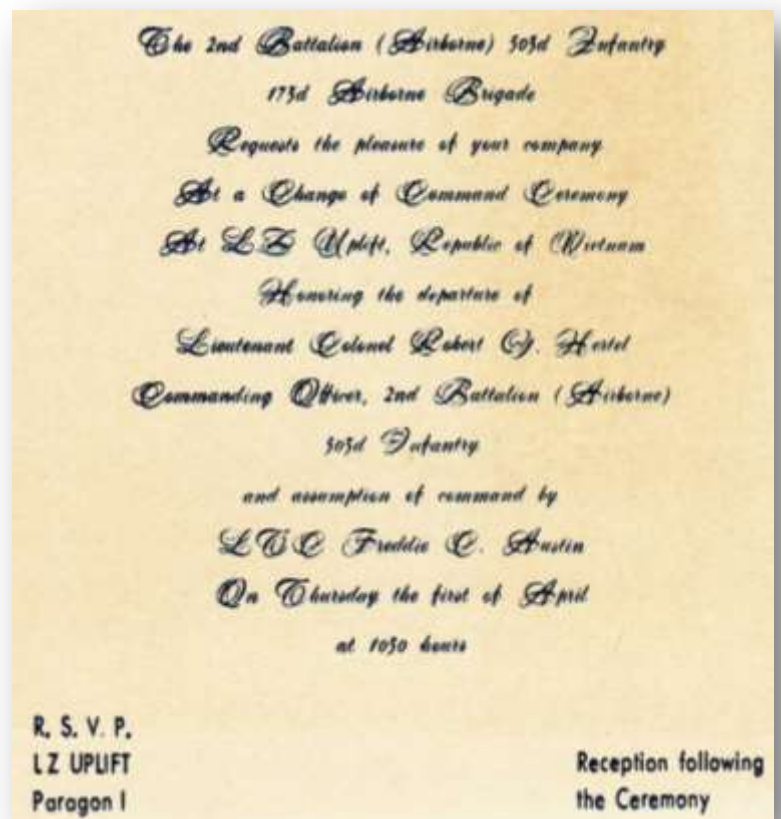
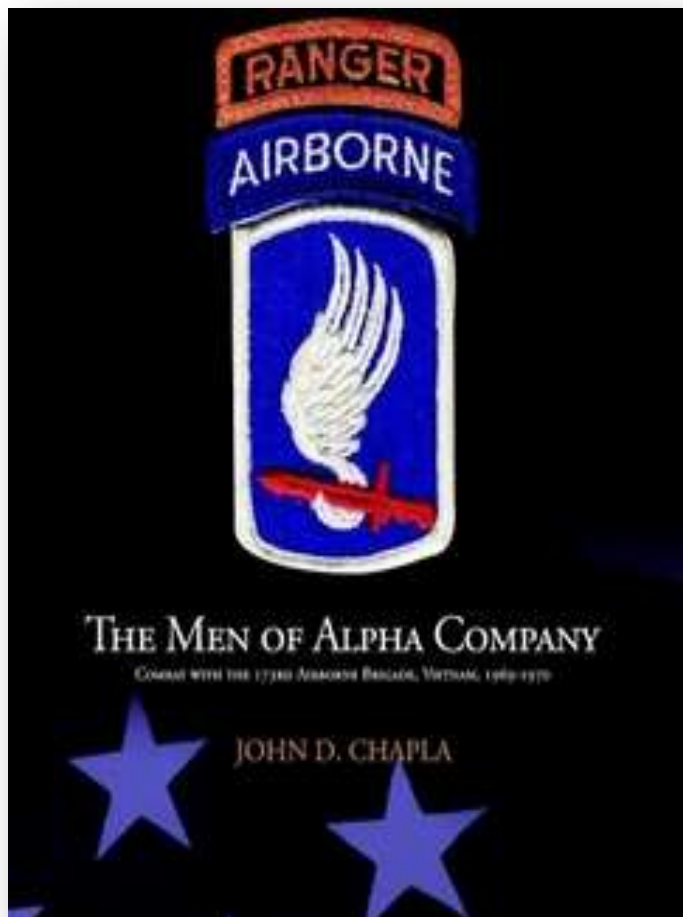
Here is a photo taken on the northern end of LZ Moon. In the foreground are freshly-turned earth, a sandbagged fighting position, and a wire-only defensive perimeter. Visible in the distance is Nui Cung Chap Mountain, as well as the flash and smoke from airstrikes ~ indicating that 2nd/503rd is in mortal combat.

*(continued....)*



For a wonderfully detailed and personal description of one 2nd/503rd operation conducted while at LZ Uplift, see 1LT Leigh W. Smith's article entitled "The Battle of Nui Cung Chap" (19 March–10 April 1971) in the January-February 2016 issue of the 2/503d Vietnam Newsletter, pages 32-39. Many "Grunt Truth" experiences about combat in and around LZ Uplift are provided in LTC(R) John D. Chapla's book entitled *The Men Of Alpha Company* where he wrote that

***"For many people, the story of war is one of battles fought and won, of heroism and valor, of leaders good and bad, and of violence, death, and wounds. For the grunt on the ground, the story of war is one of survival: sometimes during contact with a human enemy but, certainly, always with the inhuman, ever-present enemies of terrain and weather. Only the grunt ~ the infantryman who puts his foot or knee or belly or butt down on every square inch of ground across which he walks, runs, crawls, and rests in every degree of heat or cold, of rain or desert, on flat land or in the steepest mountains and thickest jungles ~ truly understands and experiences, physically and mentally, the challenge of surviving and overcoming such enemies."*** (pp. 19-20)



~ THE END ~

LTC Berry wrote that *"The Brigade soldiered on into the summer...Then word came from Washington to begin phasing the entire 173rd out of Viet Nam by the end of August. Orders were issued transferring it to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Now the tough part began. The unit had to be withdrawn without jeopardizing the safety of the men. The 173rd had to withdraw in good order in the face of a military threat...The last flight of the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) left Viet Nam on August 25, 1971. That was six years, three months, and 20 days after the first C-130 touched down at Bien Hoa on May 5, 1965."* (pp. 149-151)

~ L'ENVOI ~

The site of LZ Uplift is where NVA General Vo Nguyen Giap erected a monument to demonstrate his great disdain for the 173d Airborne Brigade for the brutality that it inflicted upon the NVA and Viet Cong between 1965 and 1971. For images of this monument, see the YouTube video produced in 2008 by two former Herdsmen entitled "Return to LZ Uplift" at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfWUOLKmE1k>

(Photos provided by COL Thomas Ayers, book cover images added)

###



## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

### *William T. Palmer Col. (Ret)*

April 5, 1935 ~ February 3, 2016

#### **Tribute**

Colonel Palmer was born in Rome, NY and grew up in New Jersey. He graduated from Norwich University in Northfield VT in 1957 with a BA degree in Government and Psychology and was commissioned in the Infantry. In 1974 he earned a Master of Arts Degree Higher Education administration from Appalachian State University in Boone, NC.



Upon commissioning Bill attended The Officer Basic, Airborne, and Ranger Schools at Ft. Benning, GA. His initial assignment was with the 101st Airborne as a Rifle and Weapons Platoon Leader, followed by an assignment with 10th Infantry Division in the Panama Canal Zone in 1959. In 1962 he volunteered for Vietnam as an Infantry and Ranger Tactics Advisor moving around the country to several locations.

He again volunteered for Vietnam in 1966; he was assigned to the 173d Airborne as a LRRP Patrol Leader, 17th Cav Squadron Commander, and Brigade S4.

Bill also completed The Special Forces Qualification Course at Ft. Bragg, NC and assumed command of 2/505th Airborne Battalion, followed by Chief of Plans G3 18th ABN Corps. He then attended the Naval War College in Newport, RI. He returned to Ft. Bragg as Commander 7th Special Forces Group in 1980.

Subsequently, he was selected by the JCS as the first Director of Operations, J3, Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) where he served in this capacity for four years. His last military assignment was as President, US Army Abn and Special Ops Test Board.

A Member of the US Army Ranger Hall of Fame, Bill was awarded the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit (1-OLC), Solider's Medal, Bronze Star (7-OLC-4 with V), Purple Heart, among other awards.

Bill is survived by his wife of 55 years, Diane, his daughter Tracey, son Bill and his wife Renee, and granddaughter Sarah.

**RLTW**

## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

### *James MacArthur Holland*

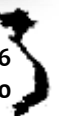
June 2, 1945 ~ January 30, 2016

#### **Tribute**

James MacArthur Holland, also lovingly known as "Mack" or "Moe" by family and friends, of McEwen, Tennessee, passed away Saturday, January 30, 2016, in Centennial Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee. He was born June 2, 1945, in McEwen, TN. He was a US Army Vietnam veteran, serving from 1966 to 1967 with the 173d Airborne Brigade, and a retired Sergeant after 27 years from the Tennessee National Guard, serving in Iraq from 2002 to 2004. He was a retired Maintenance Technician from E. I. DuPont in New Johnsonville, TN.

Services were conducted with military honors with interment in the McEwen Cemetery in McEwen, TN.

Survivors include his wife, Jan Craft Holland, Waverly, TN; 2 Daughters, Kimberly Dawn Holland Tabin (Patrick), Phenix City, AL, and Amber Nichole Holland, Waverly, TN; and Sister, Irene Rye (C. J.), Erin, TN.



# Medal of Honor - Staff Sgt. Ryan Pitts visits Barnes

By Senior Master Sgt. Robert Sabonis  
104th Fighter Wing, Public Affairs

Medal of Honor recipient, Army Staff Sgt. Ryan M. Pitts, visited Barnes Air National Guard Base on Wed., Nov. 25, 2015.



Army Staff Sgt. Ryan M. Pitts received his Medal of Honor while serving in Operation Enduring Freedom, stationed in Afghanistan on July 13, 2008. Elements of Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade; Army engineers; Marine Corps Embedded Training Team mentors; and Afghan National Army conducted Operation "Rock Move," in the Waygal Valley of northeastern Afghanistan. The operation was aimed at repositioning forces from Combat Outpost Bella to the outskirts of a village called Wanat, in order to disrupt militant trafficking in the Waygal Valley, and to set the stage for effective economic and security development in the region.



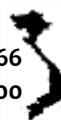
Pitts was wounded by grenade shrapnel in both legs and his left arm during an insurgence attack, and due to his heroic actions during that battle, he was recognized with the U.S. Medal of Honor, which is the United States of America's highest military honor, awarded for personal acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty. The medal is awarded by the president of the United States in the name of the U. S. Congress to U.S. military personnel only.



During Staff Sgt. Pitts' visit to the base, he was welcomed by the 104th Fighter Wing Commander, Col. James Keefe, and the Vice Commander, Col. Peter Green, as well as other senior leadership. Staff Sgt. Pitts was given the opportunity to fly in the F-15 Eagle, which he enjoyed a great deal. He then talked with unit members during a wing commander's call that afternoon where he shared his military service story, and encouraged the crowd by reinforcing the importance of teamwork and being vigilant. His visit ended with a standing ovation from the unit members.

(Photos by Senior Master Sgt. Robert J. Sabonis)

[This report first appeared in the December 2015 edition of AIRSCOOP, 104th Fighter Wing of the Massachusetts Air National Guard, and is reprinted here with their permission].



# John Lemuel Albrittain

August 31, 1947 - February 1, 2016

## Tribute



On Monday, February 1, 2016, loving husband and father, John L. Albrittain, Jr., of Arlington, Virginia died at home from ALS. His wife of 44 years, Nancy, daughter Lisa Albrittain Seeley, and son Joseph (Joe) were by his side. John also is survived by his brothers Bryan and Thomas (Tom/T) and his sister Patricia (Patty) Albrittain Lash. His brother James (Jim) and sister Emily (Suzy/Susan) Albrittain Volk predeceased him. John attended the University of Oklahoma. He served in the Vietnam War from 1969-1971, with the 173d Airborne Brigade where he was known by his fellow soldiers by the...nickname, Rock. John and his brother Jim founded a family home-building business in 1981, and John continued the business upon Jim's death in 1994. Under John's leadership, the family business, J. L. Albrittain, Inc., grew into a successful company, active in the development and construction of residential real estate in Northern Virginia. His dedicated, confident and highly capable employees continue to follow John's high quality standards.

## ~ An Old Avis Ad ~

In my communications with Avis, a company that made significant contributions to the Memorial Foundation, I was shown this ad. In my meetings with the Avis President and its CEO, I presented them with a Memorial Foundation Coin. I found out that although the company produced a number of the camouflaged buttons, they did not have one and so I presented them with my last one that now is displayed in a shadow box on the wall outside the Executive offices.

Since the existence of the ad is probably known only to a few (since most of us were in Nam at the time it came out), I thought you might want to run this old ad in your excellent publication.

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

## Some Avis buttons aren't meant to be seen.



Military version.

We had to do something about our red and white button.

In news photos showing our GI's wearing it, we noticed that it stood out like a beacon.

Fact is, it could be seen from 100 yards away against a green uniform.

So we camouflaged it.

We have already shipped 30,000 new buttons overseas. And we're getting more requests every day.

It seems that whole battalions have adopted our "We try harder" slogan.

So, even if you've been renting our Plymouths, please don't ask for a camouflaged button for yourself.

Unless you have an APO address.

©AVIS RENT A CAR SYSTEM, INC., A WORLDWIDE SERVICE OF ITC.



# In Memory of WWII

## 503rd Troopers

**Samuel Leonard Pons**, 93, of Valdese, passed away Monday, January 11, 2016. He was born the son of O.H. and Essie D. Pons of Valdese, November 16, 1922.

Samuel was married to Emma B. Pons during World War II. As a 1st Lieutenant, he was stationed in the South Pacific serving with the 503rd Airborne. Samuel was awarded the Purple Heart and was written in the book, *"Patriots of World War II."* Before retiring, Samuel was employed at Lenoir-Rhyne College. He was a member of Lovelady Masonic Lodge 670 A.F.&A.M., the Scottish Rite of Asheville and also a member of Waldensian Presbyterian Church of Valdese. Mr. Pons attended Valdese schools and Riverside Military Academy in Gainesville, Georgia. Samuel is survived by a large extended family. Samuel was preceded in death by his wife, Emma Pons; sister, Anne Laurie; and brother, Jimmy Pons. Burial at Waldensian Presbyterian Church Cemetery with military honors.



**Robert Edward Grace, Sr.**, age 92, two weeks shy of 93, of North Little Rock died Sunday, February 14, 2016. He was born March 1, 1923 to Jesse and Clara Grace near Camden, Arkansas.

He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for serving his country in World War II and was part of the U.S. Army 503rd Airborne Parachute infantry that dropped and overtook the island of Corregidor in the Philippines on February 16, 1945. This mission was described as one of the most dangerous combat missions ever attempted by an American Fighting Force. His unit received the Presidential Unit Citation Award by General MacArthur.

He is preceded in death by his beloved wife, Edith, of 54 years – he departed to be in Heaven with the love of his life on Valentine's Day. He is also predeceased by a granddaughter, two nieces and four siblings. He is survived by two daughters: Gwen (Paul) Caraway and Sherry (Garvin) Greenland, both of North Little Rock; three sons: Robert (Sue) Grace Jr. and Billy (Kathy) Grace both of North Little Rock and Larry (Diana) Grace of Harrison; many grandchildren, great-grandchildren and a host of nieces, nephews and friends.



### William Dedrick Walker, Jr.

of Satin, Texas, passed away Friday, December 11, 2015. William was born December 31, 1922 in Waco, Texas, to W.D. Walker, Sr. and Annie Peevy Walker. He attended school in Satin and Chilton, graduating from Chilton High School in 1940. He graduated from Texas A&M with a degree in Agricultural Economics and was in the Class of 1944.



While in college he played baseball and was a boxing finalist in intramurals. He served in WWII as a paratrooper in the 503rd Regimental Combat Team in the Pacific where he received a Purple Heart. After the war, he returned to Texas A&M to finish his degree and met Mary Gene Smith whom he married and celebrated 62 years of marriage.

Bill was a lifelong resident of Satin only leaving for college and the war. He was a farmer/rancher and also worked for Southwest Sprayer & Chemical. Later, he worked a number of years for Crunk Agri-Service in Asa which he thoroughly enjoyed.

Bill was passionate about his faith and family and was a devoted Aggie and loved all sports, especially baseball and golf. He was a devoted Christian, and his prayer was for his family to know and love Christ. He coached Little League Baseball and made a lasting impression on many hearts. He was an active member of Austin Avenue United Methodist Church in Waco, where he served as a Sunday school teacher, administrative board member and Meals on Wheels volunteer. He was a loving husband, dad and grandfather. Bill loved life and touched all those he met.

He is survived by his son, Rick Walker and wife, Debbie; granddaughter, Jordan Walker; grandsons, Chris Drews and Tyler Walker; great granddaughters, Ava Marie, Violet May and Wendy Lynn; and sister-in-law, Emily Walker.



## A Few Pics From 173d LRRP, Ron Thomas



"Guarding prisoners in the Plain of Reeds."



"My view of Silver City."



Jerry Miller and I in Kontum.

### Alcohol & Fats

It's a relief to know the truth after all those conflicting medical studies.

The Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

The French eat a lot of fat and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

The Japanese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

The Italians drink excessive amounts of red wine and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

The Germans drink a lot of beer and eat lots of sausages and fats and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

**Conclusion:** Eat and drink what you like. Speaking English is apparently what kills you.

[News clip sent in by Bryan "Doc" Turner, D/4/503]



*Gemütlichkeit!* If they would have only stuck to drinking their bier....



# Public History News

## PHIST Majors To Locate Missing Vietnam-Era Photos



Four of the 1,015 Marylanders who died or are missing in consequence of the war in Vietnam (credit: Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund)

The Stevenson Public History Program has volunteered to spend the next year locating photos of 190 Marylanders who died in Vietnam or who are MIA from that conflict. Although their names are currently on the Wall of Remembrance in Washington, D.C., their corresponding photos are absent from the virtual Wall of Faces presented on the Web by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. (<http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/>)

When those whose name is on the Wall of Remembrance are missing a photo, a standard image (seen below) is inserted in their corresponding entry on the Wall of Faces.



Above are six examples of 190 Marylanders missing photos on the Wall of Faces. When no personal photos are available, default iconic images are used.

We believe those who gave their lives in service to their nation should be remembered as individuals, and that the greatest individual trait we have is our

face. Out of honor to those 1,015 Marylanders who served in the Vietnam War and never returned home, we have committed our time and effort until all 190 missing photos are obtained and forwarded to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund for inclusion in the virtual Wall of Faces.

We are doing this as part of our involvement with Maryland Public Television's (MPT) Vietnam Project. The MPT project involves two products: a three-hour documentary, *Maryland Vietnam War Stories*; and a two day public event entitled "LZ Maryland." The film will tell the stories of Maryland men and women who served in uniform in Vietnam. Using the military slang designation for a helicopter Landing Zone (LZ), the event "LZ Maryland" will honor those who served in Vietnam and according to MPT "offer a long-overdue welcome home and thank you..."

Using the slogan of the Vietnam Veterans of America, the MPT Vietnam Project proclaims that: **"Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another."** In the Stevenson Public History Program we believe: **"The history of one generation is the responsibility of the next."**

Posted by: Glenn Johnston

Source:

[www.stevenson.edu/academics/undergraduate-programs/public-history/blog-news-events/phist-majors-to-locate-missing-vietnam-era](http://www.stevenson.edu/academics/undergraduate-programs/public-history/blog-news-events/phist-majors-to-locate-missing-vietnam-era)





# Roster of Distinguished and Honorary Members

## 503d Infantry Regiment

(as of December 2015)

### Distinguished Members of the Regiment



# GEN Wayne A. Downing

GEN Henry H. Shelton  
MG John R. D. Cleland  
MG Michael Healy  
# MG James H. Johnson  
BG John W. Nicholson  
BG Wesley B. Taylor, Jr.  
COL Richard H. Boland  
COL William J. Butler  
COL Dom Caraccilo  
COL Ronald R. Combest



COL George Dexter

COL Michael R. Fenzel  
COL Lawrence Jackley  
COL Justin Gubler  
COL Peyton F. Ligon  
COL Matthew McFarlane



COL William B. Ostlund

COL Alfred V. Rascon (MOH)  
COL Andrew W. Rohling  
# COL Robert Sigholtz\*  
COL Kenneth V. Smith\*  
COL Mark Stammer  
# COL John Tyler\*  
# COL William J. VerHey  
LTC Robert "Todd" Brown



LTC Robert B. Carmichael

LTC Joseph E. Flesch  
LTC Roy S. Lombardo  
MAJ Joseph Logan  
LTC Patrick Wilkins  
LTC Harold Nobles  
MAJ Walter Rosso  
MAJ Jack K. Tarr  
Captain J. Robert Wolfgang  
CSM William H. Acebes  
CSM Ted G. Arthurs

CSM Charles L. Burrow  
CSM David A. Dougherty  
CSM Billy G. Duncan  
# CSM James Lamar Edwards  
# CSM George Gatewood\*\*  
CSM Jeffrey Hartless  
CSM Francis S. MacDonald  
CSM Lawrence Okendo\*\*  
CSM Bradley K. Meyers  
# CSM Edward Proffitt\*\*  
CSM Earl Rice  
# CSM Vincent D. Roegiers  
CSM Nicholas A. Rolling  
CSM Loren Storjohann\*\*  
CSM Robert Teague\*\*  
CSM Richard Weik\*\*  
CSM William E. Workman  
# 1<sup>st</sup> SGT Eugene R. Davis



1st SGT James Dresser

# MSG Hugh C. Robinson  
SFC Erich R. Phillips  
SFC William R. Dixon  
# SP6 Joel Lawrence (MOH)  
# SSG Glenn H. English, Jr. (MOH)  
SSG Salvatore A. Giunta (MOH)  
# SSG Charles B. Morris (MOH)  
# SGT Larry S. Pierce (MOH)  
SSG Ryan M. Pitts (MOH)

(continued....)



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# SSG Laszlo Rabel (MOH)  
SGT Dillon Bergstad  
SGT Kyle J. White (MOH)  
# SGT Robert E. Wooldridge, Jr.



# SP4 Michael R. Blanchfield (MOH)

# SP4 Robert P. Gipson  
# SP4 Don Leslie Michael (MOH)  
SP4 Donald L. Smith, Jr.  
# PFC John A. Barnes, III (MOH)  
# PFC Carlos James Lozada (MOH)



# PFC Milton L. Olive, III (MOH)

Mr. Anthony Albarello  
Mr. Don Dali  
Mr. Craig D. Ford  
Mr. Henry Galindo  
Mr. Joseph E. Hair  
Mr. Dennis Hill  
Mr. Peter Klausner  
Mr. Floyd C. Riester  
Mr. John J. Schimpf

#### Honorary Members of the Regiment

#GEN John R. Deane, Jr.  
LTG William C. Mayville, Jr.

