

2/503d

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



We try
harder.

VIETNAM

newsletter

July-August 2016, Issue 68
Contact: rto173d@cfl.r.r.com

See all issues at the 503rd PRCT Heritage Battalion website:
http://corregidor.org/VN2-503/newsletter/issue_index.htm

~ 2/503d Photo of the Month ~



“Soldiers of the 173rd Airborne Brigade set off a smoke grenade in the jungle during Operation Silver City in Long Khanh Province.” (AP) (web photo)

Note: The wounded trooper standing on right waiting for dust off in the “D” Zone jungle in this March 1966 photo is Capt. Les Brownlee (Col. Retired), former 2/503 Bravo Company Commander, and the future Acting Secretary of the Army. See related story on Page 24.





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



“To the fallen soldiers....you have done your duty. To honor you is ours.”

~ Quote by unknown



Eric Ribitsch
C/2/503, 7/3/66

“PFC Eric Ribitsch arrived in-country in Vietnam in September 1965. During his tour, he received two Purple Hearts and was awarded a posthumous Bronze Star with Valor Device for his heroism. He was killed on July 3, 1966 in Operation Yorktown in the vicinity of Xuan Loc. He was 23 and a true hero. I am proud to be his nephew, named after him, and I wear his dog tag every day.”

Eric Ribitsch
His nephew



Terry Kenneth Wilkins
C/2/503, 7/3/66

“Terry and I served together with the 101st Airborne at Ft. Campbell, KY, in 1965, when my orders came for Vietnam and the 2nd Battalion of the 173d Airborne in Bien Hoa in December of that year. Terry came over in January of '66, and was assigned to Company "C" of the 2/503rd as a grunt. For the past ten years or so I've worn Terry's KIA bracelet, taking him with me wherever I go, and often when leaving home I'll put his bracelet on and say, 'Come on, Terry, let's go get something to eat.' I recall him telling me he entered the army using a forged passport or birth certificate, and when he arrived in-country he was only 17. I try to keep the memory of my friend alive.”

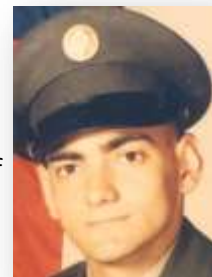
Lew “Smitty” Smith
HHC/2/503

Julius Collins, Jr.
C/2/503, 7/3/66



James T. Noss, “Doc”
HHC/C/2/503, 7/3/66

“Jimmy Noss graduated from Bruceton High School in Preston County, West Virginia with the class of 1963. He moved to Baltimore, MD where he found a job in which he marked patterns on lumber for sawyers to use as a cutting guide. Maintaining his home of residence in West Virginia he received his draft notice two years later and reported for basic training on October 4, 1965. After medic training he was assigned to the 173rd Airborne and reached Vietnam on May 18, 1966. He was killed on July 3, 1966 as he was tending to the wounded. His family received the report he ‘raised up to care for a wounded soldier when he should have stayed down.’ Preston County will not forget Jimmy Noss and all that he stood for when he sacrificed his life caring for the wounded in his care. He is remembered in the book which I wrote, NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN, PRESTONIANS WHO DIED IN VIETNAM in which he is featured along with 16 other men from Preston County, West Virginia who died in Vietnam. This book, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall and The Virtual Wall will be instrumental in assuring that James T. Noss and the others will not be forgotten.” **Dorothy Snyder**



Theodore Williams, Jr.
C/2/503, 7/4/66

“REMEMBERED by his friends and family in the Blue Island community. A memorial from Randy Kethcart.”

“Teddie, you were like a brother to our family, and the day we heard of the tragic news, we all felt and still feel the loss. Our mother and sister Cheryl has passed on and we know that all of you are together and smiling on us in heaven. As life is, we will all be together one day in the presence of God.”

Mark Tolbert Clark, Sr., and Family



(sadly, continued....)



Elmer Wayne Scarborough

C/2/503, 7/4/66

(Virtual Wall states C/1/503)

"Thank you PFC Wayne Scarborough, from CW4 Steven Bowen, USAR, Ret. We had some good times together in Powell County, KY."

CW4 Steven L. Bowen



Stephen Andrew Zukov

A/2/503 7/19/66

"You were my brother Anthony's Father, you may have never met him but he has turned out to a great man. Wish you would have been able to see him grow up."



R.L. McCall, B/6RAR, 7/25/66

James Wilford Collins*

A/82nd Avn Bn, 7/27/66



Joseph C. Sampson, Jr.*

A/82nd Avn Bn, 7/27/66

"You exemplify the spirit of Army Aviation 'Above the Best.'"

LTC Dick Townes, USA Ret'd



Joseph Francis Hunt*

C/4/503, 7/27/66

"Staff Sergeant Hunt was on his second Vietnam tour; during his first tour, January-December 1965, he served with the MACV Advisors, Teams 76 and 99."

"Photograph provided by his granddaughter, Jolene."



Joe David Kegley*

C/4/503, 7/27/66



James Larry McCrystal*

173d Engineers, 7/27/66

(Virtual Wall states C/4/503)



Melvin Warren McDowell*

C/4/503, 7/27/66



Carlos David Moore,* C/4/503, 7/27/66

(Virtual Wall states HHC/4/503)

"Hey Carl, it's Gerry, Gerry Stesiak. I remember buddy. The chopper you were in had its transmission lock up. All aboard died with you my fellow medic of Hqs Co. 4/503 of the 173rd. Platoon Sgt. Shepherd had me take your place out on line. Hey Carl, remember that diary I kept of our activities? Well pal, I finally wrote that book. It's titled *Raptors Prey*, and is coming out this year, 2001. Yea, it's some 35 years later guy. Yea, I know, it seems like just five minutes has gone by. Of course you're in it. Most of the guys, in some form, are in it too. Yea Carl I've told our story, pretty close to the way it was. Say hello to Jerry Bartram for me. Jerry, too, was KIA while taking my place on the line when I went to Hawaii for R&R. Yea, I'll write him too. Well Carl, it won't be too long when we'll be standing shoulder to shoulder again in platoon formation. You probably won't recognize me though. Age changes all of us. But I know one thing for sure, I'll recognize you. Until then pal, rest well."

Gerald K. Stesiak

(sadly, continued....)



Jerry L. Schemel*
C/4/503, 7/27/66

"You were my first boyfriend that gave me a ring, we called it going steady in those days. The memories are countless. The dances at the Walled Lake Casino where your band played, and we were on stage with Stevie Wonder. I became friends with your wife Tina after your passing and I mourned with her and by her side. You were such a talented saxophone player. We shared so many wonderful and fun times together. Thank you Jerry for the gifts you gave to all us. We will always love you and keep your memory alive within."

Cheryl Hatch Drinnon



"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



Rutherford J. Welsh*
C/4/503, 7/27/66

(Virtual Wall states A/82nd Avn Bn)

"I remember when I used to watch Jimmy work on his old car when I was 8 or 9 yrs. old on Horner Ave. off Brown's Line in Etobicoke Ont. I think it was an old Jaguar. His sister Ann taught me how to swim at the local swimming pool and I used to play with his sister Patty and his brother John. My Dad worked at Christies Biscuit's with Doc who was Jimmy's dad, my grandparents where good friends of Lil and Doc his parents. I will remember him always. I still have the newspaper clipping from that unfortunate time. May he rest in peace. Take Care Jimmy."

Bryan Power



Tomas Marroquin, Jr.
D/173d Spt Bn, 8/11/66

"Miss you Uncle Tomas. I survived my tour with the 198th LIB in 1970-71." **Ernie Flores**



Thomas William Haney
E/17th Cav, 8/14/66

"PFC Thomas W. Haney served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade. On August 14, 1966, he was fatally wounded when an enemy mine exploded while he was taking part in a road-clearing operation at Gia Rai, Binh Thuy Province, South Vietnam."