The Honorable Robert M. Kimmitt  
#MG John W. Barnes  
#MG (CH) Patrick Hessian  
#MG Paul F. Smith



# MG Ellis W. Williamson

BG (CH) James R. Hutchens  
BG James Yarbrough  
COL Michael L. Foster  
COL Kevin C. Owens  
COL Charles A. Preslyer  
COL Martin P. Schweitzer  
#COL (CH) (R) Frank Vavrin  
LTC Edward H. Anthony  
LTC (CH) Steven Cantrell



#Ch (MAJ) Charles J. Watters (MOH)

CSM Richard Clark  
CSM Richard R. Flowers  
CSM Lawrence Kilgore  
CSM Stanley Kuzminski  
CSM Arthur McCann  
SSG Lincoln V. Dockery  
# CPL Terry T. Kawamura (MOH)  
Mr. William Kenneth Alphin  
Ms. Leta Carruth  
Mr. Robert Finan, II  
Mr. Sebastian Junger

Mr. Mark Ludlow  
Mr. Frank Miceli  
Mr. Ray Payne  
Mr. John Daniel Rich  
Ms. Karen Riester  
Mr. Russell D. Ward  
MD Debora Yashinski

#### 503d PIR Assn, World War II Distinguished Members of the Regiment

# COL Robert W. Atkins\*  
COL Harris T. Mitchell  
SGM Lewis E. Brown\*\*  
Mr. Andrew J. Amaty



Mr. Charles E. Breit

Mr. Loyd McCullough  
Dr. Thomas M. McNeill

#### # Deceased

\* Honorary Colonel of the Regiment  
\*\* Honorary Sergeant Major of the Regiment



***"I do not know all of  
these men and women,  
but do know some, and  
though I really don't  
know much, I do know  
this -- they all are and  
were good men and  
women."***

An old Sky Soldier



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## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

### *Ronnie Milstead*

January 16, 1950 ~ December 3, 2015

#### **Tribute**



Ronnie Milstead, a loving son, husband, father and grandfather, died December 3, 2015 at Lakeway Regional Medical Center. The son of Jack F. and Vera Guthrie Milstead, Ronnie was born on January 16, 1950 at Ft. Hood, Texas. He was the fourth child of five children. His first long trip as a military brat was at the age of one when his family was sent to Japan for 2 years. When he was eight, the family traveled to Germany for 3 years and then it was home to Killeen where he proceeded to get to know "everyone and everything". Ronnie joined the Army in 1969 and served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam. He was awarded the National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with 2 Bronze Stars, Vietnam Campaign Medal with 1960 Device, Parachutist Badge and 2 Overseas Bars. He received the Purple Heart for wounds received in action. After being discharged, he returned to Killeen. Ronnie married Karen Mansfield on December 31, 1971, and she gifted him with a daughter, Davie Lynn Milstead. Ronnie and Karen later divorced.

During a trip to North Carolina, Ronnie met and married Shirley Faye Hicks. Shirley was the mother of William and Cindy Stogner. Ronnie later adopted William. A move back to Texas brought the family first to Houston and then to Horseshoe Bay. Ronnie was a part of The Professionals from the beginning and later changed the name to The Professionals at Horseshoe Bay. He and Shirley also owned Bay Cleaning. Shirley passed away in 2000. Ronnie later remarried Karen Frazier and was blessed with a step-daughter, Kelly Marie. Ronnie was a Master Mason of the Henry Thomas Masonic Lodge 278 of Smithwick.

Ronnie is survived by his loving family: Karen; Davie Lynn and Randall Zak, Clayton and Braydon; William and Leah Milstead, Billy and Lane; Kelly Marie and Jay



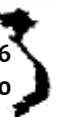
Johnson and Sydney; Sandra and Kenny Pember and Kaylee; brother Jack and Susie Milstead; sisters Connie and Jerre Guthals; Janna and Kenneth Byrd; Murvina and Geary Underwood and Nelda Mansfield. He is also survived by numerous nieces and nephews and a host of friends. If you would like, please make a donation to your favorite charity in Ronnie's name.

*~ All The Way, Ronnie ~*

## How do I get a clinic appointment when the waiting list is 6 months for an initial appointment?

#### **Veterans Authority FAQ**

You should contact the VA's telephone care program in your locality if there is an emergency which requires medical attention. Problems which are not serious will be arranged depending on the next available dates.



# 173d Documentary Planned

## Operation Yorktown 1966



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

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

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

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

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

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



**The late Charlie Morris.**

(Photo courtesy of Jim Healy  
A/2/503)

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

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

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

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



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



## HUD and VA to help more than 9,300 homeless Veterans find permanent homes

**HUD-VASH vouchers to build on national effort to end veteran homelessness**



In the ongoing effort to end Veteran homelessness, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and VA announced nearly \$65 million to help more than 9,300 homeless Veterans find a permanent place to call home. The rental assistance announced today is provided through the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program which combines rental assistance from HUD with case management and clinical services provided by VA.

***"Our nation has a sacred responsibility to support the brave men and women who served with honor, courage and distinction," said HUD Secretary Castro. "These vouchers will help thousands of Veterans start a new chapter in their lives and build for the future. We look forward to partnering with communities to ensure that every Veteran can secure this opportunity and have a place to call home."***

***"The Department of Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development and our federal and local partners should be proud of the gains made reducing Veteran homelessness," said VA Secretary Bob McDonald, "but so long as there remains a Veteran living on our streets, we have more work to do. The vouchers made available today are a vital tool to making sure Veterans across the country have a home."***



*This article was originally posted on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development website.*

50 years ago in March....

## U.S. HIKING VIET TROOPS BY 20,000



**WASHINGTON (AP)** – Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara said Wednesday he has authorized an increase in U.S. forces in the Republic of Vietnam to 235,000 men. He said this strength could be boosted to over 350,000 without calling reservists to active duty.

McNamara told a news conference another 20,000 troops have been ordered to Vietnam, on top of the 215,000 now there.

This was the first public disclosure that U.S. armed strength in Vietnam had reached 215,000.

McNamara also said the United States has the capability to send 21 more battalions to Vietnam... within the next 90 days, if such action should be required.

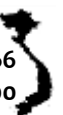
The defense secretary said, however, that based on the present assessment, such action is not likely.

McNamara made the disclosure in connection with a report on U.S. readiness in which he said that despite stationing about 300,000 U.S. fighting men in Vietnam and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, *"We are fully capable of meeting our commitments everywhere in the world."*

**Excerpt Source:**

**Associated Press as reported in  
*Pacific Stars & Stripes*, March 4, 1966**

(Web photo added)



## A 173d Airborne Salute To The



## Is Military Service Fun?

**The farewell address below was delivered by Colonel Wayne Shaw, USMC, to fellow officers at Quantico, Virginia on the occasion of his retirement. It was entered into the US Senate Congressional Record on 16 May 2000, introduced there as follows:**

*"The debt we owe to the men and women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces is one that we will never be able to repay adequately. They sacrifice so much of themselves to defend our nation and its ideals, and ask for so little in return.*

*Today, [we] would like to focus the Senate's attention on one such veteran, who entered the United States Marine Corps more than a quarter-century ago. Colonel Wayne Shaw, who was a Marine for over 28 years, retired recently and delivered a farewell address to his fellow officers at Quantico, Virginia.*

*Colonel Shaw's address at Quantico was not your typical "feel-good" retirement speech. In it, he makes a number of observations about how the Marine Corps has changed in recent years--and how, in his view, many of those changes have weakened the Corps that, for the sake of our country and the world, needs to remain strong. Not a man to mince words, Colonel Shaw lists in his speech a number of concerns he has about the future of the Marine Corps.*

*Colonel Shaw does not question the future of the Corps because of any disillusionment he may have about the institution. Rather, he questions the future of the Corps because of his love for and devotion to it. Colonel Shaw is certainly entitled--if anyone is--to critique the Marine Corps because of his unique commitment to this country for nearly three decades.*

*[We] owe it to Colonel Shaw and other veterans like him to pay heed to his words of warning and carefully consider his suggestions to sustain the integrity of the U.S. Marine Corps."*

## A Farewell to the Corps

In recent years I've heard many Marines on the occasion of retirements, farewells, promotions and changes of command refer to the "*fun*" they've had in the Marine Corps. "*I loved every day of it and had a lot of fun*" has been voiced far too often.

Their definition of "*fun*" must be radically different than mine. Since first signing my name on the dotted line 28 ½ years ago I have had very little fun. Devoting my entire physical and mental energies training to kill the young men of some other country was not fun. Worrying about how many of my own men might die or return home maimed was not fun. Knowing that we did not have the money or time to train as best we should have, was not fun either.



**Young Marines having "fun" during training.** (web photo)

It was no fun to be separated from my wife for months on end, nor was it fun to freeze at night in snow and rain and mud. It was not much fun to miss my father's funeral because my Battalion Commander was convinced our peacetime training deployment just couldn't succeed without me. Missing countless school and athletic events my sons very much wanted me to attend was not much fun either. Not being at my son's high school graduation wasn't fun.

Somehow it didn't seem like fun when the movers showed up with day laborers from the street corner and the destroyed personal effects were predictable from folks who couldn't hold a job. The lost and damaged items, often-irreplaceable family heirlooms, weren't much fun to try to "replace" for pennies on the dollar. There wasn't much fun for a Colonel with a family of four to live in a 1700 sq ft apartment with one bathroom that no welfare family would have moved into.

*(continued....)*



It was not much fun to watch the downsizing of the services after Desert Storm as we handed out pink slips to men who risked their lives just weeks before. It has not been much fun to watch mid-grade officers and senior Staff NCO's, after living frugal lives and investing money where they could, realize that they cannot afford to send their sons and daughters to college. Nor do I consider it much fun to reflect on the fact that our medical system is simply broken. It is not much fun to watch my Marines board helicopters that are just too old and train with gear that just isn't what it should be anymore. It is not much fun to receive the advanced copies of promotion results and call those who have been passed over for promotion.

It just wasn't much fun to watch the infrastructure at our bases and stations sink deeper into the abyss because funding wasn't provided for the latest "*crisis*."



**Victims of a shooting attack lay on the pavement outside La Belle Equipe restaurant in Paris Friday, Nov. 13, 2015. Well over 100 people were killed in Paris on Friday night in a series of shootings, explosions.**

(Photo: Anne Sophie Chaisemartin, AP)

It just wasn't much fun to discharge good Marines for being a few pounds overweight and have to reenlist Marines who were HIV positive and not worldwide deployable. It sure wasn't much fun to look at the dead Marines in the wake of the Beirut bombing and ask yourself what in the hell we were doing there. I could go on and on. There hasn't been much fun in a career that spans a quarter century of frustration, sacrifice and work.

**Marines having more "fun"? Marine Barracks bombing in Beirut, October 23, 1983.**

(web photo)



So, why did you serve you might ask? Let me answer that:

I joined the service out of a profound sense of patriotism. As the son of a career Air Force Senior NCO I grew up on military bases often within minutes flying time from Soviet airfields in East Germany. I remember the Cuban Missile crisis, the construction of the Berlin Wall, the nuclear attack drills in school and was not many miles away when Soviet Tanks crushed the aspirations of citizens in Czechoslovakia. To me there was never any doubt that our great Republic and the last best hope of free people, needed to prevail in this ultimate contest. I knew I had to serve.

When our nation was in turmoil over our involvement in Vietnam I knew that we were right in the macro strategic sense and in the moral sense, even if in the execution we may have been flawed. I still believe to this day that we did the right thing. Many of our elites in the nation today continue to justify their opposition in spite of all evidence that shows they were wrong and their motives either naive or worse. This nation needed to survive and I was going to join others like me to insure it did.



**U.S. Marines in battle for HUE, 1968.**

(web photo)

We joined long before anyone had ever referred to service in the infantry units of the Marine Corps as an "opportunity." We knew the pay was lousy, the work hard and the rewards would be few. We had a cause, we knew we were right and we were willing when others were not. Even without a direct threat to our Nation many still join and serve for patriotic reasons.

I joined the Marines out of a sense of adventure. I expected to go to foreign countries and do challenging things. I expected that, should I stick around, my responsibilities would grow, as would my rewards. It was exciting to be given missions and great Marines to be responsible for.

(continued....)





**The few, the proud, the Marines. Desert Storm.** (web photo)

Finally, I joined for the camaraderie. I expected to lead good men and be led by good men. Marines, who would speak frankly and freely, follow orders once the decision was made and who would place the good of the organization above all else. Marines who would be willing to sacrifice for this great nation. These were men I could trust with anything and they could trust me. It was the camaraderie that sustained me when the adventure had faded and the patriotism was tested. I was a Marine for all of these years because it was necessary, because it was rewarding, because our nation needed individuals like us and because I liked and admired the Marines I served with ----- but it sure wasn't fun.

I am leaving active service soon and am filled with some real concerns for the future of our Marine Corps and even more so for the other services. I have two sons who are on the path to becoming Marine Officers themselves and I am concerned about their future and that of their fellow Marines, sailors, airmen and soldiers. We in the Corps have the least of the problems but will not be able to survive in a sick DoD.



**Soon to earn the title of Marine. Boot Camp.** (web photo)

We have gone from a draft motivated force to an all-volunteer force to the current professional force without the senior leadership being fully aware of the implications. Some of our ills can be traced to the fact that our senior leadership doesn't understand the modern Marine or service member. I can tell you that the 18-year-old who walks through our door is a far different individual with different motivations that those just ten years ago.

Let me generalize for a moment. The young man from the middle class in the suburbs comes in to play "Rambo" for a while. He has a home to return to if need be and mom has left his room unchanged. In the back of his mind he

has some thoughts of a career if he likes it or it is rewarding. The minorities and females are looking for some skills training but also have considered a career if "things work out." They have come to serve their country but only in a very indirect way. They have not joined for the veterans' benefits because those have been truncated to the point where they are useless. No matter what they do, there is no way it will pay for college and the old VA home loan is not competitive either.

There are no real veteran's benefits anymore. It is that simple and our senior leadership has their head in the sand if they think otherwise. As they progress through their initial enlistments that are four years or more now, many conclude that they will not be competitive enough to make it a 20 year career or don't want to endure the sacrifices required. At that point they decide that it is time to get on with the rest of their lives and the result is the high first term attrition we currently have to deal with. The very thought of a less than honorable discharge holds no fear whatsoever for most. It is a paper tiger.

Twenty years ago an individual could serve two years and walk away with a very attractive amount of veterans benefits that could not be matched by any other sector or business in the country. We have even seen those who serve long enough lose benefits as we stampede from weaker program to weaker program. This must be reversed. We need a viable and competitive GI Bill that is grandfathered when you enter the service, is predicated on an honorable discharge and has increasing benefits for longer service so we can fill the mid-grade ranks with quality people. We must do this to stop the hemorrhage of first term attrition and to reestablish good faith and fairness. It will allow us to reenlist a few more and enlist a few less.

(continued....)



The modern service member is well read and informed. He knows more about strategy, diplomacy and current events than Captains knew when I first joined the Marines. He reads national newspapers and professional journals and is tuned into CNN. Gone are the days of the PFC who sat in Butzbach in the Fulda Gap or Camp Schwab on Okinawa and scanned the *Stars and Stripes* sports page and listened to AFN.



**4th Marines' Commander's Cup Competition on Camp Schwab.** (web photo)

Yet our senior leadership continues to treat him like a moron from the hinterland who wouldn't understand what goes on. He is in the service because he wants to be and not because he can't get a job in the steel mill. Three hots and a cot are not what he is here for. The Grunts and other combat arms guys aren't here for the "training and skills" either. He is remarkably well disciplined in that he does what he is told to do even though he knows it is stupid. He is very stoic, but not blind.

You bet that Tommy sees ... yet I see senior leaders all of the time who pile more on. One should remind them that their first platoon in 1968 would have told them to stick it where the sun doesn't shine. These new warriors only think it ... he is well aware of the moral cowardice of his seniors



**Marines, 1968**

and their habit of taking the easy way out that results in more pain and work for their subordinates. This must be reversed. The senior leadership must have the morale courage to stop the misuse and abuse of the current force. The force is too small, stretched too thin and too poorly funded. These deficiencies are made up on the backs of the Marines, sailors, airmen and soldiers.

The troops are the best we've ever had and that is no reason to drive them into the dirt.

Our equipment and infrastructure is shot. There is no other way to put it. We must reinvest immediately and not just on the big-ticket items like the F-22. That is the equivalent of buying a new sofa when the roof leaks and the termites are wrecking the structure.

Finally let me spend a minute talking about camaraderie and leadership. I stayed a Marine because I had great leaders early on. They were men of great character without preaching, men of courage without bragging, and men of humor without rancor. They were men who believed in me and I in them. They encouraged me without being condescending. We were part of a team and they cared little for promotions, political correctness or who your father was. They were well-educated renaissance men who were equally at home in the White House or visiting a sick Marine's child in a trailer park.

They could talk to a barmaid or a baroness with equal ease and make each feel like a lady. They didn't much tolerate excuses or liars or those with too much ambition for promotion. One once told me that Priests do the Lord's work and don't plan to be the Pope. They were in touch with their Marines and supportive of their seniors. They voiced their opinions freely and without retribution from above. They probably drank too much and had an eye for beautiful women as long as they weren't someone's wife or a subordinate. You could trust them with your life, your wife or your wallet. Some of these great leaders were not my superiors -- some were my Marines.

We need more like them at the senior levels of Government and military leadership today. It is indeed sad when senior defense officials and Generals say things on TV they themselves don't believe and every service member knows they are lying. It is sad how out of touch with our society some of our Generals are. Ask some general you know these ten questions:

How much does a PFC make per month?

How big is the gas tank on a Humvee?

Who is your Congressman and who are your two Senators?

Name one band that your men listen to.

Name one book on the NY times best seller list.

Who won the last Super Bowl?

What is the best-selling car in America?

What is the WWF?

When did you last trust your subordinates enough to take ten days leave?

What is the leave balance of your most immediate subordinate? Where does he live?

(continued....)



We all know they won't get two right and therein lies the problem. We are in the midst of monumental leadership failure at the senior levels. Just recently the CJCS testified that he didn't know we had a readiness problem or pay problems... Can you imagine that level of isolation? We must fix our own leadership problems soon.

Quality of life is paid lip service and everyone below the rank of Colonel knows it. We need tough, realistic and challenging training. But we don't need low pay, no medical benefits and ghetto housing. There is only so much our morality should allow us to ask of families. Isn't it bad enough that we ask the service members to sacrifice their lives without asking their families to sacrifice their education and well-being too? We put our troops on guilt trips when we tell them about how many died for this country and no hot water in housing is surely a small sacrifice to make. *"Men have died and you have the guts to complain about lack of medical care for your kids?"*

The nation has been in an economic boom for damn near twenty years now, yet we expect folks in the military to live like lower middle class folks lived in the mid-fifties. In 1974 a 2nd Lieutenant could buy a Corvette for less than his annual salary. Today, you can't buy a Corvette on a Major's annual salary. I can give you 100 other examples. An NROTC midshipman on scholarship got \$150 a month in 1975. He or she still gets \$150 in 1999. No raise in 25 years? The QOL life piece must be fixed. The Force sees this as a truth teller and the truth is not good.

I stayed a Marine despite the erosion of benefits, the sacrifices of my wife and children, the betrayal of our junior troops and the declining quality of life because of great leaders and the threat to our way of life by a truly evil empire that no longer exists. I want men to stay in the future. We must reverse these trends. There will be a new "evil empire" eventually. Sacrifices will need to be made and perhaps many things cannot change but first and foremost we must fix our leadership problems. The rest will take care of itself -- if we can only fix the leadership problem.

Then I still can't promise you "fun," but I can promise you the reward and satisfaction of being able to look in the mirror for the rest of your life and say: *"I gave more to America than I ever took from America ... and I'm proud of that."*

*Semper Fi and God Bless you all!*

**Wayne Shaw, Colonel, USMC (Ret)**  
**Quantico, Virginia**

#### Sources:

Received in email on May 17, 2000, from the wife of one of our former 2/503 Commanding Officers in RVN  
[www.ocsnet.net/veterans/MilitaryFun.cfm](http://www.ocsnet.net/veterans/MilitaryFun.cfm)

[Photos added. No photo of Col. Shaw was located]

In 1929 the Commandant of the Marine Corps authorized the following verses of *The Marines' Hymn* as the official version:

***"From the Halls of Montezuma  
To the shores of Tripoli;  
We fight our country's battles  
On the land as on the sea;  
First to fight for right and freedom  
And to keep our honor clean;  
We are proud to claim the title  
Of United States Marine.***

***Our flag's unfurled to every breeze  
From dawn to setting sun;  
We have fought in ev'ry clime and place  
Where we could take a gun;  
In the snow of far-off Northern lands  
And in sunny tropic scenes;  
You will find us always on the job  
The United States Marines.***

***Here's health to you and to our Corps  
Which we are proud to serve;  
In many a strife we've fought for life  
And never lost our nerve;  
If the Army and the Navy  
Ever look on Heaven's scenes;  
They will find the streets are guarded  
By United States Marines."***

On November 21, 1942, the Commandant of the Marine Corps approved a change in the words of the fourth line of the first verse to read, *"In the air, on land, and sea."*

#### ~ In Remembrance ~

Over many years at the Gunnery Sergeant Elia P. Fontecchio VFW Memorial Post 10148 in Cocoa Beach, FL, our late good buddy Don "Rocky" Rockholt (A/2/503) and I would occasionally come to attention and belt out the first verse of *The Marines' Hymn* to any unsuspecting vets and guests finding themselves present. We did this in part to humor ourselves when VN vet Marine buddy Dennis Fontecchio was present, but also in honor of his son, Elia, who gave his life to his country during the Iraq War. *Semper Fi, Elia!* Ed



Elia



## We have every reason to be proud of this Sky Soldier

George Taylor served with the 1/503rd in Vietnam and is the Chairman & Founder of NVHS - National Veterans Homeless Support in Brevard County, Florida. His dedication to helping veterans in need was once again on display recently when his intervention may well have saved the life of a fellow vet and possibly others. Congratulations on a job well done, George; and thanks to Norman Moody of *Florida Today* for permission to include his report here which appeared in the January 8, 2016, edition of that newspaper. Ed



## Vet advocate aids in standoff

Group offers to help law enforcement officers if needed in similar crises

**R. NORMAN MOODY**

*Florida Today*

Veterans advocates who helped defuse an armed standoff in Melbourne want to see a system where they could be called to assist law enforcement in similar situations.



After a nearly 12-hour standoff with authorities that included gunfire and tense negotiations, Michael Thomas Taylor has been taken safely into custody. The man opened the front door at 10:25 a.m. and walked out of the apartment at the Coral Gardens complex.

MALCOLM DENEMARK/FLORIDA TODAY



Orange County SWAT vehicle on scene.

MALCOLM DENEMARK/FLORIDA TODAY

Dorothy Walsh, an advocate for veterans in Brevard, knew to call George Taylor, president and founder of National Veterans Homeless Support, when she saw news reports and recognized the address as belonging to someone she knew.

Taylor was able to help talk the armed man out of his apartment at Coral Gardens complex off Wickham and Sarno roads and end the nearly 12-hour standoff peacefully shortly before 10:30 a.m. Thursday. Residents of the apartment complex, who had been moved to a nearby bowling alley, were allowed to return home shortly before noon. No one was injured. Walsh first called the suspect, 47-year-old Michael Thomas Taylor (no relation to George Taylor), on the phone.

*"I called him and said 'Is that you on the news?' He said 'Yes,'" Walsh said. "I've been dealing with him and helping him with his PTSD issues. It was pretty tough. I was able to keep him calm."*

Walsh said Taylor is an Army veteran who has served multiple deployments including to Desert Storm, Bosnia and elsewhere.

When Walsh could not get the veteran to surrender during her conversation with him on the phone, she called George Taylor, with whom she has worked as a volunteer helping homeless veterans.

George Taylor, who was in Mims near the northern end of the county, said he called two judges but could not reach them before calling Brevard County Sheriff Wayne Ivey, who told him to come to the scene in Melbourne.

*(continued....)*



*"I told him I could talk him out of this," George Taylor said. "I have a long rapport with him." "I was praying as I was coming down I-95," he said.*

The Melbourne police SWAT team was already in place around the building after the long standoff that started Wednesday night. Police exchanged gunfire with Michael Taylor several times. They had initially been called to the home to investigate a domestic disturbance.

*"I know Mike well," Walsh said. "Mike does not deal well with authority. He said 'I'm not coming out if you point guns at me.'"*

Police negotiators were in communication with the suspect and Taylor was allowed to talk through a robot. The veteran did not immediately recognize Taylor's name or voice, but George Taylor believes that once he saw his signature black cowboy hat, he knew it was the veterans advocate.

*"Once he realized that I was the man with the black hat he calmed down," George Taylor said. "I said 'I'm here for you.'"*



**George Taylor, who works with veterans, contacted the sheriff's office and said he knew the suspect.**

MALCOLM DENEMARK/FLORIDA TODAY

The men talked, and soon after the suspect walked out of the apartment with his hands up, a bottle of water in his right hand and his keys in the other.

The suspect was taken in to custody and taken to a hospital for treatment to a cut on his hand and abrasion on the abdomen. Police said he could face multiple charges, including attempted murder of a police officer.

*"It was just like a million pounds off my shoulders," George Taylor said. "If Dorothy had not called me I wouldn't have known. I don't even want to think what would have happened. I will visit him in jail."*

Contact Norman Moody at 321-242-3651 or

[nmoody@floridatoday.com](mailto:nmoody@floridatoday.com)

Follow on Twitter [@RNormanMoody](https://twitter.com/RNormanMoody)



## **NVHS MISSION**

### **To Eliminate Homelessness Among Veterans in Central Florida.**

Founded in 2008, NVHS is a community based organization formed by veterans to locate and assist the more than 4,500 homeless veterans living in the parks, woods, and streets of Central Florida in getting off the streets permanently. What makes NVHS truly unique is the fact that we tackle homelessness directly where it thrives...on the streets of our community. Unlike every other homeless service provider in the State of Florida, who wait patiently for homeless clients to know they exist and find their office, we go out constantly and persistently to find our clients where they live, provide basic needs to insure their survival and build rapport, then connect them to any community organization that offers a service beneficial to them rapidly moving from homeless to housed.

See more at:

[www.nvhs.us/#sthash.RWMTZYht.dpuf](http://www.nvhs.us/#sthash.RWMTZYht.dpuf)

### **1/503...The Best of the Best**

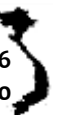


**Sky Soldier George Taylor, Sr.  
NVHS Chairman & Founder**



2/503d **VIETNAM** Newsletter / Mar.-Apr. 2016 – Issue 66

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The Military Order  
of the

*Purple Heart*

## **Guidance for Media Queries on Reactions to 9th Circuit Court of Appeals Decision that Unauthorized Wear of Military Decorations is a Right of "Free Speech."**

### **Background:**

On January 11, 2016, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, ruling on a 2007 conviction of Idaho resident Elven Joe Shisher for violating the Stolen Valor Act, overturned the conviction, saying that it was a form of free speech protected by the U.S. Constitution. In taking this action, the Court upholds the U.S. Supreme Court decision in 2012 which struck down the Stolen Valor Act for the same reason.

### **Guidance:**

If you are contacted by the media asking for your reaction to the Court of Appeals decision, you should make clear that you are responding as an individual veteran and a Purple Heart recipient. If the request is for the "official position" of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, you should refer them immediately to John Bircher, MOPH National Public Relations Director and official spokesman for MOPH. He can be reached at 352-753-5535 or by email at [publicrelations@purpleheart.org](mailto:publicrelations@purpleheart.org).

### **Response:**

With regard to the Court decision, we are, of course, disappointed once again that the courts have determined that the wearing of unauthorized military decorations is an expression of "free speech," as protected by the U.S. Constitution. For most veterans, and especially those of us who received the Purple Heart medal for wounds sustained on the battlefield or as the result of acts of terrorism, the Purple Heart is a badge of honor. It is the symbol that the recipient was willing to sacrifice his or her very life in defense of the United States of America and the freedoms all Americans are able to enjoy.

When someone who is not entitled to the Purple Heart, or any other military decoration for that matter, wears that medal, they not only denigrate its significance, but they dishonor those brave and heroic American military members who served to defend that same Constitution.

For veterans, seeing someone commit an act of "Stolen Valor" has the same emotional response as watching the burning of the American Flag. While both acts may be protected by the U.S. Constitution, that doesn't mean it should be liked or condoned. Whenever it is determined that someone is fraudulently wearing military decorations to which they are not entitled, especially the Purple Heart medal, we will continue to expose their act of "stolen valor," and hopefully embarrass them sufficiently that they will cease and desist from this deplorable action.

[Sent in by Bob Clark, 1st/5th Special Forces]

## ***More from The Military Order of the Purple Heart...***

## **Veterans Organizations Criticize House Passage of "FACT Act" Bill**

Most members of Congress never miss a chance to publicly praise the brave men and women who serve in or are veterans of our nation's armed forces. But the House of Representatives has just passed a bill that will bring unnecessary and unjustified financial hardship to thousands of veterans and their families.

The so-called **FACT Act (H.R. 1927)** will make it harder for Americans who are sick and dying from asbestos-triggered disease to obtain compensation from the corporations responsible for their exposure. The bill is backed by some of the biggest corporations in the country that have knowingly exposed many of our veterans to asbestos while they were in uniform and in their workplace during their civilian lives.

Almost one-third of the victims of mesothelioma, a rare and incurable cancer caused by asbestos exposure, are veterans.

The measure would force veterans and others who are sick and dying from asbestos-triggered diseases to publicly disclose personal, highly sensitive information such as how and when they were exposed, health records, and part of their Social Security numbers....

(continued....)



The bill will also require the asbestos trusts that have been set up to compensate victims to publish their sensitive information on the Internet on a publicly accessible database.

Forcing our veterans to publicize their work histories, medical conditions, social security numbers, and information about their children and families is an offensive invasion of the privacy of the men and women who have honorably served, and it does nothing to assure they receive the compensation they deserve or prevent any future illness among our veterans.

If the bill becomes law, it will add significant time and delay in paying claims to our veterans and their families by putting burdensome and costly reporting requirements on trusts.

In most circumstances, dying veterans desperately need compensation to offset the cost of mounting medical bills and end-of-life care, as well as providing for their families' support when they are gone. The bill passed by the House will force trusts to spend time and resources complying with these additional and unnecessary requirements at the expense of our veterans.

Members of the House who voted for **Representative Farenthold's** bill should be held accountable for casting their votes in favor of the asbestos industry and turning their backs on those who defended our nation. These members are put on notice that veterans have a long memory, and we vote.

**The bill passed with the support of less than half of all House members, and we are proud of the 16 Republicans and all Democrats who voted against it. This is an encouraging sign that the bill will not be seen favorably in the Senate.**

The Senate now has the opportunity to stop this injustice. Similar legislation authored by **Sen. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.)** awaits consideration by those in the upper chamber. We hope that compassion for our veterans—not bowing to asbestos interests campaign donations—will prevail, and the Senate will roundly oppose S.357.

This letter is submitted on behalf of the following veteran groups by Hershel Gober, National Legislative Director for the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

**Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA)**  
**Air Force Women Officers Associated (AFWOA)**  
**AMVETS**  
**Association of the United States Navy (AUSN)**

**Commissioned Officers Association of the US Public Health Service**  
**Fleet Reserve Association (FRA)**  
**Jewish War Veterans of the USA (JWV)**  
**Marine Corps Reserve Association (MCRA)**  
**Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)**  
**Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH)**  
**National Association for Uniformed Services (NAUS)**  
**National Defense Council**  
**Naval Enlisted Reserve Association (NERA)**  
**The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA)**  
**U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association**  
**U.S. Army Warrant Officers Association**  
**Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)**

Source: [www.purpleheart.org/LegislativeLiaison.aspx](http://www.purpleheart.org/LegislativeLiaison.aspx)



Rep. Blake Farenthold [R]  
Texas's 27<sup>th</sup> District



Sen. Jeff Flake [R]  
Arizona



Let's hope this Numba One Screaming Eagle is never exposed to asbestos.



## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

**Thomas F. Siopes**

**A/2/503**

May 7, 1946 ~ December 24, 2015

### **Tribute**

METHUEN, MA - Thomas F. Siopes, 69, of Methuen, MA, passed away unexpectedly Thursday, December 24, 2015 at St. Elizabeth's Medical Center in Brighton, MA.

Thomas was born on May 7, 1946 in Boston and was a son of the late Demitrios Siopes and the late F. Bertelle (Tibbetts) Siopes. He was raised in Dorchester, where he attended St. Matthew's School. He later attended St. Joseph's High School in Lowell and then continued on to graduate from Marist Prep School in Cold Springs, NY. He graduated from UMass Lowell with a degree in Criminal Justice and received his Master's Degree from New England School of Law.



After volunteering to serve with the United States Army, he honorably served as a part of a special strike force for all of Southeast Asia known as "The Sky Soldiers." In two incredible acts of heroism, he deliberately risked his life to save the lives of other men. Thomas was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with 'V' Device for 'Valor', the Silver Star Medal, the Purple Heart, and the Air Medal. The Republic of Vietnam also awarded him four medals, including the Gallantry Cross.

Thomas was honorably discharged on August 29, 1969 and continued on to serve with the Andover Police Department for 37 years, retiring as Lieutenant in 2011. He enjoyed gardening, traveling, riding his motorcycle, and cooking. Thomas also enjoyed taking his family and friends on his boat to go fishing and spending quality time together. He was a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in North Andover, Post 2104.

Thomas is survived by his four daughters, three grandchildren, siblings and extended family, and his girlfriend Thalia Higgins.

###

I am sad to hear about any of our soldiers in combat who have died. After spending a quiet evening Christmas night 25 Dec 2015, I awoke early to a text message that Tom Siopes/Massachusetts had died. He

was a great soldier, an even greater dad, and a close friend ... served with me in the 'Nam as a squad leader. He was awarded the 'Silver Star' decades later after DEROS ... I shall miss my beloved friend. That day, I sent out calls to let everyone I know learn about it. One of our former LT's attended the family and the funeral. I couldn't do much more with so little notice. He died on the 23rd ... and I didn't know at the time.

**Rick 'Doc' Navarrete'**

Catonsville, Md., 2nd Batt / '68-'69 / 'A' Co, CMB

## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

**Dr. Frank H. Sams, Jr.**

April 20, 1938 ~ December 19, 2015

### **Tribute**

Reynolds, GA -- Memorial services for Dr. Frank H. Sams, Jr., 77, of Reynolds were held on December 22, 2015 at First Baptist Church of Reynolds. Burial was private.

Dr. Frank passed away on Saturday, December 19, 2015 at his residence. He was a member of First Baptist Church of Reynolds where he had served as a deacon. He graduated from Reynolds High School, the University of Georgia and the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta. After serving one year internship at the Macon Hospital, he joined the army for two years where he was a battalion surgeon for the 101st Airborne Division at Ft. Campbell, KY from 1966 to 1967, and the 173d Airborne Brigade in Vietnam 1967 to 1968.

He returned to Macon and served one year of residency in surgery at the Macon Hospital before returning to Reynolds to assume his fathers' practice at Sams - Whatley Hospital. Later he practiced as an emergency room physician at Peach County Hospital and also practiced at Medical Center of Central Georgia's Butler Family Medical.

He had been a physician in Taylor County for 35 years. He was preceded in death by his parents, Lois and Dr. Frank Sams, Sr.; one brother, Henry L. Sams. Survivors include his wife, Andrea J. Sams of Reynolds; one son, Frank H. Sams, III (Melinda) of Warner Robins; one daughter, Claire S. Locke (Thomas) of Reynolds; one brother, H. Clinton Sams (Elaine) of St. Augustine, FL; four grandchildren, Houston Locke, Anna Locke, Casey Sams and Reid Sams. ###



*Lest we forget....*

## Winning design concept for the National World War I Memorial unveiled



The nation's capital will finally receive a national memorial dedicated to the Servicemembers who fought in "The Great War." The U.S. World War I Centennial Commission selected the design team of Joe Weishaar & Sabin Howard and their design concept *"The Weight of Sacrifice"* for the National WWI Memorial at Pershing Park.

***"Those five million Americans who served in uniform during World War I literally changed the world. This new landmark in our nation's capital will be a worthy expression of their great legacy,"*** said Robert Dalessandro, chair, U.S. World War I Centennial Commission.

### **Happy Birthday to Frau Regine (Reggie) Smith**



The lady whom over the years has helped and opened her home to many Sky Soldiers. Happy Birthday Doll!!! Ed

## Pic from the Past



**Caption: "Members of the 173rd Airborne guarding the perimeter of Defense Department contractor at rock quarry 10 miles north of Saigon."**

Hey Guys! I hope this finds you all well.

I was on the internet today and googled 173d Airborne, Viet-Nam and among the pictures was the one above. It took a minute but then I recognized (L-R) **Cary Roehl, Bill Detten** and **John Meropolis** sitting on a bunker at the Rock Quarry. This was when Bill was still my assistant machine-gunner and before John was shipped to "A" Company. It must have been our first trip to the Quarry in May or June of 1966.

We were all in the 2nd squad under Sgt. Julius Brown or Rodriguez when the picture was taken. I was probably in the next bunker down the line.

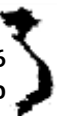
Cary and Bill stayed with Recon. John was shipped to "A" company (I think) after they got hit in June. I think Sgt. Julius Brown, Jerry Shepard, a guy named Austin were also shipped there.

**Gary "Kraut" Kuitert**  
**Recon/2/503**

## What are Aid and Attendance and Housebound benefits?

### **Veterans Authority FAQ**

In order to know about the facilities of aid and attendance, and other housebound profits, you need to check: [www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/pension/vetpen.htm#7](http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/pension/vetpen.htm#7)  
And for knowing about sensory aids, medical devices and prosthetics, please check: [www.prosthetics.va.gov/](http://www.prosthetics.va.gov/)



# Waltham Voices: Remembering a hero this Memorial Day

By Marie Daly  
Guest columnist

May 29, 2015

This year, my Waltham (MA) High School class is celebrating our 50th class reunion, and as we look back over the half century, we recall our classmates who were veterans of the Vietnam War.

We graduated in June 1965, and one month later, President Johnson called for 50,000 more troops and an increase in the monthly draft calls from 17,000 to 35,000. Most of the boys in our class faced the draft when they left school, either high school or college. This Memorial Day, we remember our classmate, 2nd Lt. Robert Charles Ryan, a hero who died in 2011, and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Bobby Ryan was a handsome, vibrant kid from Cedarwood who enjoyed writing, acting and singing. In high school he was involved in the talent show, the drama club and the chorus, as well as the school newspaper. He was an excellent skydiver, skin diver and water skier.

In our yearbook, he said he planned on going to college and then entering the priesthood. Instead, he attended Boston State College (now UMass-Boston) and joined the U.S. Army. He was enrolled in Officers Candidate School in 1969. He served in Vietnam as a second lieutenant in the 5th Group (Special Forces), 1st Infantry (also known as the Green Berets) and as a paratrooper in the 173rd Airborne. For his service, he received a Bronze Star with Valor, with three oak clusters, and a purple heart. He returned home from the war as a highly decorated veteran, but to shouts of "Baby Killers!" from an unappreciative public.

But, Bobby Ryan was utterly traumatized by his Vietnam experiences, and suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder for years. Reliving his horrific experiences in Vietnam, he wrote a book of poetry, "D.E.R.O.S.: A Collection of Post-traumatic Poetry," under the pseudonym Charlie-2.

By 1987, he was the only one of his Officers Candidate School class of 281 men still alive. Most had been killed in Vietnam, and he often wondered why he



Charlie-2, his call sign.  
LT Bobby Ryan

had survived. He was homeless for three years, living in his car. He had been hospitalized 17 times. He suffered from nightmares and flashbacks, and was haunted by guilt over the children killed in Vietnam.

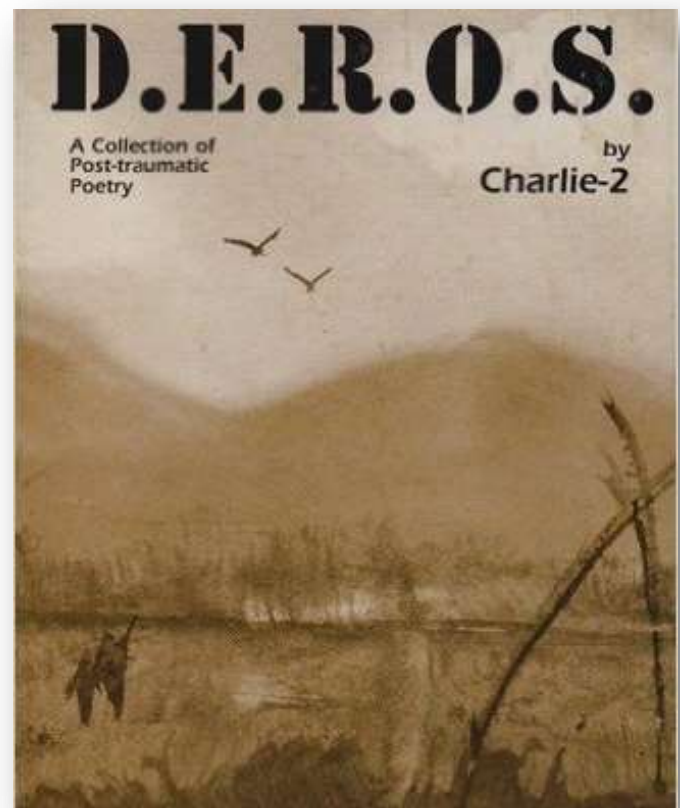
Bobby Ryan left Waltham in 1965 a cheerful, energetic young man with a bright future, and came back as Charlie-2, a disturbed, friendless veteran who was reviled by the American public who had turned against the war. His poems are a heartbreaking account of his war experiences and his tortured life upon return.

So this Memorial Day, let us remember those veterans who survived the Vietnam War, but returned wounded both physically and mentally. I am donating a copy of Bobby Ryan's book to the Waltham authors collection at the Waltham Public Library, so that his classmates and younger generations of Waltham students can learn from his anguished life.

Marie Daly is a Waltham resident.

Source:

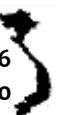
<http://waltham.wickedlocal.com/article/20150529/NEWS/150526109>



The LT's book of poetry is available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

###

*Rest easy, Charlie-2. We know you went to heaven, cuz you've already been to hell.*



# Eighteen Minutes of a Lifetime

By C.T. Lince



**Carlos Lince in his hootch at Camp Zinn.**

(Photo from Bob "Luke" Lucas, A/2/503)

I don't remember exactly, I think it was C Company\*, definitely 2nd Bat., 503rd Inf, 173d Abn Bde., 1966 to 1967. There in Charlie Co., 2nd Platoon, 2nd Squad, we had Lt. Benidetty, a platoon leader, then Sgt. Brown, Sgt. Nathaniel Brown from Washington, D.C. – the cleanest dude I have ever met – so clean, even in the boonies he stayed clean. In my squad there was Pfc. Tyre, Pfc. Lucas, Sp4 Renfro, Pfc. Mikulki, Pfc. DeMarseco (sic), Pfc. Stuby (sic), machine gunner.

Once on an operation in War Zone D, our squad was detailed to an ambush patrol, and prior to that, I was Platoon R.T.O. until I fell asleep one time, so I was assigned point man, my favorite position.



**Norman Renfro**

See Pages **xx-xx** for more about Norman and his buddies

I pride myself as being the best, for I had the responsibility of holding course heading and spotting any hazards and trouble and the best route around them. After all, I had all those guys depending on it.

So on this night we set up for an ambush along a trail. That day we had found a cache across the trail. Knowing someone would be by for resupply, we waited. Seemed like a long night – then it happened – out of nowhere, the dark was alive with gunfire. I recognized it as AK47, a distinct sound – *pac pac pac pac* – repeatedly – it seemed to go on forever – only lasting 2 or 3 seconds. Then silence – eternal silence, but only for a couple minutes that seemed an eternity. Then the moans and screaming of dying men filled the air. I could also hear the enemy running and softly shouting at each other in Vietnamese. I fired my M-16 and threw some grenades. Then everything fell silent. It was silent for a long time.

Pfc. Tyre was to my right – he was M-79 man. I softly said to him, *"I'm moving, going to check out what's happening, I'll be back, hold your fire."* Then I quickly moved cautiously toward where the action had been.

On my way, I called for Pfc.