Taken from westsaintpaulantiques.com



Harold W. Reinbott*
A/82nd Avn Bn, 7/27/66



Freddie Bee Glover
E/17th Cav, 8/14/66



* "A/82 Avn was supporting a 173rd Abn troop lift. This aircraft was number 8 in the formation. It was seen to pitch up to a vertical position, falling off to the left. It completed a 270 degree turn while descending rapidly and exploded on impact with trees. Post-crash analysis determined the crash was due to a mechanical failure."

Source: Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association

"Whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report... think on these things." **Philippians 4.8**

Remembrance

"As the crews of COWBOYS & FALCONS gather in Atlanta in late June of '99, you will be remembered."

George Murray, 335th AHC, RVN

(sadly, continued....)



Daryl Raymond Corfman, A/4/503, 8/14/66

“Daryl, I was beside you this fateful day brother...you were a close friend. I will never forget that day as long as I live. I will always remember a blond headed kid. And the heartbreak, and the hand of God. ALWAYS a brother in arms...Sky Soldier.” **Larry Coleman**

“I was there when you died. The problem was difficult to deal with. In your death you have become famous as "The Man In The Poncho" in the photograph by SP/4 Paul Epley titled "The Agony of War" or more popularly known by your Herd Brothers as "Death Watch". **By C.**



“The Agony of War”
(Photo by Sky Soldier Paul Epley)

B.G. Hornung, D/10 6RAR, 8/18/66

Frank R. Gallagher
A/2/503, 8/20/66



Willie J. Tucker, A/2/503, 8/20/66

“Daddy, I love you. Willie James Tucker is my father. The father I never had a chance to know because he died when I was 6 months old. There are times when I feel like a part of me is missing. I know that he is my guardian angel and he is watching over me. Daddy I love you, I hope that I make you proud of me. Love your daughter.” **Spring**

Thomas Taro Kasai
A/2/503, 8/20/66

“Tommy Kasai and I went to high school together. Just another nice guy. We called him the Irishman mainly because he was Asian. I still



think of him and the fun we had. I was in Nam when one of my teachers informed me of Tom's Death. Rest in peace Irishman.” **Phil Anninos**

Michael Lewis
B/2/503, 8/22/66



Henry Van Demps
B/2/503, 8/22/66

“Wow, a grandson born on your birthday. I will call him Rico, and always remember you. Too bad he didn't carry your name in to this century, but perhaps he will have some of your talents, or good looks.” **Margaret Shua**



“As a fellow paratrooper who also served in the 173rd ‘Herd’ Brigade in RVN, I join with all our brothers in offering our appreciation and regrets for your sacrifice. May you rest in peace and never be forgotten. I also live in Tampa and will remember you and say a little prayer as I drive past your cemetery in East Tampa.” **Mike Switzer**

Rayfon Lofton, A/4/503, 8/23/66
(Virtual Wall states B/4/503)

“I just now found your name on a list of 173rd KIAs and realized you were from Chattanooga, TN as was my brother Lonnie Floyd who also served with the 173rd and was KIA 1-14-67. He served with Co C 4 503. I'm so sorry I didn't know you but I assure you now that you'll never be forgotten as Lonnie never will be. Thank you for your sacrifice.”