Lucas (my buddy), *"Hey Luke, hey Luke, Luke"*. *"Linc, that you?"* a familiar voice replied as I approached Luke. We both made it to where our squad leader and RTO were positioned. As I called to them, saying I am coming over, don't fire, one said, *"Hey, Linc, there is a gook between us, I think he's dead."* Fear was not in me, but caution was. If this guy was alive, I was not going to let him get me. As I approached with Luke close behind, I could see a body not more than four feet away, lying face down, motionless. I came to the man lying there, made sure he was dead and approaching the squad leader, and RTO, and squad medic, I saw there seemed to be some confusion with the RTO and frequency assignment for this mission. I sort of patted myself on the back, for I was not the only RTO to get tired once in a while – I remembered the frequency and presto, we had contact.

Meanwhile, by now, there seemed to come an occasional groan from where the machine gunner was. I said to Luke, *"I'm going to have a look."* Luke being who he was, super good dude, was right alongside. We went on our bellies, approaching this position.



**Edward Tyre**

(continued....)



I first came on Pfc DeMarseco (sic) – big boned, red-headed fellow. I bummed cigarettes from him all the time, he was very generous, never said no. De was shot bad. I could make out bullet-blood spots on his back. We, Luke and I, moved quickly to where Pfc. Mikulki was, there we found him on his back. He was hit on his chest and helping himself by controlling the bleeding and lungs by covering his chest. We then dragged him back to the squad leader's position. Pfc Stuby (sic) never knew what hit him, it seemed everything was in his helmet. Everything was wet, sticky wet. I made it back to De. He moved his arms and I said, *"Lie still buddy – sh, sh..."* and as I held him, comforting him, De expired.

To this day, I feel helpless, and this night haunts me. *"Eighteen minutes of a lifetime."*

[Source: 173d Airborne Brigade, *Sky Soldiers*]



### **Michael James De Marsico**

Private First Class  
A CO, 2ND BN, 503RD INFANTRY,  
173RD ABN BDE, USARV  
Army of the United States  
White Plains, New York  
March 19, 1945 - October 1, 1966



### **William Leroy Stubbe**

Private First Class  
A CO, 2ND BN, 503RD INFANTRY  
173RD ABN BDE, USARV  
Army of the United States  
Central City, Nebraska  
April 25, 1945 - October 1, 1966

\* Time often plays tricks on us and with our memories. According to his buddies, Sky Soldier Carlos Lince did in fact serve with *Alpha* and not *Charlie* Company during the ambush he reports on here. Ed

**“NO DEROS ALPHA”**

## More Memories of that Day in October

By Bob “Luke” Lucas  
A/2/503



Luke, at the ready.

**I**t was Alfa Company. Carlos Lince was in my squad and bunked across from me. We were in 2nd Platoon, 1st Squad. I read his story a long time ago and have been trying to find him ever since.

Our squad was sent out on ambush patrol the night of October 1, 1966. The Squad Leader was Sgt. Dean Rogerson, I was the RTO and we set up an L-shaped ambush. The machine gunners were Stubbe, DeMarsico, Larey McCorkle, C.T. Lince and 2 others were to my right front. It was a miserable night with heavy rain.

About 05:00 we heard machine gun fire coming from McCorkle's position. I noticed that the rain had stopped and the moon was bright. I then saw a Gook in the usual Bamboo hat coming right at me. I fired my first shot at his head, tracer, and missed but corrected my aim and shot him in the head. I saw a piece of his skull fly off and he went down. Everything went quiet after that. Lince called to me and was coming to my position. I warned him about the guy I shot and that he was starting to moan. One of our guys crawled over to him and slit his throat.

(continued....)



About that time we heard someone from the MG position calling my name. I told the Squad Leader that we were going over to help them. When we got there the first guy I rolled over was dead as well as as the second that we checked on. Larey was alive with a sucking chest wound and an arm wound. We patched him up and Lince grabbed the M-60 and I carried Larey.

By the time we got back to Sgt. Rogerson he had made contact with the company and help was on the way. Larey, as you know, survived but I never knew until I saw him again in 1985 at my first reunion in Washington, D.C. Hope this helps! Luke



**Our good buddy, the late Larey McCorkle  
A/2/503**

## October Memories Continued

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



**Frenchy, chowing down in the boonies.**

**T**hat whole area was crawling with dinks and after Larey got hit and Lucas took out that dink, Bowbowski had me go out alone with a PRC 25 the next night and watch over the body and call in a strike if they showed up to retrieve it.

That whole night tucked under some large plants and foliage for camouflage and knowing the place was crawling with enemy was the longest and feared night I ever had. Two days later on October 3rd we walked right into a base camp and all hell broke loose. Sgt Bobowski and I received the Bronze Star for valor for taking out two .51 cal machine gun bunkers that day.

Sgt Bowbowski and Sp4 Borgas started putting down suppressive fire while I crawled up on the bunkers and took them out. A friend of mine named Roundtree caught a .51 in the side as he stepped in front of our 1st Platoon Leader (I thought it was Lt. Guy but not sure) to knock him out of the way of the one .51 that brought pee down on us. After we swept the base camp we headed out that night to a nighttime rendezvous point. I remember that day as if it was yesterday. Seeing .51 tracer rounds coming in on your ass is an experience I'll never forget.



**1LT Bob Guy**

While crawling out one of the bunkers spotted me and I never will forget seeing the tracer rounds looking like the size of golf balls on fire coming down on my ass, and I played dead - in my mind I realized I was going to die anyways. Ray Wilson, 6'3" black guy, who started to crawl out after me because he thought I was hit shouting "*Frenchy! I'm coming for ya!*" and I turned and told him to get his big black ass out of there as I just laid there playing dead. He jumped up and dove behind one of those huge termite mounds -- I still remember as he dove behind it the whole damn thing just exploded from the gun fire but later found out he made it back. I used to be prejudiced, but that day until today realized we are all one just as we were back then.



*(continued....)*





**"Sgt Bobowski, 1st Plt-A/2/503 and his squad on APC's - the timeframe is during Operation Sioux City and we're in War Zone 'D' Bobowski is to the left with the 'We Try Harder' button on his helmet...It was good to 'ride' rather than walk."**  
 (Photo from Jack Kelley, CO A/2/503)

The irony of the whole thing is I was a PFC, lost my friend I used to hang out with and Borgas, Wilson and those who put rounds down range so I could do my job never got a damn thing. When Top called me in to tell me they were giving me a stripe (SPC4 and the Bronze Star for Valor) and was going to have a dedication on the PSP to award Bobowski and I medals, I refused to go, and he said I would get busted. I remember telling him to save me the time to get stripped of the SPC4 and just keep my PFC stripes on. For whatever reason he laughed and said get the hell out of here and that was the end of that.

I hated the politics of war and guess that's why I haven't changed much to this day. These emails brought me back to a day I've tried to forget. We were a tough fighting outfit and always will be proud of those many many clicks I walked with in hell with my brothers. If they need these documents I would be happy to send them to someone, Bobowski and I are on the same one and account of that firefight of October 3rd 1966.

*Airborne All the Way! Frenchy*



**On July 9, 2005, Alpha Company's guidon returns to Vietnam by Maj. Gus Vendetti (L) and Capt. Bill Vose.**

###



**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**  
**Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate)**  
**APO San Francisco 96250**

**General Order**  
**Number 591**

**1 December 1966**

**~ AWARD OF THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL FOR HEROISM ~**

1. TC 320. The following AWARD is announced.

**PELLERIN, LEO A.**

Specialist Four, E4, USA, Co. A, 2nd Bn (Abn), 503d Inf

Awarded: Bronze Star Medal with "V" Device

Date action: 7 October 1966

Theater: Republic of Vietnam

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

Specialist Four Pellerin distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 7 October 1966, in the Republic of Vietnam. On this day while conducting a search and destroy operation in the vicinity of Phouc Vinh Province Republic of Vietnam, Company "A" made contact with a well-entrenched Viet Cong force. Specialist Four Pellerin was serving as a grenadier in the first platoon which was acting as the point platoon for the company. Upon making contact the point platoon became immediately pinned down by heavy fire from two heavy machine guns employed in bunkers. Specialist Four Pellerin sat upright in the midst of the incoming fire, and placed suppressive fire on the enemy positions until he expended all of his ammunition.



Realizing the seriousness of the situation, and with complete disregard for his own safety, Specialist Four Pellerin crawled forward to within 15 meters of the enemy positions and set up two claymore mines, aiming them directly at the bunkers. He then returned thru the murderous hail of machine gun fire to his original position where he detonated the mines. Inspired by this act of courage and display of utter disregard for his own personal welfare the platoon pushed forward overrunning the Viet Cong positions. Specialist Four Pellerin's outstanding display of aggressiveness, devotion to duty, and personal bravery were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.



Authority: By direction of the President under the provisions of Executive Order 11046, 24 August 1962 and USARV Message 16695, AVA-S, 1 July 1966.

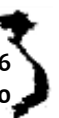
**FOR THE COMMANDER:**

**OFFICIAL:**

**J.R. MAILLER**  
**MAJ, AGC**  
**Adjutant General**

**(Signed)**

**E.B. Roberson, 1LT, AGC**  
**Asst AG**



# VA releases FY2017 budget request

Veteran Affairs News Release

February 9, 2016

## Care and Benefits for Veterans Strengthened by \$182 Billion VA Budget

WASHINGTON -- In his FY 2017 budget, President Obama is proposing \$182.3 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Funding will continue to support the largest transformation in VA history; expand access to timely, high-quality health care and benefits; and advance efforts to end homelessness among Veterans.

*"VA has before it one of the greatest opportunities in its history to transform the way it cares for our Veterans who nobly served and sacrificed for our Nation," said VA Secretary Robert*



Secretary McDonald

*A. McDonald. "As we work to become a more efficient, effective and responsive, Veteran-centric Department, we can't do it alone; we need the help of Congress. This year, VA submitted over 100 legislative proposals, including 40 new proposals to better serve Veterans. Our goal is provide the best care to our Veterans while removing obstacles or barriers that prevent them from getting the care they deserve."*

### Highlights from the President's 2017 Budget request for VA

The FY 2017 budget includes \$78.7 billion in discretionary funding, largely for health care and \$103.6 billion for mandatory benefit programs such as disability compensation and pensions. The \$78.7 billion for discretionary spending is \$3.6 billion (4.9 percent) above the 2016 enacted level, including over \$3.6 billion in medical care collections from health insurers and Veteran copayments. The budget also requests \$70.0 billion, including collections, for the 2018 advance appropriations for medical care, an increase of \$1.5 billion and 2.1 percent above the 2017 medical care budget request. The request includes \$103.9 billion in 2018 mandatory advance appropriations for Compensation and Pensions, Readjustment Benefits and Veterans Insurance and Indemnities benefits programs in the Veterans Benefits Administration.

### Health Care

With a medical care budget of \$68.6 billion, including collections, VA is positioned to continue expanding health care services to its millions of Veteran patients. Health care is being provided to over 922,000 Veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn/Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) and Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS). Major spending categories within the health care budget are:

- \* \$12.2 billion for care in the community;
- \* \$8.5 billion for long-term care;
- \* \$7.8 billion for mental health;
- \* \$1.6 billion for homeless Veterans;
- \* \$1.5 billion for Hepatitis-C treatments;
- \* \$725 million for Caregivers;
- \* \$601 million for spinal cord injuries; and
- \* \$284 million for traumatic brain injuries.



President Barack Obama, Commander-In-Chief

### Expanding Access

The President's Budget ensures that care and other benefits are available to Veterans when and where they need them. Among the programs that will expand access under the proposed budget are:

- \* \$12.2 billion for care in the community compared to \$10.5 billion in 2015, a 16 percent increase;

*(continued....)*



\* \$1.2 billion in telehealth funding, which helps patients monitor chronic health care conditions and increases access to care, especially in rural and remote locations;

\* \$515 million for health care services specifically designed for women, an increase of 8.5 percent over the present level;

\* \$836 million for the activation of new and enhanced health care facilities;

\* \$900 million for major and minor construction projects, including funding for seismic corrections, two new cemeteries, and two gravesite expansions; and

\* \$171 million for improved customer service by providing an integrated services delivery platform.

#### **Improving the Efficiency of Claims Processing**

The President's Budget provides for continued implementation of the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) robust Transformation Plan -- a series of people, process, and technology initiatives -- in 2017. This plan will continue to systematically improve the quality and efficiency of claims processing.

Major claims transformation initiatives in the budget invest \$323 million to bring leading-edge technology to claims processing, including:

\* \$180 million (\$143 million in Information Technology and \$37 million in VBA) to enhance the electronic claims processing system -- the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS); and

\* \$143 million for Veterans Claims Intake Program (VCIP) to continue conversion of paper records, such as Veterans' medical records, into electronic images and data in VBMS.

In addition, the President's Budget supports increasing VBA's workforce to address staffing needs so it can continue to improve the delivery of benefits to Veterans. As VBA continues to receive and complete more disability compensation rating claims, the volume of non-rating claims correspondingly increases. The request for \$54 million for 300 additional full-time equivalent employees (FTE) and claims processing support will allow VBA to provide more timely actions on non-rating claims.

#### **Appeals Reform**

The current appeals process is complicated and ineffective, and Veterans on average are waiting about 5 years for a final decision on an appeal that reaches the Board of Veterans' Appeals, with thousands waiting much longer. The 2017 Budget proposes a Simplified Appeals initiative -- legislation and resources -- to provide Veterans with a simple, fair, and streamlined appeals process in which they would receive a final appeals decision within one year from filing an appeal by 2021. The Budget requests \$156 million and 922 FTE

for the Board, an increase of \$46 million and 242 FTE over 2016, as a down payment on a long-term, sustainable plan to improve services to Veterans.

#### **Ending Veterans Homelessness**

The Administration has made the ending of Veteran homelessness a national priority. The Budget requests \$1.6 billion for programs to prevent or reduce Veteran homelessness, including:

\* \$300 million for Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) to promote housing stability;

\* \$496 million for the HUD-VASH program, wherein VA provides case management services for at-risk Veterans and their families and HUD provides permanent housing through its Housing Choice Voucher program; and

\* \$247 million in grant and per diem payments that support temporary housing provided by community-based organizations.

#### **MyVA**

The 2017 budget continues the largest Department-wide transformation in VA's history through the MyVA initiative, which is changing VA's culture, processes, and capabilities to put the needs, expectations and interests of Veterans and their families first. MyVA has developed five objectives fundamental to the transformation of VA: 1) improving the Veterans' experience; 2) improving the employee experience; 3) improving support service excellence; 4) establishing a culture of continuous performance improvement; and 5) enhancing strategic partnerships. To aid in this transformation, the Department established the Veterans Experience Office (VEO). The VEO will represent the voice of Veterans and their families in Departmental governance; design and implement customer-centric programs to make interactions with VA easier; and support VA's "mission owners" in carrying out MyVA improvements across the system.

#### **Veterans Choice Act**

The Veterans Choice Act provides \$5 billion to increase Veterans' access to health care by hiring more physicians and staff and improving the VA's physical infrastructure. It also provides \$10 billion through 2017 to establish a temporary program (the Veterans Choice Program) to improve access to health care by allowing eligible Veterans who meet certain wait-time or distance standards to use eligible health care providers outside of the VA system....

*(continued....)*



....In 2017, VA will use the Choice Act funds in concert with annual appropriations to meet VA staffing and infrastructure needs and expand non-VA care to Veterans who are eligible for the Veterans Choice Program. VA plans to spend \$1.4 billion in 2016 and \$853 million in 2017 to support more than 9,700 new medical care staff hired through the Choice Act; \$980 million in 2016 and \$116 million in 2017 to improve VA facilities.

#### Other Key Services for Veterans

- \* \$286 million to administer VA's system of 134 national cemeteries, including additional funding for operations of new cemeteries and the National Shrine program to raise and realign gravesites;

- \* \$4.3 billion for information technology (IT), including investments to strengthen cybersecurity, modernize Veterans' electronic health records, improve Veterans' access to benefits, and enhance the IT infrastructure; and

- \* \$125 million for state cemetery grants and state extended care grants.

#### Enhanced Oversight of VA's programs

- \* The 2017 budget requests an additional \$23 million and 100 FTE for the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to enhance oversight and assist the OIG in fulfilling its statutory mission and making recommendations that will help VA improve the care and services it provides.

VA operates the largest integrated health care system in the country; the tenth largest life insurance program in the Nation, with \$1.3 trillion in coverage; monthly disability compensation, pensions, and survivors benefits to 5.3 million beneficiaries; educational assistance or vocational rehabilitation benefits and services to nearly 1.2 million students; mortgage guaranties to over 2 million homeowners; and the largest cemetery system in the Nation.

Information about VA's 2017 budget submission and links to related documents may be found here.

Information about the President's budget may be found here. <http://www.va.gov/budget/products.asp>

Sent in by:

Ben L. Humphries, President  
Vietnam Veterans of America  
Florida State Council  
"Together Then, Together Now"

Vincent Rega  
Vietnam Veterans of America  
Secretary, Florida State Council



## Positions of top candidates for Commander-In-Chief on privatization of the VA

We should know where they stand.



Ben Carson

**Carson would eventually eliminate the Veterans Health Administration,** but in the meantime, he would offer veterans their choice of medical care at a Defense, VA or civilian facility.

*"The VA is like the federal version of the Department of Motor Vehicles:*

*inefficient, incompetent and infuriating. Except the VA is much worse: at least the DMV's long wait times do not kill its applicants."*

**USA Today**



Hillary Clinton

**Clinton would fight wholesale privatization of the VA health care system.**

*"The problems are serious, systemic and unacceptable. They need to be fixed, they need to be fixed now."*

**CNN**



Ted Cruz

**Cruz supports privatization of VA.**

*"Why can't every veteran choose to go to any doctor he or she wants? I believe each of our vets knows a heck of a lot better what is needed for [his or her] health care than does some bureaucrat in Washington."*

**Boston Globe**



John Kasich

**Kasich supports a more robust Voucher System for veterans to get health care outside of the VA.**

*"We need to expand the voucher program so a veteran can get the health care they need as soon as they can possibly get it, and [they] should not be just*

*limited to the VA hospitals."*

**CNN**



Marco Rubio

**"(Rubio) has introduced legislation allowing secretaries of the VA to remove any VA employee based on performance or misconduct...If**

**veterans don't feel like the Veterans Health Administration suits their needs,**

**Marco supports giving them the option to use the exact same funds to see an approved private sector provider of their choice."**

**Marcorubio.com**

(continued....)





Bernie Sanders

**Sanders does not support VA privatization.** *"Instead of cutting benefits for the men and women who have served our country, we should ask the most profitable corporations and the wealthiest among us to pay their fair share."* [Berniesanders.com](http://Berniesanders.com)



Donald Trump

**Trump would privatize the Veterans Health Administration.** *"All veterans eligible for VA health care can bring their veteran's ID card to any doctor or care facility that accepts Medicare to get the care they need immediately,"* his website states. *"The current state*

*of the Department of Veterans Affairs is absolutely unacceptable. Over 300,000 veterans died waiting for care. Corruption and incompetence were excused. Politicians in Washington have done too little too slowly to fix it. This situation can never happen again, and when Donald J. Trump is president, it will be fixed – fast."* [donaldjtrump.com](http://donaldjtrump.com)

###

## A Few Quotes by Former Commanders-In-Chief & Wannabe's

***"It's amazing I won. I was running against peace, prosperity, and incumbency."***

—George W. Bush, June 14, 2001, speaking to Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson, unaware that a live television camera was still rolling.

***"It depends on what the meaning of the words 'is' is."***

—Bill Clinton, during his 1998 grand jury testimony on the Monica Lewinsky affair.

***"Even though most people agree... I'm presenting a fair deal, the fact that they don't take it means that I should somehow do a Jedi mind-meld with these folks and convince them to do what's right."***

—President Obama, mixing up Star Wars and Star Trek references while discussing working with Republicans in Congress (March 1, 2013).

***"Well, I learned a lot....I went down to (Latin America) to find out from them and (learn) their views. You'd be surprised. They're all individual countries."***

—President Ronald Reagan

***"Things are more like they are now than they have ever been."***

—President Gerald Ford

***"Blessed are the young, for they shall inherit the national debt."***

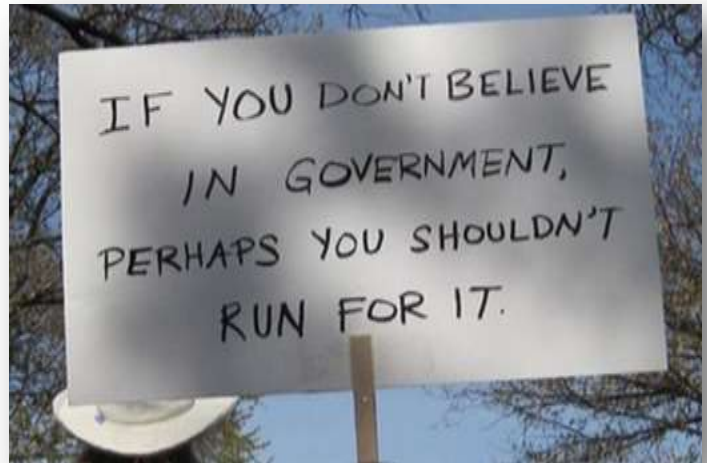
—President Herbert Hoover

***"When the President does it, that means it's not illegal."***

—Richard Nixon, in a 1977 interview with David Frost

***"I believe in an America where millions of Americans believe in an America that's the America millions of Americans believe in. That's the America I love."***

—Mitt Romney (January 2012)



**Editor's Choice of best Commander-In-Chief or Wannabe quote:**

***"I promise you, the president has a big stick. I promise you."***

—Joe Biden, citing Theodore Roosevelt's famous quote, *"Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far."*

**Vote wisely.**

###

## Service Records and Proof of Your Eligibility

### Veterans Authority FAQ

In order to get your VA benefits you have to prove to the VA that you are entitled to them. Sadly, they will not seek you out and give you a giant benefits package with everything done for you. You have to give the VA office an official copy of your DD Form 214/215 or NGB 22/ 22A. These forms are the most important forms you will be given during your military service as they are the key to getting all of your benefits.

**Note:** We strongly urge you to contact your nearest Disabled American Veterans (DAV) office or other vet organization for assistance and representation.



# Alyce Dixon, the oldest female Veteran, passes away.

**She was one-of-a-kind; a strong-willed, funny, wise, giving and feisty WWII Veteran.**

The oldest female Veteran, the high-spirited, fun-loving, amazing local celebrity, Alyce Dixon, died peacefully in her sleep at the Washington DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center's Community Living Center. She was 108 years old.



She is well-known in the community for her elegant sense of style, her long repertoire of eyebrow-raising jokes and very strong opinions. She credits her long life to sharing and caring.

***"I always shared what little I have, that's why He let me live so long. I just believe in sharing and giving. If you have a little bit of something and someone else needs it, share,"*** she said.



**VA Sec. Bob McDonald meets with Alyce Dixon in January 2015. Dixon, one of the nation's oldest living female Veterans, passed away this week at the age of 108 years old.**

Dixon was born in 1907, when an American's average life expectancy was only 47 years. She was born Alice Ellis in Boston. At the age of 16, she changed the spelling of her name to Alyce after seeing a picture show starring actress Alyce Mills. She lived life on her own terms from that day forward.

This excerpt, posted January 2016, is from a story originally published on the Washington DC VAMC's website.

(Photo credit: Rachel Larue)

## *In Memory of Sky Soldier* **Ronald Eldred**

April 4, 1947 ~ December 7, 2015

### **Tribute**



Ronald Eldred, 68, of Tampa, passed away on Monday, December 7, 2015. Ronald was born April 4, 1947, in Honesdale, PA., to Roland and Gloria Eldred. He was a loved father, brother and friend. He is an honored Veteran who served as a Paratrooper in the Vietnam War, 173rd Airborne Brigade Special Forces. Ronald was a leader and strong business man, he was Vice President of Bally Total Fitness for many years in Chicago, IL and later helped expand the business to south and central Florida. He was also successful in becoming a business owner to one of the first all Women's Fitness Health clubs in Central Florida, New Body Fitness. He is remembered for his dedication to life, following the word of God, and for being full of vitality and strength. He was a member of the Elks Lodge and a celebrated veteran. He is survived by his son Brandon Eldred and daughter Ashley Holyfield and her husband, Nathan Holyfield as well as family in Pennsylvania, brother's, Pat Liuzzo and Joe Liuzzo, and sister's Susan Wiggins, Gloria Gennie, and Nancy Sullenburger. Services were held December 18, 2015, at Florida National Cemetery, Bushnell, FL, with full Military Honors.

***Rest Easy Ron, ATW!***



## March 3, 1967 - Operation Junction City

### *Description of the incident*

By Robert A. "Luke" Lucas  
A/2/503



Some of the guys who were on the ambush which went wrong.

(Photo courtesy of Bob "Luke" Lucas, A/2/503)

My company was in a defensive position along with the rest of our battalion on the drop zone. That morning Charlie Company sent out a platoon to recon the area. Shortly after departing our area they ran into an ambush and were taking heavy casualties.

A Company was tasked to send help to them. The 2nd platoon, my platoon, was sent out to rescue them. We could hear the sound of the battle and the fire fight was very intense. As we approached their position the enemy withdrew. When we reached the platoon the first thing I saw was three dead soldiers laying by an M-60 Machine Gun. All three were shot in the head. We immediately put out security and started to treat the wounded. We were eventually able to evacuate the wounded with additional help from the battalion. It was a real mess. C Company had, I believe, about 15 men KIA and many WIA.

After evacuating the dead and wounded my platoon was told to track the enemy. The point was taken by one of my best friends, Norman Renfro. My squad was in the rear and I was the first squad R.T.O. We had not gone very far when a single shot rang out. I was called on my radio and told to send the medic up front as Renfro was hit in the arm. I alerted the medic and he was heading to the front when a second shot rang out.

I was called again and told that Renfro was hit again and shot in the head. I was so enraged that I ran up to the medic and grabbed him and took him to my friend.

When we got there I saw Renfro propped up by a tree with his brain exposed and he was gasping for air. Just about that time the whole jungle erupted in gun fire. Everyone was looking for cover and trying to return fire. I looked to my left and saw a mound about 15-20 meters away and ran to it and dove in behind it. Another soldier, Mark Austin, joined me and we continued to fire our weapons toward the enemy.

A few minutes later another soldier came up on my left and started firing. He was new and had only been in VN for about 3-4 weeks. I reached over and grabbed his web gear and tried to pull him in behind the mound and felt his body jerk. I look at him and blood on his head and he was dead. He had been shot through his helmet and died instantly. I believe his name was Clyde Caires from Hawaii.

Somebody must have called the battalion for fire support because shortly after Caires was killed I heard incoming rounds from the 4.2 mortars. Three white phosphorus rounds landed right behind me and hit the guys to my rear. A large piece of shrapnel landed on the calf of my right leg and was hot but I shook it off quickly. I heard the screams from behind me and when I looked back I saw that Peter Schutz took a direct hit and was dead. His glasses melted on his face and he was burned all over....

*(continued....)*



....The soldier next to him was Steven Adams and he was alive and screaming in pain. One look told me he was not going to live. He was burned over 90% of his body and was in terrible pain. I called over my radio and screamed to cease fire three or four times. The next voice I heard was CPT Carnes our Company Commander asking what happened. I told him that the mortars had hit in the center of our platoon. He asked me to adjust fire and I told him I couldn't do that. I did not have a map or compass nor did I know how the platoon was laid out. I don't know why I never heard anyone else on the radios but I remember being the only one from the platoon talking to the Company Commander.

I don't know how long the fighting went on but eventually the word spread among the platoon to withdraw and we started to get our wounded together. I called back to CPT Carnes and said that we were getting ready to withdraw and that this was my last transmission. I was going to destroy my radio and carry as many weapons out as possible. Myself and Mark Austin grabbed and loaded as many M-16 rifles as we could carry and gave covering fire to the men that were withdrawing with the wounded. When we caught up I noticed 2 men carrying Adams on a poncho and he was still alive. As I got alongside of them to help, his right leg fell off and onto the ground. The W.P. had eaten through his leg and bone and the rest of his body. He died on the way back and the moaning and crying finally stopped. I still think of the sight of him every day.

We had to leave three of our dead soldiers behind as we had so many wounded to carry. When I got back to the Drop Zone I was grabbed by CPT Carnes and after a debriefing he told me we were going out first thing in the morning and he wanted me on point. He said that we were bringing back our guys Renfro, Schutz and Caires, and that was that. I told him that my year was up in a couple of weeks and I didn't want to go. He said that if I didn't do it I would regret it for the rest of my life. He eventually convinced me.

We left early the next morning by a different route and found all three guy's without any enemy action. We brought the three bodies back to the DZ and the commander put me on a chopper back to our base camp in Bien Hoa with them and told me to make sure they were taken care of.

I DEROS'd out of NAM in the middle of March.

(Photo added)

**“NO DEROS ALPHA”**

###

## Back at Base Camp

**O**n March 3rd 1967 I was in my bunker back at base camp which was where we parachuted into on Feb. 22nd.

Someone started yelling get your gear on, we have a platoon in a fire fight. We loaded onto APCs and started moving out. There was a trench that the APCs couldn't get across so we unloaded and humped out to help. As we got there, the fighting had stopped.



**Dallas Duncan**

We could see 2 GIs with their hands up, surrendering to the VC about 75 meters from us. So we yelled and they turned around and ran to us weeping. I was in 1st squad, 1st platoon of A Co 2/503rd. I was 1st Lt Owens' RTO.

We secured the area and cut an LZ and loaded up 20 plus KIAs and medevac'd them out by chopper. By then, there was another platoon that met up with us there. We assumed the VC had already retreated from the area so both platoons lined up and got ready to move out. One platoon moving out to the left 500 meters and we would do the same to the right. If no contact was made with the VC, we were to meet back here at the LZ and move back to the base camp.

One platoon was on the left and the platoon I was in was on the right. As we started moving, no more than 10 meters, our point man spotted a grenade tied to a small tree 3 ft off the ground with a black commo trip wire. After disarming it, we walked, I think, no more than 75 meters and all hell broke out! The VC was still there.

I could hear the screams for the medics and my brothers yelling (VC) *"they're in the trees!"* Lt Owens yelled get online with the other platoon. We tried but we were pinned down. Lt Owens asked me for my phone and he called in a directional round which I think landed behind us 75 meters and to the right 25 meters. So he said *"up 75 meters, left 25 meters, fire for support"*. I said to myself, I'm just a private and he's a 1st Lt but sounds like to me it's going to be landing on us, and it did so he yelled retreat. That's when I was wounded with a WP mortar round and retreated back to where we had earlier cut a LZ for the KIAs. My wounds weren't as bad as my brothers so I was one of the last to be evac'd out.

**Dallas Duncan, A/2/503**

(continued....)



**W**e arrived in country 4/1/67. Processed in and assigned to C/2/503. They were just returning from Junction City II. We helped build wooden barracks, went to jungle school for a week and then went to the third platoon. They lost their platoon leader, Lt Guyer, a very popular leader and others during JC II. This was one beat up company with everyone's nerves pressed to the limit.

I am not sure of his KIA date but we lost men on every operation while operating out of Bien Hoa. It was a brutal battle of attrition. We "cherries" we're treated as disposable. They strapped radios on Walter Bills and me and gave Sam Stewart an M-16 as part of a fire team. I never recall being at full strength the entire year, averaging about 25 men in our platoon.

I hope Sam and Bill, with their better memories can contribute more. Regards,

**Roger Dick**  
C/2/503



**Roger Dick**

**H**i Guys. I served with C/2/503, on operation "Junction City", Feb 22/1967. After the jump in the early morning, we gathered and dug in around the DZ to wait the heavy drop. First time I had seen such a sight, everything was falling from the sky, C's, supplies, 105's, and A1M1's jeeps. After about two to three hours of digging and dodging pieces from an explosion of a fuel balloon close to a mortar pit, we set out on search and destroy missions.

I, as most of the time, was given the assignment of "point", which I thought was because I was trusted and had never walked into an ambush, but later came to find out the joke, "I had such big feet, the word was if I didn't trip it, it was not there". It took a long time to get over that one!

I remember Paul Curran, because he was given one of the new M-16's that came down, the one's with the over and under 79 launcher, but it worked out right, because he could make that gun sing!

That night proving our perimeter was "Charlie", we had strung out trip's and Claymores six deep, so we were ready, and one of the recurrent events that still



**Terry Sabree**

dogs me to this day is the constant outgoing and incoming of tracers all night. Sometime the only way I can sleep now at night is to go back to that time and knowing my fellow Sky Soldiers were on guard and had my back, then I feel at ease.

God I love you guys.

**Terry Sabree**  
C/2/503

**~ 3 March 1967 ~**

**The 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, lost 20 men as the result of an action east of Kontum on 03 March 1967.**

**The action began when a platoon from Charlie Company was ambushed and continued when additional forces were inserted to recover the trapped men. Nineteen were killed in the action; one died the following day of wounds received:**



**Norman A Renfro, KIA**  
A/2/503

04 January 1943 - 03 March 1967  
Oakland, California

***I wish I could have known him.  
I never even got to call him dad.  
I have always been so proud of him.  
I know he has always watched over me.  
Love, Rosie***

(continued....)



## A Company KIA, 3 March 1967

SP4 Peter J. Schutz  
Utica, MI



PFC Charles B. Alandt  
Royal Oak, MI



PFC Lionel S. Anthony, Los Angeles, CA (DoW  
3/4/1967)



PFC Steven J. Adams  
Springfield, OH



PFC Charles H. Bennett  
Fayetteville, NC



PFC Clyde J. Caires  
Kalaheo, HI



PFC Paul W. Curran  
East Milton, MA



PVT Norman A. Renfro, Oakland, CA

PFC Micheal J. Drake, Stanford, FL

## C Company KIA, 3 March 1967

1LT Welborn A. Callahan  
Columbus, GA



PFC Michael L. Ebald  
Philadelphia, PA



SSG Melvin C. Gaines, Los Angeles, CA  
SSG Angel P. Saez-Ramirez, Orocovis, PR

SGT John R. Stalter  
Pico Rivera, CA

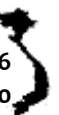


PFC Earl S. Garrison  
Brunswick, ME



(continued....)

SP4 Moses Green, Jamaica, NY, medic, HHC w/C/2/503



PFC James A. Skiles, New Brunswick, NJ  
PFC Selvester J. Vasques, Los Angeles, CA  
PFC Herbert Wilson, New York, NY  
PVT Lawrence Strack, Richmond Hill, NY

***"To live in the hearts we  
leave behind,  
is never to have died."***

Thomas Campbell, circa 1888

(Posted on the Virtual Wall by a cousin of James Skiles)

## From the After Action Report

(Declassified)



### D + 9 (3 March 1967)

Changes in Task Force Organization: A/1/4th Cav  
OPCON to E/17th Cav

**Operational Summary:** The 173d Airborne Brigade, under the Operational Control of the 1st Infantry Division began displacement of the Brigade CP (-) from Position LIZ to SUOI DA (IT 3457). The 1/503d Infantry retained their blocking positions on the east flank of the operational area, provided security and conducted patrolling in the eastern sector of the AO. The Recon Platoon remained under the OPCON of the 4/503d Infantry. Two batteries of artillery from the 1st Division

took up firing positions in the Battalion sector and B/1/503d Infantry was assigned with the security of the site. At 0810 hours, Major Hodges assumed the duties of the Battalion XO. There were no hostile contacts resulting from patrols during this day.

At 1200 hours, C/2/503d Infantry made contact with a large enemy force. Elements of A/2/503d Infantry were later called from the north and south of the contact area to aid Charlie Company. The enemy broke contact with A/2/503d Infantry in pursuit. The enemy employed 60mm mortars, 57mm recoilless rifles, automatic and semi-automatic weapons, claymore mines and grenades. Four (4) TAC air strikes, artillery and 4.2" mortars supported the 2/503d Infantry (-). The contact resulted in 20 US KIA, 28 US WIA and 39 VC KIA (BC).

The 4/503d Infantry continued their blocking mission along HIGHWAY 4 WITHIN ao 2. The Companies continued local security patrolling in assigned AO's. At 1313 hours, C/4/503d Infantry was alerted to have two platoons ready to reinforce the 2/503d Infantry (-) at vicinity XT 3694.

At 0715 hours, the 2d and 3d Platoons of D/16th Armor returned to the company CP area and at 1110 hours, the 1st Platoon was instructed to return. At 1200 hours, C/2/503d Infantry had established contact with an estimated company (+) size VC force. The 1st Platoon was instructed to transport an infantry Platoon of A/2/503d Infantry as far as possible into the contact area. At XT 352938, the 1st Platoon/D/16th Armor was barred from further progress by a large ditch and the infantry platoon was dismounted at that point to proceed toward the point of contact. At 1920 hours, the infantry elements of the 2/503d Infantry returned and the 1st Platoon of D/16th Armor transported them back to Position LIZ.

On this day, E/17th Cavalry received the mission of moving to Artillery Base 1 and securing a 155mm Howitzer Battery. Attached to the Troop was the 1st Platoon of Troop A/1/4th Cavalry plus a section of twin 40mm Dusters. Since the attachment with the original strength of E/17th Cavalry consisted of a fairly sizeable force, it was decided to keep one Cavalry Platoon on continuous patrolling throughout the AO.

On the evening of 3 March 1967, it was decided that elements of the 2/503d Infantry would return to the contact site of C/2/503d Infantry in order to retrieve 3 bodies which were left behind due to the fierceness of the contact and to recon the area for further enemy resistance.

###



# *In Memory of Sky Soldier* *P. Donald Kauffman*

September 11, 1946 ~ January 3, 2016

## **Tribute**



P. Donald Kauffman, 69, of Denver, died Sunday, January 3, 2016 at Reading Hospital & Medical Center. He is survived by his wife of 48 years, Bonnie F. (Miller) Kauffman.

Born in Lancaster, he was the son of Marian E. (Getz) Kauffman of New Holland and the late Phares B. Kauffman.

Don served in the U. S. Army during the Vietnam War, serving with the 173rd Airborne. He was a member of the Charles E Ludwig Post 7362 Veterans of Foreign Wars, New Holland.

He was an avid hunter and fisherman who loved nature. He also enjoyed spending time with his friends but most of all he loved his family.

Surviving in addition to his wife and mother are two sons: Troy D. Kauffman, Denver and Chad S. married to Kimberly (Leaman) Kauffman, Blue Ball; two grandchildren: Brock and Kayla Kauffman; three siblings: Gary married to Sylvia (Kieffer) Kauffman, Patricia married to Robert Haines, and Deborah married to Todd Hillard, all of New Holland. He was preceded in death by a brother, Kenneth G. Kauffman.

Interment with military honors was held in Bowmansville Union Cemetery.

## *Florida Chapter Dedicates Memorial Marker*



**173d Airborne memorial marker placed at Jacksonville National Cemetery in Florida.**

**[Send in by Jim Bradley, 173d Florida Chapter]**



## Elite Forces



On Sunday, December 20, 2015, Elite Forces, Chapter VI, 173d Airborne Brigade Association, held its annual Christmas Party, in Huntley, IL. War stories were shared, there was a silent auction and there were displays of our fellow Sky Soldiers. It was a wonderful evening which included guests from the Illinois Secretary of State's Military Advisory Council, a doctor who offered to provide assistance on VA Claims, and remarks from our Officers. The remarks from the Officers concluded with an Infantryman's Award to Bob Getz for his services during the year (the photo above shows the Sky Soldiers with Bob at the presentation - From left to right: Terry Gannon, Dan Cosgrove, Frank Miceli, Bob Getz, Jose Palacios, Benito Garcia, Buzz Bizante, and Takie Mandakas). *AIRBORNE, ALL THE WAY!!*

###

### **Sky Soldier engineers build fighting positions, support Allied Spirit IV**

**February 4, 2016**

By Staff Sgt. Opal Vaughn, 173rd Airborne Brigade

HOHENFELS, Germany – Paratroopers from the U.S. Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade participate in U.S. Army Europe's Exercise Allied Spirit IV at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center Jan. 10 through Feb 5, 2016.

More than 2,400 participants from seven NATO allies were involved in the annual exercise taking place at the Hohenfels Training Area or, The Box, as it is known. The Box is unique in the fact that it provides a hands-on laboratory of vast live-fire ranges, and steep and



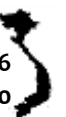
forested terrain that can replicate many different environments.

The challenging terrain did not deter the paratroopers from the 54th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 173rd Airborne Brigade, as they sent out teams to prepare and construct fighting positions, building on lessons learned from previous multinational exercises.

*"So far we've worked with the British and the German armies,"* said Spc. Felipe Workman, a horizontal construction engineer assigned to the 54th BEB.

**Excerpt. Read entire article at:**

[www.army.mil/article/161834/Sky\\_Soldier\\_engineers\\_build\\_fighting\\_positions\\_support Allied Spirit IV/](http://www.army.mil/article/161834/Sky_Soldier_engineers_build_fighting_positions_support_Allied_Spirit_IV/)



# Veterans Say Trained Dogs Help With PTSD, But The VA Won't Pay

Published January 4, 2016

Lauren Silverman



Cheryl Woolnough, director of training at Patriot PAWS in Rockwall, Texas, works with Papi, a Labrador retriever.

Lauren Silverman/KERA News

At a warehouse near Dallas, a black Lab named Papi tugs on a rope to open a fridge and passes his trainer a plastic water bottle with his mouth.

Service dogs are often trained to help veterans with physical disabilities. Now, a growing number are being trained to meet the demand from vets with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues.

Those dogs learn extra tricks — how to sweep a house for intruders, for example, so a veteran feels safe.

*"We teach them something called perimeter, where they go into the house and they check, they just touch all the doors and all the windows,"* says Cheryl Woolnough, training director at Patriot PAWS, a nonprofit in Rockwall, Texas, that provides service dogs. These dogs also learn how to create personal space for a veteran by stepping in front or behind the owner to block people from approaching.

Most veterans who apply for a service dog have PTSD, often on top of physical disabilities, according to Terri Stringer, assistant executive director of Patriot

PAWS. *"We have 100 veterans on our list waiting for dogs, so we have to get more dogs,"* Stringer says. So far, though, the Department of Veterans Affairs won't help pay for service dogs for PTSD, citing a lack of scientific evidence. But it's launching a study to find out what effect specially trained service dogs can have on the lives of veterans with PTSD. Vets with PTSD who already rely on service dogs say the research should have been done years ago.

The training process for these service dogs is complex. It starts with puppies — often Labs, poodles or Labradoodles. The little guys get their shots and learn simple commands first. Then they go either to a puppy raiser who teaches them to behave in public places or they go to prison, literally. Stringer calls it the "big doghouse."



Jay Springstead, a Vietnam veteran who has post-traumatic stress disorder, started working at Patriot PAWS after his youngest son, an Iraq combat vet who also had PTSD, took his own life.

Lauren Silverman/KERA News

*"Prison is where they get their hard-core training,"* she says. *"They're with the inmates 24 hours a day."* The inmates teach the dogs dozens of commands. Patriot PAWS relies on three Texas prisons for the type of intensive training the dogs need to be paired with veterans. It takes more than two years and costs about \$30,000 per dog. The few veterans lucky enough to make it to the top of the list each year get dogs at no charge.

Jay Springstead, who lives outside Dallas, still has nightmares from combat in Vietnam 40 years ago. ***"A service dog for post-traumatic stress can actually help you get out into the public and regain some of that independence that you've lost,"*** he says.

(continued....)



Springstead started volunteering at Patriot PAWS after his youngest son took his own life. *"Both my sons were Iraqi combat veterans; my youngest one had severe post-traumatic stress,"* he says. *"So I'm familiar with the symptoms and I also know how important dogs are to anyone's recovery."*

Springstead and many others are frustrated that the VA is not providing financial assistance to veterans who use service dogs to cope with PTSD. It's a complaint Patricia Dorn, director of the VA's Rehabilitation Research and Development Service in Washington, D.C., has heard repeatedly. She says that while there is plenty of scientific evidence of the benefits of service dogs for people with physical disabilities, there's little in the area of mental health.

*"We understand, veterans are not happy with the agency in that we're not just providing this benefit,"* Dorn says. *"But for an agency with [over] 150 hospitals and millions of veterans we serve, we need to have the evidence base to make a determination."*

That's why the VA is conducting a randomized controlled trial on service dogs with 200 veterans with PTSD from Atlanta; Iowa City, Iowa; and Portland, Ore. Dorn says researchers will assess veterans' quality of life over a three-year period.

This isn't the first time the VA has tried to study service dogs and PTSD. An earlier effort was halted in 2011 after two service dogs bit children in veterans' homes. The current study, Dorn says, has stricter standards for dog training and a more rigorous study design.