Brenda Lloyd Underwood
Gold Star Sister

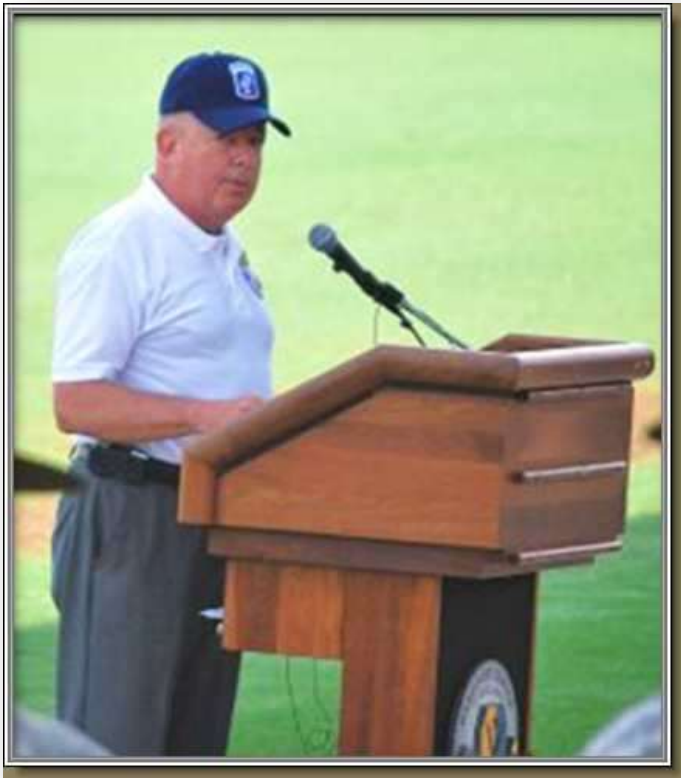
~ Rest Easy Sky Soldiers & Diggers ~

“If I should die, and leave you here a while, be not like others, sore undone, who keep long vigils by the silent dust, and weep...for MY sake, turn again to life, and smile...Nerving thy heart, and trembling hand to do something to comfort other hearts than thine... Complete these dear, unfinished tasks of mine...and I, perchance, may therein comfort you.”

By unknown



Excerpts from remarks given at the Special Operations & Airborne Museum in Fayetteville, NC, and the Brigade Reunion near Fort Benning, GA, by Kenneth V. Smith, Col. (Ret), 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep), Colonel Emeritus



Colonel Smith, former Commander of Alpha & Delta Companies, 2/503 in Vietnam, during dedication of the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial at Fort Benning, GA in 2010.

THE UNIQUE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE, "SEPARATE," PROVIDES, IN MY OPINION, ONE OF THE KEYS TO ITS ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

The concept of a "SEPARATE" or self-sustaining Brigade was unique to the Army force structure. As a Separate Brigade, the unit could deploy to any given location, plug into an air or sea supply line, and sustain itself for an extended period of time.

The Brigade was born in 1963 on the Island of Okinawa as the army transitioned from the rigid battle group organization to the more flexible BRIGADE force structure.

The core of the Brigade's 1963 fighting elements included:

- the First and Second Battalions of the 503d Infantry,
- the Third Battalion, 319th Artillery,
- Company D, 16th Armor, the only separate armor company ever on army roles and the only one on jump status,
- "E" Troop, 17th Cavalry,
- the 173d Engineer Company,
- and a separate Aviation Platoon named after the friendly ghost – CASPER.

The 173d Support battalion was in actuality a mini-division support command with an administrative company; a medical company with the equipment and personnel who could pull your teeth or perform life-saving surgery. A supply and services company, and a maintenance company capable of keeping the brigade's vehicles and equipment operating.

From its birth through May 1965, the brigade underwent intense training both on the Island of Okinawa and with U.S. allies throughout the Pacific region. Because of the Brigade's frequent parachute jumps with allied airborne units, the Nationalist Chinese named the Brigade paratroopers "Tien Bien" or "Sky Soldiers" a nickname that has stayed with the unit since its early existence.



Sky Soldiers of the 2/503 arrive Bien Hoa AFB in May '65.

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

(continued....)



As a result of a deteriorating situation in Vietnam in the opening months of 1965, the Brigade was ordered to deploy to Vietnam effective 5 May for a thirty-day temporary duty assignment. The Sky Soldiers were the first major United States Army ground combat unit committed to that long and bloody conflict.

Their initial mission was to hold open a gateway for follow-on units, securing the Bien Hoa airfield and defending the vital port of Vung Tau.

For some weeks after their arrival, Sky Soldiers conducted company size sweeps around the Bien Hoa air base. While the Sky Soldiers were there, not a single round fell on that airfield.

A few weeks after the brigade's arrival in Vietnam, the First Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment was attached to the Brigade, and the New Zealand 161st Field Artillery Battery arrived some weeks later. The Aussies and Kiwis contributed to the brigade warriors a wealth of jungle fighting experience learned in Malaysia – as well as a taste for Aussie beer.