In the meantime, Springstead says veterans sometimes get tricked into buying dogs that aren't properly trained. Patriot PAWS is one of a few dozen organizations in the country accredited through Assistance Dogs International, but there's no standardized training specific to mental health.

**Source:**

<http://keranews.org/people/lauren-silverman>

(Reprinted here courtesy of Lauren Silverman, KERA News)



**Patriot PAWS Service Dogs** is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization | CFC #35710  
**ADDRESS:** 254 Ranch Trail, Rockwall, TX 75032  
**OFFICE:** 972-772-3282 | **FAX:** 972-772-3284  
**WEB:** <http://www.patriotpaws.org/>  
**EMAIL:** [office@patriotpaws.org](mailto:office@patriotpaws.org)

## Magnificent 7



**"Since 1776 there have been an estimated 559 million American citizens.**

**Since 1776 an estimated 41 million Americans have served in the military during conflicts and wars.**

**That amounts to 7% of the total population serving to preserve the freedoms of the other 93%.**

**I thank you and your ancestors who have served among this 'Magnificent 7.'**"

**[Sent in by LTC Jack Kelley, CO A/2/503 (Ret)]  
 (Borrowed from an individual at US Army War College)**

(Image from web)

### ~ Daughter Looks for Dad's Buddies ~

Hello: I'm the fiancé of Catherine Beers, **SFC Jack Beer's** oldest child. Cathy was only 8 1/2 years old when her father was killed in action, and would love to hear any other memories people might have of him - and especially of pictures of him.

Is it possible to have something put in the 2/503 newsletter???

(SFC Beers served in B Company, 2/503 and was killed in action on 07 April 1969 near Lam Dong; he was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross).

Thanks, I look forward to hearing from you! Mark sends.

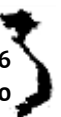
**Mark Conrad  
 MSgt, USAF (Ret)**

By all means, Mark. All references to Jack indicate he served with B/3/503 and not B/2/503. Your email request was forwarded to all 3/503 troopers in our address book. Guys, Cathy can be contacted thru Mike at Miami Valley Military History Museum, email: [curator@mvmhm.com](mailto:curator@mvmhm.com)



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# BEERS, JACK BLAINE

Sergeant First Class

B CO, 3RD BN, 503RD INFANTRY

173RD ABN BDE, USARV

Army of the United States

Clarksville, Tennessee

September 17, 1934 to April 07, 1969

JACK B BEERS is on the Wall at Panel W27, Line 28



(Photo posted on web by his daughter, Catherine Beers)

## BEERS, JACK BLAINE

Sergeant First Class, U.S. Army

Company B, 3d Battalion (Airborne), 503rd  
Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade,

Date of Action: April 7, 1969

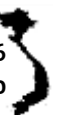


## *Citation:*

The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Jack Blaine Beers, Sergeant First Class, U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations involving conflict with an armed hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam, while serving with Company B, 3d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade. Platoon Sergeant Beers distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on the evening of 7 April 1969 during an attack by an estimated reinforced Viet Cong company on his platoon's night location near the town of Bao Loc, Lam Dong Province. Sergeant Beers moved through the initial barrage of rocket, automatic weapons and small arms fire to reach a section of the perimeter under heavy ground attack, and was painfully wounded by shrapnel from an incoming rocket when he arrived at a machine gun bunker. Despite his injury, he directed that position's fire against the aggressors and momentarily halted their assault. After hearing a rocket hit in the platoon's command post and a cry for help from his radio telephone operator, he started toward the stricken post, but was seriously wounded in the legs and stomach by shrapnel from enemy grenades and rockets as the communists began attacking from all sides. Disregarding his safety, he encouraged his men to hold their positions and crawled to a radio to call for artillery support. Although he was in an exposed location, he continued to adjust artillery strikes until he was mortally wounded by hostile small arms fire. Platoon Sergeant Beers' extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty, at the cost of his life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

HQ US Army, Vietnam, General Orders No.  
1728 (May 14, 1969)

Home Town: Clarksville, Tennessee



## 3rd Batt Rally Point at 173d Reunion

We will hold our “3rd Batt Rally Point Luncheon” in the Continental Room of the National Infantry Museum on Thursday June 9, 2016 at 11:30 hrs. We will be ordering off a menu and paying individually. We are having our Rally Luncheon on Thursday, the third day of the Reunion so as to cause the least conflict with extraordinary activities such as golf, tours and any scheduled Reunion Agenda events.

The Rally Point Luncheon provides the opportunity to meet and greet our fellow 3rd Batt Brothers in attendance and make plans for the remainder of the Reunion. The following Brothers have made the extra effort in the past to bring our colors and we are hopeful they will again be present with our Guidons flying high. If I missed any volunteer Guidon Bearers, then please let me know so we can spread the word. By the way, the more the merrier and I bought my Guidon right there just outside the Ft Benning gates.

MG Cleland (Ret) – our First Colonel of the Battalion has made the point that “*where our Rock Troopers gather we will have our Guidons present.*”

HHC – Paul Fisher

A Co – Roscoe Heyman

B Co – David Evans and/or Gary Vanschoiack

C Co – Eldon Meade and/or Mike Switzer

D Co – Herman Rainey and/or Graham Rollings

E Co – Mason Branstetter

A moment to reminisce about last year's Reunion in San Diego. It was simply fantastic. Extraordinary organization, wonderful facilities, fantastic weather. And we had plenty of areas for gathering and sharing our Brotherhood. Smiles all around. And our Guidons were flying high. If you missed that one, you missed the best one I have ever attended – please don't miss the next one.

**Mason Branstetter, LTC (Ret)**  
**HHC/D/E 3/503rd**



## One of ours



# National Infantry Museum

# GERONIMO BATTALION PLANS DINNER

**The 4/503rd Bn is hosting a Reunion Dinner for all Sky Soldiers who served in the 4/503rd Bn, on Friday, June 10, 2016, 1700-1900, at the Infantry Museum, Ft. Benning, GA, in conjunction with the 173d Abn Bde Reunion. For details contact:**

**Peyton Ligon**

Eml: [pligon3392@aol.com](mailto:pligon3392@aol.com)

**Phn: 205-746-5586**



## Vietnam War display at museum





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

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

**SC Chapter 30  
(2016 Reunion Committee)**

**Contact:**

**Phone: 803-237-3169**

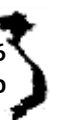
**Email: [bowway@aol.com](mailto:bowway@aol.com)**

**From the rice paddies and central highlands of Vietnam; from the sands of Iraq; from the mountains of Afghanistan; from Italy, Australia and New Zealand; from the fifty states and all points between – back to the beginning we go.**

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

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

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





What's left of A/2/503's 3rd Platoon after battle on 29 June 1966, in Xuan Loc.

## PFC Oates takes Command

*Often leadership emerges during a time of crisis and often it's unexpected. Such was the case on June 30th, 1966.*

The previous day was a tough battle for A/2/503rd against the 308th VC MF Battalion -- we sustained a number of casualties especially in the 3rd Platoon, that had taken the brunt of the battle.

Once the battle was over we re-organized; the KIAs and WIA were evacuated and positions were dug in anticipation of a counterattack by the VC. I was moving around our perimeter checking out our positions and stopped to talk to the 13 men left in the 3rd platoon. I told them they had done a great job, tried to share with their grief...and then said that since there were only 13, I planned to have them become part of one of the other two platoons.

At that time PFC Freeman Oates stepped up to me, just about nose to nose and said,

*"Captain, there's only 13 of us, and we all are PFC's, but I'm the ranking PFC, and we don't need to be put in other platoons. We're still a platoon and we need to stay that way."*

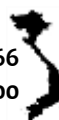
Sounded good to me, and I told Lt. Vendetti, who was the Weapons Platoon Leader, to take over the 3rd Platoon and take SSgt Willie Pitts to be the Platoon Sergeant...along with the help of PFC Oates.

**Jack Kelley**  
**CO A/2/503**

**NOTE:** Don't forget the 173d Reunion in June. If you were in A/2/503 on June 29th 1966 give us a commo check and share your thoughts and memories of that day---  
[jacktkelley@aol.com](mailto:jacktkelley@aol.com)  
or 910-488-0165



Doc Bob Beaton and fellow Troopers tending to Alpha Company wounded on June 29, 1966, in Xuan Loc.





# 173D REUNION 2016

## JUNE 7 ~ JUNE 11, 2016

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



**Our Memorial**

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

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

### **We have blocked rooms at the following hotels:**

MARRIOTT (all rooms have been picked up)

DOUBLETREE (no longer available)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

***We look forward to seeing you in Georgia!***

*(continued....)*



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# BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Hosted by SC Chapter 30

7-11 June 2016 | Ft. Benning, Georgia

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Unit served within the Brigade \_\_\_\_\_ Dates served \_\_\_\_\_

## Guests

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Male/Female \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Male/Female \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Male/Female \_\_\_\_\_

## Registration and Activity Fees

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100 per Gold Star Family member

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

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

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

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

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_ \$50 - Banquet only

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

\_\_\_\_\_ FREE - Ladies Luncheon (must register to attend)

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

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100 per vendor table

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

\_\_\_\_\_ \$15 - Reunion challenge coin

\_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL COST

**To register and pay online, visit [www.173dreunion2016.com](http://www.173dreunion2016.com)**

Make checks payable to: 173d Reunion 2016

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

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

For additional information: Wayne Bowers, 803-237-3169, [bowway@aol.com](mailto:bowway@aol.com)

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

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



# ~ He Was Young & Brave & A Paratrooper ~

## *Kenneth Max Knudson, Sky Soldier Extraordinaire*



Max

### **Awarded: Silver Star** (Posthumously)

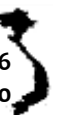
**PRIVATE FIRST CLASS KNUDSON** distinguished himself on 16 March 1966 while serving as a member of A Company during an attack by a large Viet Cong Force near Phuoc Vinh, Republic of Vietnam. During the ensuing fire fight, the company sustained several casualties from the assaulting waves of Viet Cong. After thirty minutes, word was received that the company's right flank was in grave danger of being overrun due to the numerous casualties received by a hostile .50 caliber machine gun which was

positioned at 40 meters to the front. When the order was given to reinforce the right flank platoon, **PRIVATE FIRST CLASS KNUDSON**, upon arrival in the threatened area, placed accurate fire on the Viet Cong's positions and killed four insurgents. Because of heavy machine gun fire on the right flank, his fire team was pinned down and sustained casualties. Realizing the existing danger, **PRIVATE FIRST CLASS KNUDSON** with complete disregard for his safety, engaged the hostile emplacement in an attempt to silence it. While performing this heroic act, he was mortally wounded by a burst of machine gun fire. His courageous efforts inspired the remaining comrades to hold their positions and eventually defeated the insurgents. **PRIVATE FIRST CLASS KNUDSON'S** possession of unimpeachable valor in close combat against a numerically superior Viet Cong Force was in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself and his unit, and the United States Army.

###

"Second Platoon had one KIA on Silver City. A tall blond young man named Knudson, a farm boy from the heartland, as I recall. Several days earlier he had found an ancient wooden plow and asked if he could have it – he wanted to display it at the Country Fair when he got home. I told him it was fine with me, but I didn't know how he would get it to an LZ and then back to Camp Zinn. He said he would carry it until we got to our next LZ, and that he did. Through 8 clicks of jungle he carried that 80 pound wooden plow, in addition to all his other gear, and then convinced a chopper pilot to drop it off at Camp Zinn. Ken Knudson never got to send the plow home."

**Gus Vendetti**  
**CO A/2/503d**



# ~ Reunions of the Airborne Kind 2016/2017 ~



**2016 Annual Airborne Awards Festival**, April 13-16, 2016, College Park, GA, hosted by Donald D. Lassen Atlanta All Airborne Chapter. Host hotel is the Atlanta Airport Marriott.

**Contact:**

**Web:** <http://www.82nd-atlanta.com/2016-annual-airborne-awards/>



**173d Airborne Brigade Association Annual Reunion, "Back to the Beginning"**, hosted by South Carolina Chapter 30, June 7-10, 2016, Ft. Benning, GA.

**Contact:**

**Phn:** 803-237-3169

**Eml:** [bowway@aol.com](mailto:bowway@aol.com)

**Web:** [173dreunion2016.com](http://173dreunion2016.com)

(See Pages 79-80 for more details)



**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](mailto:rfs.concord@gmail.com)

## NOTES:

If you are aware of any upcoming 'Airborne' or attached unit reunions, please send complete details to [rto173d@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rto173d@cfl.rr.com) for inclusion in our newsletter.

Due to insufficient interest there will be no gathering in Cocoa Beach, FL of Sky Soldiers on March 15-16, 2016.

## Soldier rescued after parachute caught in power lines

DELAND – Military officials said a U.S. Army soldier parachuting over central Florida was blown off course and got tangled into some power lines.

The *Daytona Beach News-Journal* reported that 33 year-old Carlos Esparza, stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, was rescued Monday morning about a quarter of a mile from the drop zone at the Deland Municipal Airport.

Sgt. Maj. Tom Clementson said Esparza is very experienced at free fall and high altitude jumps. Emergency workers responding to the scene reported that Esparza was dangling about 20 feet off the ground. Duke Energy workers had to cut the power so Deland firefighters could bring Esparza down safely.



# AIRBORNE! ATFW!!



*FloridaToday newspaper  
February 11, 2016*



2/503d **VIETNAM** Newsletter / Mar.-Apr. 2016 – Issue 66  
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**T**omorrow is December 27th...the 48th anniversary of the Dong Tre battle. I thought I would share this with you and feel free to share with anyone. I was a Dustoff medic in the 50th Med Det (Hel-Amb) at Tuy Hoa from October '67 to March '68 when we moved to I Corp, Hue - Phu Bai. Every few days I still remember and relive the missions I flew on December 27, 1967, the battle at Dong Tre, supporting the 173rd Abn. For the last eight years I have been a National Park Service volunteer at The Wall in Washington DC. Every day that I am at The Wall I place a poster in honor of the 173rd men that were KIA at Dong Tre. And this past Veterans Day I was one of the speakers at The Vietnam Women's Memorial in Washington DC. My talk (below) may be shared with anyone that you think would be interested. I salute the men of the 173rd. You were great Sky Soldiers. Thanks,

Neal Stanley  
50th Med Det



## The Vietnam Women's Memorial, Washington D.C.

November 11, 2015

**Speaker: Neal A. Stanley**  
**U.S. Army Combat Medic, Vietnam 1967-68**  
**50th Medical Detachment**  
**(Helicopter - Ambulance) -- DUSTOFF**

Good morning. I am Neal Stanley and I live in Denver Colorado. I am a husband, a brother, a golfer, a petroleum engineer, a business man, a Harley rider, a National Park Service Volunteer at the Wall, and was a U. S. Army combat medic in Vietnam in 1967-68.

I want to thank Dr. Marsha Guenzler-Stevens, a professor at the University of Maryland and the

Education Chair and Vice President of the Board of the Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation as the chair of today's Storytelling program. Thank you Marsha for all you do to honor veterans.

I am highly honored to participate in this program for the second time. I have attended nearly all of the Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies here since 2003.

As we look around at the three memorials, The Vietnam Veterans Memorial commonly called The Wall, The Three Soldier Statue and The Vietnam Women's Memorial, I always think how perfect the three are together. The Wall honors those that gave their life in service to our country, the Three Soldier Statue honors all soldiers that served, and the Vietnam Women's Memorial honors all the women that so bravely served including the eight military women that did give their lives... and the four Donut Dollies that did also.

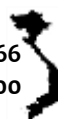
I was a U.S. Army Dustoff medic in Vietnam. Dustoff was the radio call-sign for helicopter medical evacuation. I joined the Army in 1966 and chose to be trained as a medical corpsman, as that seemed like a good job, a helpful job, and an exciting job. And the recruiter said *"hospitals always have the best food"* and the nurses are there too. Both of which were very true. So off to Fort Polk, Louisiana I went in early October 1966 for basic training and then to Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas for ten weeks of medic training.

After medic training I was sent back to Fort Polk to work as a medic in the Tigerland infantry training center.

The 50th Medical Detachment (Hel-Amb) had been stationed at Ft. Polk since the end of the Korean War. And recently the unit had received new Huey helicopters and all their guys wearing jungle fatigues....



(continued....)



....So everyone knew that they were heading to Vietnam soon. Our medical company clerk told me that the 50th needed two more medics to fill their headcount. I stayed awake almost all of that night thinking...I know I'll be going to Nam soon anyway and FLYING OVER the jungle seemed like a neat job and better than WALKING IN the jungle.

The next morning I joined the 50th, went home for seven days and then back to Ft. Polk....and we departed two days later to San Francisco to board a ship to take us and 4000 other Army men to Vietnam.

We had forty guys in the unit...six helicopters, each with a crew of four....2 pilots, one crew chief and one medic. So 24 of us were flight crew and the other 16 were administrative, radio operators, and helicopter mechanics. We were located at Tuy Hoa, right on the South China Sea beach connected to the 91st Evac Hospital. And the 91st Evac DID have great food and nurses and Donut Dollies. We were an ambulance service.



Dustoff at 91<sup>st</sup> Evac Hospital in Tuy Hoa in 1968. (web photo)

Besides the war going on, there were all the "normal" maladies that 400,000 people would have....heat stroke, heat exhaustion, snake bites, spider bites, upper respiratory infection, malaria, all types of diseases, fights, jeep wrecks, chopper crashes.... anything you can think of. The calls to pick up the wounded came in on the radio all day and night.

***"Dustoff Dustoff, this is Sugar Clinch 6 OVER. Sugar Clinch 6, Eagle Dustoff, go ahead OVER. Dustoff we need an urgent pickup. Our coordinates are BQ 899 792. We have 5 WIA and 2 KIA, currently taking heavy fire from the November. Three of these guys will be KIA soon if you can't get to them quickly. We are in deep jungle on a hill side, there is no LZ. You will have to hoist them out. The weather is light rain with low ceiling. Our tact push is 49.7... OVER. Roger Sugar Clinch 6 we copy. Dustoff 92 will be airborne in three minutes and will contact you on your push, OUT."***

So off we would fly, pick up the wounded, try to keep them alive, and get them to a hospital as quickly as possible.

In May, after the Tet Offensive of January and February 1968, we were moved to I Corp, Hue – Phu Bai, Camp Eagle. We became part of the 101st Airborne Division. That was a big time war in I Corp. It was mostly mountainous terrain so lots of hoist missions. We would take most of the patients to the 22nd Surgical Hospital in Phu Bai or to the 95th Evac in Da Nang. For head wounds, we would fly out to the hospital ships Sanctuary and Repose.



U.S.S. Sanctuary

The ships would be 5 to 30 miles offshore, which was no problem on a sunny day, but in a rain storm at night was a different case. The best benefit was that when we would land to off load the patient, a nurse dressed in her white uniform would come out and give us a paper sack with cokes and ice cream inside. Oh the beauty of small things.

So I finished my tour in Nam flying 746 missions, 567 flight hours. I was sent to White Sands Missile Range New Mexico to work in the hospital for my final year in the army. That was a good place to decompress and I met my wife there as she was teaching school in nearby Las Cruces. After that year I went back to college on the GI bill and DID open those books and never missed a class. But it wasn't easy. The country was in the midst of all the anti-war dialogue. Veterans were looked down on and or ignored like we had done something wrong. I didn't really talk about Nam much. I did have all the pictures...a few hundred slides that chronicled my year in Nam that I would show to a few people.

(continued....)



But one event kept nagging at my soul -- our Dustoff 90 crew, the four guys that we didn't bring home. What had happened to them? They had disappeared on a night mission on 12 February 1968. They radioed the Special Forces camp where they were headed and said they would be there in 20 minutes and never showed up. So we searched for over two weeks...lots of aircraft searching... never found anything. The crew chief, Wade Groth, was the first guy I had met when I joined the unit and was my great friend. He and I flew together on many missions.

For many years after Nam I had been thinking about having a reunion of our unit. Even back when I was in Nam I thought about that since we had such a great team. So on Thanksgiving weekend of 1997, I had a new computer and was on the internet for the first time. I started looking for everyone in the 50th. That first weekend I found eleven guys. No one had ever talked to anyone else in the 29 years. I kept dialing for people and decided early on that I would organize a reunion.

I came to Washington on St. Patrick's Day in 1999 on business and met one of my 50th Medical Detachment buddies who I had found and that lives in nearby Fairfax County. We had dinner at Old Ebbits to plan the reunion and then he brought me to the Wall, my first ever visit. We located the names of our four Dustoff 90 buddies on Panel 39E as we cried together.... Jerry Roe, Alan Gunn, Wade Groth and Harry Brown.

So in 2000 we had our first reunion in San Antonio in conjunction with the Dustoff Association reunion. Twenty-five guys and spouses attended. It was awesome. For the reunion I prepared a DVD slide show of our year in Nam, all set to 60's rock and roll and dedicated it to the Dustoff 90 crew.

The missing Dustoff 90 chopper was seen from the air in 1970, two years after going down. It was covered by dense jungle and 80 foot tall trees, exactly on the mountain where we had looked flying slowly at low level for two weeks. It was

fairly intact, not all burned and broken up. No sign of the crew was found at that time. And in the mid-1990's a detailed site examination was completed, again with no sign of any remains. I have been told that they are the only full helicopter crew still MIA in Vietnam.

That will haunt me forever wondering how we did not find the Dustoff 90 chopper when we searched for days flying over that mountain.

I continued to have business trips to DC a few times each year. Every day that I am in DC I would place a poster for the Dustoff 90 crew at Panel 39E. And I posted their story on the Virtual Wall with my email address.

While here on Veterans Day 2007 I met a woman in a Starbucks as I was having breakfast. I asked her *"What is the yellow uniform that you are wearing?"* She said that her name is Suzanne and that she is a volunteer at The Wall. Later that morning I found her at The Wall and she said she was from Denver and has been a volunteer at The Wall for many years. Over the next couple of days while talking to Suzanne at The Wall she suggested that I become a Wall Volunteer too. So Veterans Day 2008 was my first time as a volunteer. There are about 60 volunteers from 22 different states. We all come to the Wall whenever we can and help visitors find names and answer questions.

Two years ago at The Wall I was talking to a Nam veteran and he said to me, *"You know Neal many times Vietnam seems like it was only a few months ago."* I thought about his words as I was flying back to Denver and a couple of days later I sat at my computer to send him an email and intended to just say, *"You are right, Paul, as it seems like only two years ago I was running to my chopper"*...but my fingers kept moving on their own as I described a complete Dustoff mission.

It seems like only two years ago I was running to my chopper...putting on my flak jacket and flight helmet... untying the main rotor blade....watching the engine compartment for fire as the pilots cranked it up.... sliding the pilot's side armor plate forward and closing the pilot's door....jumping in the back and hooking up the cable to my helmet...looking over at my crew chief to see if he was ready....and keying my mic on the intercom telling the pilots *"ready rear"* and *"clear right"*...and my crew chief would say *"clear left"* and the pilot would begin pulling up. That adrenalin rush was so awesome knowing we were flying out to pick up someone that desperately needed us...and we might be the difference between him living or not.

(continued....)



**Jerry Roe, KIA**  
1942 ~ 1973



**Wade Groth, KIA**  
1947 ~ 1978



**Harry Brown, KIA**  
1943 ~ 1975



During our flight to the patients, usually at 3000 feet, the pilots would talk to the men on the ground giving us a detailed description of the LZ and the activity. When we got close the guys on the ground would "pop smoke" and then we could see the LZ for the first time...was it a big space, or tight with trees, was it flat or on a steep hill, was a battle still going on?? .... all of that so we could quickly calculate what we would encounter going in and landing. As we came screaming in at 100 knots, and then the big flare to land, it was all reaction as our brains processed it all.

I had my M16 locked and loaded ready to suppress any fire as we landed, as we always flew with the side doors open unless it was raining. As we touched down, I hung my M16 on the wall hook, jumped out of the right side of the chopper and my crew chief would jump out of the left side as we looked for the patients and quickly loaded them with the help of the ground guys. When we had them all...or we were full....I'd jump in, look for my crew chief to make sure he was in...as he had been doing the same thing on his left side of our Huey...and tell the pilots "ready rear" with my M16 back in my hands...and off we would go. It was a good mission if we didn't have to shoot our way in or out of the LZ.

As soon as we were clear of the LZ, I would start sorting out the patients...seeing which needed my care first....stop the bleeding, keep them breathing...mouth to mouth, start IVs, and treat for shock. Of course many times they all needed my care first. I would do the first steps and then tell my crew chief what to do next as I went to the next patient. And as this was going on I would keep the pilots informed of the status of the patients so that information could be relayed to the hospital ER. As we landed at the hospital the medics from the emergency room would be waiting on our "hot pad" to carry them into ER. If we didn't have another mission we would fly a few meters to our revetment and my crew chief and I would get the chopper ready for the next mission....wash the blood out, restock our supplies, check our weapons, sit down and try to rest for five minutes. Then I would go into ER and watch my patients being treated.

The ER doctors, nurses, and corpsman were amazing as they quickly treated the patients, cutting off the patient's clothes to expose all the wounds, starting IVs, quickly sending them to surgery if necessary. After watching for some time I would go back to our operations office next door and wait for the next call on the radio to come in..."*Dustoff Dustoff we need an urgent pickup.*"

There are always amazing stories that happen at the Wall. In 2007 I had been in DC for four days on business and had a flight out on Sunday morning. I visited the

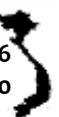
Wall on the way to the airport and placed my poster to Dustoff 90 and the picture that I had taken on our first day in Nam of Wade Groth sitting in our helicopter.



Wade

I clearly remember thinking that morning that there was literally nothing else placed at the Wall, which is really rare, especially on a Sunday. Two weeks later I received an email from a woman named Belinda from Minnesota. She had found my email address on the Dustoff 90 posting I had placed on the Virtual Wall. She had visited the Wall that Sunday afternoon with her friend from DC. She told me how that her mother had worn an MIA bracelet since 1968 and she wanted to find the name as her Mother had never been able to visit the Wall either. So Belinda and her friend found Panel 39E and were searching for the name, and happened to look down at the poster and picture. The name on her Mother's bracelet was Wade Groth, my buddy. They were totally shocked and amazed. How could this be? The one name they were hoping to find was the only name on the Wall that someone had placed a remembrance for that morning.

(continued....)



Every day that I am here at The Wall I place a copy of the story that Belinda wrote about that day, next to Wade's photo and poster on Panel 39E. The Wall is an amazing place, a very healing place, one that is filled with hugs and tears every day. These three wonderful Memorials allow everyone to face their emotions about a difficult time in our Nation's history. Together they create an amazing place, a very emotional place and a very healing place.

Most all of us that served thought we were serving our country and we served honorably. We were dedicated to helping each other, and we hoped we would persevere. But no one group did that more bravely than the women that served our nation. Nurses, Donut Dollies, and regular military women were ALL volunteers and stood side by side with the men.

Thank you Diane Carlson Evans, who could not be here today, and all those that helped you, for your leadership and perseverance in creating this memorial to all the women that served in Vietnam. A few years ago Diane told me that in her final hearing before a congressional committee to seek approval to use this land for the Women's Memorial, a crusty old congressman said, *"We don't need a memorial to those damn women, what did they do?"* The room got quiet and Diane calmly replied, *"Congressman, without those women that served how many more names would be on that black granite wall?"* The room was totally quiet until another congressman said, *"I move we approve the plan for the Vietnam Woman's Memorial, all in favor say aye."* It passed unanimously. Let's give Diane a big thank you applause.

And Holley Watts was one of the first Donut Dollies to go to Nam in 1966. What a nice talk you gave. For those that don't know, Holley wrote a book in 2004, titled *Who Knew?* which has pictures that she took in Vietnam and her thoughts from her Vietnam tour.

Thank you to all the visitors that are here this weekend. You are honoring all Vietnam veterans with your presence and especially the 58,307 veterans whose names are on The Wall.

Thank you. I salute you.



Holley

## Diane Carlson Evans



1LT Diane Carlson Evans, ANC RVN (born 1946) served as a nurse in the United States Army during the Vietnam War and founded the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project in 1984 (now the Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation), initiating and leading the effort to add the Vietnam Women's Memorial to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC.

Carlson Evans was born and raised on a dairy farm in rural Minnesota and graduated from nursing school in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Upon graduation, she joined the Army Nurse Corps and served in Vietnam at age 21, in 1968-1969. She served in the burn unit of the 36th Evacuation Hospital in Vung Tau and at Pleiku in the 71st Evacuation Hospital, 30 miles from the Cambodian border in the Central Highlands, just 10 to 20 minutes by helicopter from the field. Including her one year in Vietnam, Carlson Evans completed a total of 6 years in the Army Nurse Corps.

Carlson Evans attended the dedication of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial (the "Wall") in 1982. Following the dedication of the statue of three soldiers at the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in 1984, Carlson Evans founded the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, to honor the service of American military women who served during the Vietnam War era.

(continued....)



She worked from 1984 through 1993 to establish the Vietnam Women's Memorial, lobbying federal authorities for permission to build a memorial to the 11,000 military women who served in Vietnam and the 265,000 who served around the world during the Vietnam era. Carlson Evans and thousands of volunteers in 50 states raised money and public support for the cause, including from leading veteran's organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans, and the American Legion.

It took seven years of testimony before three federal commissions and two congressional bills for Evans and her supporters to earn permission for the memorial. Once permission was granted, more than 300 artists entered a major design competition in 1990. Sculptor Glenna Goodacre, of Sante Fe, New Mexico, submitted the winning design that now stands on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The bronze sculpture is 7'0" tall with four figures, 3 women and a wounded soldier.

The Vietnam Women's Memorial was dedicated before a crowd of thousands on November 11, 1993, with remarks from then Vice President and Vietnam Veteran Al Gore.

Since the dedication of the Vietnam Women's Memorial in 1993, Carlson Evans has remained active in the veterans community. As Founder and President of the Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation, she speaks nationally about the experience of women in wartime. She and her husband, of thirty years plus, have four children and five grandchildren.



###

## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

# *Officer Nicolette Dayan Clara*

### **Tribute**



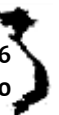
On Saturday January 30, 2016, Alexandria Police Officer Nicolette D. Clara, First Sergeant, USA (retired) age 44 passed away at her home after a courageous battle with cancer.

She served in the United States Army during Operation Desert Storm in addition to deployments including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, South Korea, and her last deployment was as a member in the 173rd Airborne in Afghanistan. Her awards and decorations include three Meritorious Service Medals, seven Army Commendation Medals, and 10 Army Achievement Medals, among others. She retired honorably in 2009 and continued her call to service in joining the Alexandria Police Department in 2012.

Nikki is survived by her parents, Frank and Louise Clara of Prescott, Arizona; sister Lisa Woods and brother-in-law Bryan Woods of Victorville, California; nephews, Tyler Woods and Alex Woods; and her special sisters, Shay Wilson, Jeannie Rickey, and Jennifer Owen; in addition to many aunts, uncles and cousins.

Interment with full military honors was held at Quantico National Cemetery, Triangle Virginia.

*You served your country well, Sky Soldier*





The 503rd Parachute RCT had occupied a hastily constructed camp on the shores of Leyte Gulf since its non-combat landing on 19 November 1944. We were awaiting orders for our next combat assignment. Finally, in the first week in December orders came down specifying an important assignment for us. We were to make an amphibious landing on Mindoro Island and secure sites for new airfields. These fields would be needed in order to support further advances in the Philippines.

Construction of the only major airfield at Tacloban on Leyte was taking much longer than anticipated because of the swampy land in that corner of the Island. Even if the fields had been constructed on time it would have been very difficult accumulating the numbers of C-47 aircraft necessary for an operation such as this. C-47 transport aircraft had become the work horses of the Southwest Pacific Area, moving troops and ferrying freight. Airborne troops did not have an exclusive hold on the transports. Thus we were to make an amphibious rather than a parachute landing.



Don Abbott

As a bridge between the two types of operations, we trained as amphibious troops, by having the LCI carrying paratroopers head in toward shore, hit the beach with the bow and drop its ramps to Port and Starboard. It took us a total of 3 1/2 minutes to get off the LCI.

***I don't know how long it takes straight legs but I'll bet we beat them in our first try.***

Our troops scampered down the two ramps into three or four feet of water and headed for a dry beach. It appeared to us as if the Navy crew of the LCI deliberately beached further out than needed so they could get the hell out in a hurry. This resulted in all our men and their weapons getting far wetter than would have been needed. This did not set the stage for friendly relations with the crew.

On 12 December 1944, the Combat Team boarded a fleet of small troop transports, mostly Landing Craft Infantry (LCI's). This was the real thing. It was a new experience for us. We were accustomed to having wings on each side of our transports. We were a bit apprehensive since we knew amphibious operations were a completely different matter than the airborne tactics we had trained for. But if "straight legs" could do it so could we, only better.

We had been briefed in our mission to land on the Island of Mindoro, secure the area around San Jose, on the level Southwest plain, and provide security as Engineers and construction personnel build airstrips.

The long road back to the Philippines had proved that air superiority was an absolute requirement in the accomplishment of a strategic objective. In this case the objective of the operation was, really, the main Island of Luzon and the City of Manila. The toehold in the Philippines, with the partially completed air base at Tacloban, on Leyte, was too far from the important parts of Luzon for effective sorties. Without airfields closer to Manila it would be nearly impossible to seize and maintain air superiority in northern Luzon. Airfields in the Southwest of Mindoro would be much closer to the targets on the big island. San Jose, Mindoro is, roughly, 150 miles from Manila.

A fleet of Naval craft was assembled instead of the aircraft. Guthrie enumerates the craft in the assault force as follows:

**1 Light Cruiser, 12 Destroyers, 9 Destroyer transports  
30 LST's, 12 LSM's, 31 LCI (L)'s, 16 Mine sweepers  
Plus a number of smaller craft**

(continued....)



The Assault Force was only part of the story behind this mission. One cover fleet consisted of 3 Cruisers, 7 Destroyers and 23 Motor Torpedo Boats. Another Fleet of Naval craft stood by to provide air cover and support and were there if the Japanese attempted to block the Assault Force. Guthrie says this force consisted of:

**6 Escort Carriers, 3 Battleships  
3 Light Cruisers, 18 Destroyers**



**LST's unloading at Tacloban airstrip.**

(Web photo)

As "landlubbers" the sheer number of these ships boggled our minds. Never had we seen anything like that number of ships at one time. One report told that the total fleet numbered over 150 ships of all sizes. Since this was, relatively, an insignificant operation we wondered what a major fleet operation would be like.

We pulled out of Leyte Gulf and into the Strait of Surigao after dark on the night of 12 December. Even in the dark it was still possible to make out the shore of the Island of Mindanao on the Port side of the LCI and the shore of the Island of Leyte on the Starboard side. We could not help but reflect on the battle waged here, in these very same waters, just a short time before between the attacking Japanese Naval force and our Naval ships. Many, many, people had died that night. Thankfully, they were mostly Japanese. This remote corner of the Philippines had become important for a short span of time.

Next morning we emerged from the Strait of Surigao into the Mindanao Sea. This was a much wider expanse of water but with a large force such as ours there was not much maneuvering that could be done. It seemed as if we steamed in a straight line to the Southwest. On our LCI at breakfast time we expected to be fed but this,

it turned out, was not a part of the Naval crew's duties. In fact, they left the feeding of our troops to our own men. Cases of C-Rations were opened and spoons came out of hiding. I carried a spoon in the knife pocket of my right pant leg of my fatigues where it would be handy at any moment. Somehow cold C-Rations in the morning are not an appetizing way to start a day. This was a far cry from the treatment we had received from crew of the Custer on our voyage from Noemfoor to

Leyte. Then nothing was good enough for our men. Now it was up to the 503rd, not the Navy.

The crew of our LCI had been instructed to keep our troops below deck any time there was any enemy action taking place. That turned out to be a good deal of the time. Watching some of the shrapnel from our convoy's Anti-Aircraft Artillery falling around us and slamming into the water the Navy was probably justified in issuing that edict but all our men wanted to see

what was going on outside and when there is enemy activity one does not like the feel of being cooped up under deck where it would be virtually impossible to get out if we were hit. The edict remained in force for most of our voyage from Leyte to Mindoro since we were under attack, or expected to be under attack most of the time.

At this time let me explain that the whole of "E" Company of the 503rd had been loaded on one LCI. I don't believe anyone else were among our passengers. Captain Sam Smith was our Company Commander and I was the Company Executive Officer. I had been promoted to XO after we had emerged from the jungles of Noemfoor at the end of the fighting on that Island.

*(continued....)*





Sam and I became good friends and palled around often. The two of us, at this time, stretched the Navy edict considerably. We remained under deck when we were under attack -- sort of. We'd edge our way up the steps leading from the troop deck to the main deck a little bit further every time we could get away with it. By the time the voyage was over we were on deck all the time. *To Hell with the Navy.*

Sam and I had our heads far enough above deck we had a pretty good view of one of the first encounters with Japanese airplanes early after daybreak the first morning. A large, twin engine plane came out of the sky to the North. To my knowledge no one knew where it came from. We were within easy reach of enemy flights based on Bohol, Cebu and Negros. The Japanese in their three years of occupying the Philippines had constructed many airfields throughout the various islands. Many of these fields were primitive but were adequate to act as bases from which their attacks could come. Later we were to see a number of those strips on Negros.

The Jap plane headed relentlessly toward the cruiser USS Nashville. It, apparently, had sneaked through our radar warning system. It seemed as if it came as such a surprise the Navy did not have time for effective antiaircraft fire to be established. The plane came in at a thousand feet or so and there was no doubt in any minds where he was headed. He kept pretty much on a straight course toward the Nashville. Finally, it plunged nearly vertical into the cruiser, hitting just behind the bridge. There was a huge bursting ball of flames. Surprisingly, it was only moments before the plane and

the ball of fire had been swept overboard. From our vantage point the Nashville seemed as if it was unscathed. We did not know until sometime later that the cruiser had been badly damaged. The task force Chief of Staff had been killed along with many other people on the ship. The Command of the task force was transferred from the Nashville to one of the destroyers and the Nashville returned to Leyte Gulf for necessary repairs.

## USS NASHVILLE

Photo # 80-G-K-6886 Cleaning up Kamikaze damage on board USS Nashville, Dec



**USS Nashville: "On 13 December, she was struck by a kamikaze off Negros Island. The aircraft crashed into her port 5 in/127mm gun mount, with both bombs exploding about 10 ft (3 m) off her deck. Gasoline fires and exploding ammunition made her midships area an inferno, but although 133 sailors were killed and 190 wounded, her remaining 5 in (127 mm) guns continued to provide anti-aircraft fire."**

With this air activity as a beginning the next couple or three weeks provided the men of the 503rd had an almost constant show. Having been interested in airplanes since I was a small boy, this seemed to be the greatest show on earth. We knew there were many people, both American and Japanese, being killed but from our vantage point, they could not be seen.

*(continued....)*



The Second Battalion Adjutant, Tom McNerney, described the engagements which followed during our days in the convoy.

"1745 hr 13 Dec 44: Intense ack-ack at 8,000 feet heralded the arrival of more Jap planes. Many bombs are being dropped at the left flank, but no damage realized. 1800 hr: 4 Jap bombers are directly overhead, pursued by 6 P-38's. One Jap peeled off from 5,000 feet at a cruiser, but a burst of fire from a 38 set him afire, and he crashed in the sea, far astern of the convoy. The sky is now filled with ack-ack, and the P-38's are up above it, to ward off any Nips coming in high. 1830 hr: The attack is over for the present, and no damage inflicted on the convoy. Half an hour remains 'til dark. There is no moonlight these nights, and we hope the convoy is not visible during hours of darkness. In the morning the Japs will most likely expect us to invade Negros. It should be quite a while after dawn when they pick us up far out in the Sulu Sea."

"0800 hr. 14 Dec: We had no air or sea attack during the night. 1000 hr: After patrolling over the horizon since yesterday morning, our large Task Force is again visible, and now has 6 carriers, 3 battleships, and numerous cruisers and destroyers. Today Admiral Halsey is due to inaugurate 4 days of intensive



Fleet Adm. William F. "Bull" Halsey

and the lesser islands. This may well account for our lack of air opposition today, augmented by our carrier based Hellcat cover, and P-38's from Leyte which arrived soon after dawn. 1100 hr: We are now in the Sulu Sea, west of Panay, and in the eyes of the Japanese High Command, capable of striking any of the numerous enemy held islands surrounding us. 1400 hr: A light attack by Jap planes on the rear of the Convoy was driven off by heavy ack-ack. 1945hr: Darkness has settled, and no further air attacks have materialized."

"During the night of 14/15 1944 it was necessary for the task force to reveal its location. The task force had intended to keep the Japanese in the dark as to our destination. We had made feints toward several possible objectives, such as Panay or Paluan.

Unfortunately, radar picked up a small Japanese freighter off the West Coast of Panay. Although it probably posed no threat to our convoy the ship had undoubtedly spotted us. The ship was fired upon and set ablaze. It was burning furiously as we passed it in the middle of the night."



"U.S. anti-aircraft gun at Tacloban airfield in action."

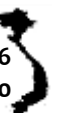
(Web photo)

'Reveille and breakfast was at 0430.' Tom McNerney's journal says there were doughnuts and coffee. I think Tom was whistling Dixie.

Reveille was early on the morning of 15 December 1944. Our men were anxious to be "up and at them" and get our first combat amphibious landing behind us. We have no idea whether our landing will be opposed or not. The Japanese have seemed to adopted a strategy of pulling their defenses inland, allowing our forces to land unopposed, then attacking the troops who have landed. Maybe they will follow the same approach here, but, then, who knows? Maybe this is the time they will try to defend the landing beaches.

As we came on deck well before the 0700 HR on "U" Day (15 Dec 44) the invasion fleet had reached their assigned positions off shore. The LCI's were lined up in rows consisting of the order they would be landing. Far to the right, or South, were the landing craft bringing the 19th Regimental Combat Team of the 24th Division. To the left, North, of us were landing craft with the 1st Battalion of the 503rd who were to land on the North side of the Bugsanga River and represent the Left Flank of our invasion. Nearby were the LCI's of the 2nd Battalion of the 503rd. Behind us, further out to sea were craft with the 3rd Battalion, acting as Combat Team reserve.

(continued....)



As 0700 approached landing craft, including LCI's rigged as Gun Ships began launching rocket salvos. That was the first time I had seen Gun Ships and their array of rockets. Each gun ship would fire many rockets at a time. They would leave with a high pitched *swoosh!!* The rockets could, clearly, be followed all the way to the point of impact. Hundreds of these rockets plastered the beach line and a short way inland. I'd have hated to have been in the shoes of anyone caught on the beach at that time.

Although I did not check my watch we must have hit the beach at almost exactly at the 0700 HR. As in the case of our practice landing on Leyte, a few days earlier, our LCI hit the beach very softly after having dropped an anchor a few yards out so they would be able to winch themselves off. When the landing ramps were dropped the water was chest deep on the taller men. Shorter men were over their head and woe be a short man with a heavy load. He was in danger of drowning. At the very best, men making the landing had their weapons and loads thoroughly soaked.

As soon as we hit the beach our lead platoons began to move inland, only to discover we had not landed at the exact spot which had been intended. The whole invasion fleet had landed about 400 yards to the right of where we were supposed to have landed. There followed about an hour as the Companies shuffled around getting themselves into their assigned positions.

"E" Company was to be in the van of the Combat Team as it moved inland. A narrow gauge railroad, used in pre-war days to haul sugar cane to a sugar mill, guided our advance inland. It was obvious to us that the railroad had not been used during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Grass grew up around the ties and the tracks were dull as if no traffic had used them for a long time.

A large corrugated building could be seen in the distance. This was adjacent to the village of San Jose. The village must have been a Company Town with the sugar mill practically the only industry in peace time. Housing, occupied by the workers, ranged from very small to quite large, representing the status of the employee occupying the home.

The Company had *Scouts Out* from the lead platoon. As we had always done, the scouts searched for suspicious looking areas where the enemy might be waiting to ambush our advance. This, of course, took more time than a simple march inland. The problem was that an Engineer Construction Battalion had come in with all their equipment not too long after our landing. Because of the delay getting our companies straightened out after our landing the Engineers were

right behind us and kept nipping at our heels hoping to get to the place where they would begin construction of Elmore airstrip. Having D-8 Caterpillar tractors right behind you and trying to pass does not make for a very orderly infantry advance.



**The strategic airstrip on Tacloban.**

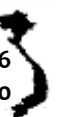
(Web photo)

We managed to keep the D-8's behind us and, eventually, we reached San Jose and the Company carefully moved in. The small Japanese garrison had moved out and had taken to the hills. This had been a hasty evacuation as they left their morning meal uneaten and abandoned their living accommodations. Since our objective was to clear the area of any Japanese so the airfields could be constructed, we did not pursue the evacuating troops. We sent outposts to make sure they did not return and, then, began to assume the positions we would occupy while the construction crews took over the area.

The civilian population came out of hiding and welcomed the invading Americans.

"E" Company was to occupy a position on the perimeter located along the Bugsanga River which drained a large area to the East of San Jose. The river was a well-defined boundary for the perimeter, forming the Northern boundary of the out-posted invasion. "D" and "F" Companies also assumed a part of this perimeter. Over the coming weeks the companies developed their positions, from a line of temporary foxholes to one including bunkers and emplaced heavy machine guns, even 50 Caliber Machine Guns. This was the first time the 503rd had any experience with water-cooled 30 caliber Machine Guns or the air-cooled 50 Caliber Machine Guns.

(continued....)



The Company CP was set up a hundred yards, or so, to the South of the river. As the Elmore airstrip construction progressed it turned out the CP was not far from the end of a major landing strip. Nearby an Anti-Aircraft Artillery outfit set up a 40mm emplacement. This facility became the designated "Alert" gun for a large part of the area of occupation.

The Bugsanga River ran from East to West along the Northern edge of the occupied area. The gravel bed was several hundred yards wide with the stream itself running along the Southern part of the bed. The river varied from a foot to several feet deep. The water flowed swiftly several miles an hour. This was the first time the 2d Battalion had manned a perimeter with a stream in front of it. The water was clear and cool and appeared usable without treatment but we had, long ago, learned to always treat our water before using it to drink. The penalty for drinking untreated water was not worth contemplating.

We never had a significant rainstorm during our occupation of Mindoro so we had no way of knowing what the river was like under those circumstances but we suspected the stream bed could be a raging torrent.

Beginning almost immediately after our landing on Mindoro we were subjected to Japanese attack from the air. Being a relatively short way from their airfields on Luzon, including Clark Airfield<sup>s</sup>, North of Manila, the Japanese had plenty of planes to use against us. The Japanese bases were closer than our base at Tacloban, Leyte so they hit us often. At one time I saw an "A-2" (Air Corp. Intelligence) report which told of 182 raids over a two-week period. That is "Raids", not single aircraft. Our air defenses consisted of carrier based planes from our Navy task forces, Army Air Corp planes from Tacloban and AA fire.

We had seen a good deal of air activity; bombing and dog fights while on Leyte and during our convoy attack on Mindoro but the shows on Mindoro were awesome! Some days the sky teemed with air battles. One encounter comes to mind. One day we were having a big raid with a lot of Japanese planes. There were a lot of our planes in the air, mostly P-38's, holding the Japanese off. Since this was a real good show the people from the CP climbed on a gravel pile left by the construction people, to get a better view.

The CP group were all watching one fight going on up high to the North. For some reason I happened to look over my shoulder, toward the South and commented, "Boy, that P-38 is low!" One of the sergeants looked back, said "38 hell, that's a Jap," then dove off the gravel pile. I looked again and sure enough it was a Japanese twin engine light bomber heading our way low. Right behind him, however, was a P-38. About that time the Jap leveled off at about 200 feet and

passed overhead. As the Jap was going away I could see a tail gunner open up at the P-38. The P-38 now opened up with all his guns and we could see the tracers hitting the Jap plane.

One trick film makers use to show a "kill" in a dog fight is to have the pursued plane go behind a hill, then show a big ball of flame coming up. This is, exactly, what happened in this case. The Jap went behind a low hill with the P-38 following him. There was a big ball of flame and the P-38 came zooming up from behind the hill. A big cheer came from the observers on the gravel pile.

Japanese kamikaze planes were in evidence on a daily basis. One day a kamikaze hit an oil tanker in front of the occupied area, presumably carrying aviation gas. A huge plumb of black smoke went up thousands of feet high. The breeze happened to change direction from the East to the West and the smoke passed over our heads. As it did a black rain began to fall. Afterward an oily sheen covered everything under where the cloud had passed. That ship burned for a number of days. We could only imagine it formed a great landmark for the Japanese and American planes coming together for their dog fights



**"One of the war's most spectacular Kamikaze shots shows Jap Judy about to crash into U.S.S. Essex, its only damage of war."** By Lt. Cdr. E. Colgrove (web photo)

(continued....)



Another time a big air battle was taking place. We could see Japanese planes trying to get at the supply ships waiting to be unloaded offshore. I do not know if it was a bomb dropped or a kamikaze but an ammunition ship was hit. Mind you, we were something over two miles inland from where the ship had been. The concussion was such that we were nearly bowled over. After the shock, all there was left was a sea covered with debris. Not a soul aboard the ship survived.

Whenever our planes from Tacloban were above us they kept most of the Jap planes away. This, of course, was during the daytime because most of our airfields were not set up for night activity.

When our planes were not overhead Anti-Aircraft Artillery batteries, the 40mm, the 90mm and even 50 Caliber MG's made the Japanese planes steer clear. At night searchlights were also effective for making it difficult for Japanese planes to bomb or strafe our airfields. It was interesting to hear a Jap plane approaching at night only to be caught in searchlights then AAA fire. It sounded similar to a bee approaching and being stirred up. The sound would go from a steady drone to a high pitched scream as the pilot attempted to evade the light.

Unfortunately, the ammunition ship which had been vaporized in front of us was loaded with AAA ammunition. So the guns were left with practically no ammunition.



P-61 "Black widow night fighter".

(Web photo)

By this time a squadron of night-fighters had arrived on the Island. They flew P-61's, twin engine planes guided to their targets by radar. These planes were put up as our night time air defense. Since our planes would be in the dark sky that night, orders were given forbidding any anti-aircraft fire from the ground. In other words the P-61's would be our only defense. This

led to some very hectic nights until a ship got through with AA ammunition....

***Being near the approach to Elmore field where the P-61's were based, we would hear a plane approaching. We would not know for sure whether it was one of ours or a Jap. If it landed, it was one of ours. If it began strafing and dropping bombs, it was one of theirs.***

The P-61's were very ineffective at keeping the Japanese planes away at night.

The 40mm AAA outfit near us gave the air raid warning in our area. On the night mentioned the gun was constantly sounding a *BOOM, BOOM, BOOM* (alert). Then after a quiet stretch the all clear *BOOM* would be fired. Every time this gun fired I would nearly jump out of my skin.



Twin engine Japanese light bomber used during WWII.

One night when the orders against ground fire were in place, a twin engine Jap bomber who had dropped his bombs was caught in the lights and tried to get away, heading out over the river in the "E" Company area. A gunner manning one of the 50 caliber MG, opened up at him and a number of rounds hit the Jap. I was watching this and could see the tracers slamming into him. If you consider there was one round of tracer to six rounds of ball ammunition, you know he is being hit badly.

(continued....)



The Jap was hurt critically and crashed on the North side of the river. We were still under orders that anything moving was enemy so no one ventured to the crash site that night. Early after daybreak I went from the CP to the line. Since they had shot down a Jap plane it didn't seem to make any sense to chewing out the machine gunner for disobeying orders not to fire. As daylight dawned an Australian truck drove up to the river. It had a load of Aussie airfield construction workers on it. The truck driver started to ford the river to get near the downed plane. Our men yelled at them *"What the hell are you doing, you can't go over there!"* The driver yelled back *"We're going over there to get souvenirs from that plane, Yank"* and started across. Our machine gunner fired a burst in front of the truck and called *"You're not going over there, cobber!"* The burst changed the Aussie's minds. They turned around and went away.

After full light I, along with a big group from "E" Company, went to the crashed plane. The two pilots were dead but there was documentation for the plane which was deemed to be valuable for our Air Corp intelligence. It was a new type of plane, similar to our A-20, for which our Air Corp welcomed information. When the brass came down to find out who had fired at the Jap against orders, no one in "E" Company had heard any firing from guns in our Company area. Incidentally, the MG may have been fired by Pfc. Munoz who was assigned to "E" Company from Second Battalion HQ. This was the man who was badly wounded in the shoulder while with our company on Noemfoor. Not long after the incident with the Japanese plane Munoz was, once again, badly wounded, this time in the head by falling AAA shrapnel.

The 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team saw only limited ground action while on Mindoro. The Second Battalion saw none but "B" Company, in the First Battalion was ordered to make an amphibious landing on the North West corner of Mindoro. They moved inland and attacked an enemy garrison at Paluan, sent there by the Japanese to set up an early warning outpost to tell when American planes were headed toward Northern Luzon. Paluan was a small and short mission but a fierce battle took place during which most of the Japanese were killed and "B" Company lost five men.

On another occasion, Lt. Ewing from Second Battalion Headquarters was sent with a small group to investigate a small Island off the Northern coast of Mindoro where a black market center had been established. Ewing told me there were many cases of cigarettes and other military supplies which had not been available in the Philippines during the Japanese occupation. These illegal good, the cigarettes in

particular, were like gold, a matter of great value. Ewing said he had been offered many thousands of Pesos of American Victory currency if he would look the other way and let the dealers off the hook.



**"The 'Victory' note series was printed in 1944, to be used upon the return of MacArthur. When he came ashore in Leyte on Oct. 20th, 1944, he was purportedly carrying some of these in his pocket. They definitely brought many crates full of these notes with them during this landing."**

There were something in the order of 300 Japanese on Mindoro, other than those at Paluan. We did not know for certain where they were, so they could have presented a threat. In addition there was always the potential for Japanese troops to be sent from Luzon to interfere with the airfield operations around San Jose. So informal patrols from the Second Battalion ranged out to the North of the Bugsanga River even after it appeared the base around San Jose was secure.

On several occasions I would gather up a squad of men, tell HQ what I was doing and patrol a few miles into unoccupied territory. A number of the local Filipinos, who had made for the hills as we landed on December 15th returned to their homes in the area and I became friendly with several of them. It was an interesting experience. Most of these people had been educated around the sugar mill property at San Jose and most were quite bright and intelligent. Their homes ranged from primitive nipa huts to good size buildings, set up in sizeable compounds. One particular farmer always insisted they should kill a chicken and prepare a meal for us. I felt a bit guilty about taking food away from their families but they would insist. After the first such experience I always took some food with me which I left for them. It would be something they would not have been able to find otherwise and they appreciated whatever we could take to them.



**Nipa hut in the Philippines**

*(continued....)*



On one of those patrols we had finished the meal and were talking when I heard a small explosion. It was no surprise because there were a number of small streams, or sloughs, in the area which held fish. Some of our men would come out with grenades or blocks of TNT to stun the fish they could pick up. In this case one of the men and a buddy were setting up a block of TNT when it went off in his hand. The explosion had blown off both his hands and we had to apply tourniquets to keep him from bleeding to death. This happened shortly before we left for the Corregidor mission and I never learned his name or what became of him.

Our time on the perimeter around the airfields built on Mindoro did not last long. As was the case we, shortly, began to set up a more permanent camp. A large, level, area was laid out for us and we set up a tent camp. It was, really, at this time the 503rd became known as **"Colonel Jones and his 3000 thieves"**.



**Colonel George M. Jones during the Philippines Campaign.**

Parachute units throughout World War II were set up with Tables of Organization and Tables of Equipment as if we flew everywhere we went and had no use for garrison supplies. In the 503rd Regiment, for example, there were fewer than one jeep per line Company. Trucks and other supply vehicles were also in short supply. We were "officially", authorized a very limited supply of materials we could draw from the Quartermaster Corp. Even if we could draw lumber for tent frames (which we couldn't) we could not haul it because we did not have enough trucks. The 503rd learned how to steal trucks to haul the materials we had stolen. In some cases trucks already loaded with materials were stolen. This was considered good because we didn't have to load them. There were even times when truckloads of beer were stolen. This was considered very "cool" -- a term unknown at the time.

While we were still on the perimeter and the Anti-Aircraft Artillery gun crew were still very active, Sam

and I began to be a bit concerned that our oversize foxhole did not protect us from the shrapnel from their fire. As we had gone past their camp we noticed they had a few sheets of corrugated iron. So we swiped a sheet, put it over our foxhole and tossed about a foot of dirt on it. That would protect us from the smaller bits of shrapnel and we felt a lot safer. Unfortunately a detail from the AAA outfit came over, picked up the end of the sheet of corrugated, dumped the dirt and left with our stolen material. There wasn't much we could do about it.

When "E" Company began to set up camp we needed something for tent frames. Lumber was out of the question. Then I recalled a Filipino farmer I had met who had quite a large plot of bamboo. This took up quite a bit of land where he could have been growing cane when they started up the sugar mill again. I didn't know this guy well but took some beer and went out to talk with him. He welcomed our cutting in his bamboo patch. So I organized a detail and we went out and cut down a lot of bamboo suitable for tent frames, probably in the range on 200 pieces. When we had the supply back in camp and the tent frames nearly completed this guy came in with a piece of paper charging us two Pesos (1 US Dollar) per piece. I had made a mistake in not having him agree to a price before we started cutting. We did not pay for the bamboo.

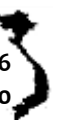
Mindoro in short order had many planes from a number of different units; Air Corps, Marines and an occasional Navy plane. On the way to Regimental Headquarters, the easiest route led past revetments set up along the airstrips of Elsmore field. We would see P-38's and P-47's with large numbers of Japanese flags painted on them, indicating a kill.

Several of the leading ACEs were stationed on Mindoro at one time or another. I think Bong was one of them. One time, I think it was Bong, a plane was taxing and got a wheel stuck on the railroad. Without a thought of who might be affected, he revved up his engines. The props threw up a painful amount of dirt and gravel. At that moment an Ace would have been shot down if we had one of his guns.



**Maj. Richard I. Bong  
Top ACE during WWII**

*(continued....)*



Another time we passed some revetments where the ground crews were working on a B-25. This model of the B-25 had two 50 caliber Machine guns on each side of the fuselage. As we passed in front they were working the bolts of the guns. All they would have needed to have was ammunition and we would have been hit with many rounds per minute of 50 caliber stuff.



**U.S. B-25 makes a bomb run on a Japanese destroyer escort.**  
(web photo)

A unit which flew P-47's also was stationed at Elmore field. At the end of the East end of one of the main runways the sugar mill was left standing. It was an, at least, two stored corrugated iron building. One day, as I was going to Battalion HQ I could see where a P-47 had crashed into the building. The odd part was that the hole in the corrugated iron was in the exact shape of a P-47 faced head on. I never knew what happened to that pilot.

The fighter aircraft always buzzed the strip to see that everything was clear for them to land. At the end of the strip they would pull back on the stick to gain altitude quickly, get into a pattern, come around and land. If they had shot down a Jap plane they would do a "Victory Roll" as they climbed. We saw planes with as many as four rolls, indicating four Japs shot down.

One day a P-47 pilot buzzed the strip, hauled back on the stick and his motor began to sputter. The P-47 was a huge, ungainly, looking aircraft. It had an enormous radial engine. It had a very low glide ration. In other words when its motor conked out it couldn't glide far, it had to crash. As I watched, the pilot tried, unsuccessfully to get the engine running smoothly, all the time trying to maintain the landing pattern. About halfway along the downwind leg he crashed with his wheels up. A lot of dust was kicked up but no fire.

We all headed over to the crash site to see if the pilot was still alive and to help him if he were. Much to our surprise the pilot was headed across a field toward us, lugging his parachute over one shoulder. He was not even limping.

One of the many aircraft to be based at Elmore strip was a Navy version of the Air Corp B-24. Early models retained the twin tails of the B-24 but the models stationed here had a huge, single tail. These aircraft were used by the Navy for long range patrol.

Late in the afternoon of the day after Christmas 1944, one of those Navy planes came in to report a Japanese task force consisting of a battle ship, three cruisers and seven destroyers. Reports days later scaled back the size of this fleet but the mere fact the Jap task force was off Paluan Island and headed our way was a scary thought. There was, also, unconfirmed reports of Japanese troop ships following the attack force. The possibility of a landing of troops, which had always been a consideration now gave more concern.

The reported task force stirred up a flurry of activity. Unfortunately, the US Navy, which had maintained patrol activity around Mindoro, had been drawn back to Leyte (we thought they may have run out of Ice Cream mix and had to go back to Leyte to get a new supply). At any rate the sum total of a Naval defense was the small contingent of Motor Torpedo Boats (PT Boats) which were still on station.

So the American base had to make do with what it had. First, the troopers, who had their positions pretty well hardened dug a bit deeper and any gaps were closed up. Sam and I dug our oversized fox hole even deeper to the point we had to chin ourselves to get out. We had done all we could.

While we had no heavy bombers on Mindoro, such as B-17's or B-24's we had a number B-25 light bombers. The B-25's began their bombing of the Jap fleet as soon as they could be gassed up and loaded with bombs. At first the planes were gone for an hour or two because the fleet had been 200, or so, miles away when they had been spotted. As the ships came closer in the twilight hours of December 26 the B-25's were gone only a few minutes before they returned for more fuel and more bombs. As it began to be darker, a couple of things happened. First, we could see flashes from the Jap AA fire from their ships. Second, the B-25's were joined by nearly anything else that would fly and could carry a bomb. The Fly Boys were hitting the Japs with everything they had....

*(continued....)*



....But darkness made operations more difficult. The airfields were not prepared for this many aircraft to operate using, more or less primitive, radar facilities. It was necessary for returning planes to use their navigation lights so they could avoid each other. Again, as we awaited developments, planes came in to land on our nearby airstrip and we never knew if it were one of ours or one of the Jap's.

The Jap task force was moving rapidly. By the time it was fully dark their AA fire was clearly seen along with the flashes of bombs exploding. This was a thrilling sight. In retrospect it was, probably, one of the most sensational events in my life.

The base at San Jose, Mindoro had been reasonably well stocked with fuel and bombs but as our planes continued to operate at full tilt supplies began to run low. We were told that to gas up the B-25's fuel, tanks were lifted on one side so every last drop could be taken from the tank. It may be a bit hard to believe but we were told the last B-25 to leave on the bombing run had bombs without detonators. They were dropping the bombs just because they were heavy.

As the fleet drew close to our airfields the planes were told not to come back to the Mindoro base but to head for Leyte and safety. It was 250-300 miles back to Tacloban and many of the planes which by that time were flying on fumes did not make it. It is thought that more pilots and planes were lost due to running out of fuel than were lost to the enemy.

Finally, as we all watched, the Jap ships came abreast of our base on Mindoro. About that time a sound powered phone we had hung on a tree in the CP rang. Being JOP (Junior Officer Present) Sam sent me to answer the call. On the phone was Lawrence Browne, Battalion S-3. His message was that the Jap fleet was off our beaches and could be expected to shell at any moment. This came as no surprise to me, particularly when I heard the first shell *woosh, woosh* toward us and burst into a star shell. A star shell burst can make a person feel naked as a jaybird with the whole world looking down on him. I said, *"Larry, what the Hell do you think we have been watching for hours?"* Then I made a leap for the foxhole where I had the presence of mind to check my watch and saw that it was 2325 hr.

After the first star shell went off the next round, a high explosive one, followed quickly. The shelling went on and on with an occasional star shell mixed in among the HE. Strangely, I heard nothing hitting close to us or the nearby air strip. It finally dawned on me all the shells were landing in the gravel stream bed of the Bugsanga River. Apparently Japanese spotter planes told them that the stream bed was an airstrip. They did not even hit any of our defensive positions on the Southern side of the river. The shelling stopped after 25

minutes at 2450. Then the Jap fleet began a withdrawal Northward followed by our PT boats which continued to launch torpedoes at them.

The next morning we were all gathering to discuss what we had been through. I then noticed my right big toe was hurting. When I got out of our hole to answer the phone I was barefoot. Apparently when I dove for the hole I'd stubbed the toe. By morning it was badly swollen. I went to the Battalion aid station and told Doc Charley Bradford I might have broken my toe. He looked at the toe and agreed, I'd broken it. So he fashioned a cast on my foot with my big toe sticking out. He also gave me a pair of crutches. I had never used crutches before and found them very hard to navigate. Every few steps I would stub the big toe on a rock, or something. With the heavy cast adding weight it hurt more when I stubbed my toe than it did when there was no cast. I went back and had Doc take off the cast. I hobbled around for a few days but with no cast or crutches.

Shortly afterwards we began to set up our "permanent" camp.



"Relaxing after Corregidor on Mindoro, troopers of the 503rd PRCT".



[Don Abbott's story reprinted here courtesy of Paul Whitman with the 503rd PRCT Heritage Battalion website. Web photos added]



Don passed away in 2003



## *In Memory of Sky Soldier*

# Lewis “Louie” Michael Chappell, C/2/503

July 25, 1946 - January 5, 2016

### Tribute

Beloved son, father, grandfather, and friend, Lewis “Louie” Chappell, 69, of Apache Junction, AZ passed away on January 05, 2016 after a valiant fight against brain cancer.



Louie had a warrior's spirit and a huge heart and overcame many struggles in his lifetime until he succumbed to his final illness.

Louie was born in Goffstown, NH on July 25th, 1946 and was preceded in death by his father: Lewis Chappell, his wife (the love of his life): Patricia Chappell, and his brother: Dennis Chappell. Louie's legacy lives on through his mother: Marjorie Chappell, daughters Pamela (Peter) Kline and Karen (Gregg) Elder, and his cherished grandchildren: Caitlin, Matthew, Zabriz and Athena, as well as many loving relatives and friends.

Louie grew up in New Hampshire and lived there until he moved to Arizona with his wife and daughters in 1980. He resided in Apache Junction for the next 35 years. He was a proud Army Veteran, serving with the 173d Airborne Brigade, 503rd Regiment, 2nd Battalion, Company C, the “Sky Soldiers”, during the Vietnam War.

Louie served his country faithfully from 1966-1968. He continued to serve his country as a veteran by actively taking part in his local VFW chapter, Post 9399, where he served on the board as Judge Advocate.

Louie loved cars, driving them, racing them, and fixing them. He worked many years as a cross-country truck driver and auto mechanic. He owned several businesses and eventually retired to spend quality time with his wife, Patricia, before she passed away in 2014.

Louie served his community in many facets. He was always helping out neighbors, friends and strangers. He would lend a hand, or offer his services to anyone he saw in need. Louie loved hunting, fishing, camping, traveling and later in his life he found a real passion for cooking and baking.

Louie was the epitome of generosity, service, and selflessness and he leaves behind a family and community that will feel his absence in many ways.

Louie's memorial service was held at Mountain View Memorial Gardens, in Mesa Arizona on January 13th, 2016.

***May he rest in honored glory and peace.***

Thank you for passing along the sad news, you may include my email address if anyone who knew my dad would like it. Kind regards,

Louie's Daughter, Karen  
[augustxoxo@gmail.com](mailto:augustxoxo@gmail.com)