Diggers of the RAR arrive Vietnam.

In July, the brigade participated in the first joint U.S.-South Vietnamese operation of the war. This was a nine-battalion effort that penetrated deep into the western part of War Zone D; over 400 enemy casualties resulted from this engagement.

August and September of 1965 saw the brigade deployed to Vietnam's central highlands to relieve a siege of A-Team Special Forces camp about four kilometers from Cambodia.

Returning back to their Bien Hoa base in early November, Sky Soldiers found that the nature of enemy operations had changed.

While on Operation Hump, brigade elements were opposed by North Vietnamese regular army forces who chose to fight rather than flee into the jungles. This was a bad decision on the part of the North Vietnamese. The Sky Soldiers destroyed a main force north Vietnamese regiment and were awarded a Presidential Unit Citation.



“U.S. 1/503 paratroopers engaging the enemy during Operation Hump.” (web photo)

The list of brigade operations conducted in 1966 is much too long to cover in any detail. In January, during Operation “Marauder,” brigade elements were deployed to the Mekong Delta, the first major army unit to operate in that area. Sky Soldiers destroyed the headquarters of Viet Cong forces operating in the Plain of Reeds.

(continued....)





“Women and children crouch in a muddy canal as they take cover from intense Viet Cong fire at Bao Trai, about 20 miles west of Saigon, on January 1, 1966. Paratroopers, background, of the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade escorted the South Vietnamese civilians through a series of firefights during the U.S. assault on a Viet Cong stronghold” (during Operation Marauder). (Horst Faas/AP)

Between February and December Sky Soldiers participated in eighteen major operations. Two examples were: Operation Crimp, during which the brigade captured the Viet Cong headquarters for the Saigon area, and Operation Silver City, during which the 2nd Battalion destroyed A North Vietnamese regiment.



“Sky Soldiers of the 2/503 arrive LZ Zulu Zulu on the late afternoon of 15 Mar '66 during Operation Silver City. The next morning they would be surrounded and battle with an enemy force three-times their size.” Later, the 2/503, along with attached units inside the beleaguered LZ, would be awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

(Photo by RTO Wayne Hoitt, HHC/2/503)

In mid-1966, Sky Soldiers bid goodbye to their Australian and New Zealand friends. However, the Brigade’s combat power was enhanced by the addition of the 4th Battalion, 503rd Infantry from Fort Campbell.

Shortly after their arrival, the 4th Battalion and supporting Brigade elements were sent north to reinforce the Third Marine Division in the Da Nang area. This task force was the first army ground element to operate in the northern sector of South Vietnam.

Upon arrival in the Marine area of operations, Sky Soldiers provided security for bridges, a Hawk air defense battery, and supply areas.

While Sky Soldiers protected key facilities in the region, no mortar or rocket attacks were launched against the sprawling Da Nang air base, and the critical Namo Rver Bridge. Shortly after the Sky Soldiers departed the area in December 1966, the enemy blew up the Namo River Bridge and resumed mortar and rocket attacks on Da Nang.



Namo River Bridge, later destroyed during the war.

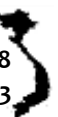
(web photo)

The Battalion Task Force was one of the few army units serving in Vietnam to be awarded a Navy Presidential Unit Citation.

As the calendar transitioned into 1967, the record of operations named Dexter, Yorktown, Attleboro, and so many more became history.

Early in 1967, the Brigade participated in Operation Junction City, the largest combat operation of the war. The operation was designed to capture the Viet Cong supreme headquarters. Soldiers from three infantry divisions and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment were directed to sweep through the critical War Zone C, pushing the enemy into Sky Soldiers who were to be deployed as a blocking force to capture or kill the fleeing enemy.

(continued....)



To insert the blocking force quickly, the Second Battalion conducted the only mass U.S. parachute assault of the Vietnamese conflict. Combat forces were on the ground in 7 minutes and received their artillery and heavy equipment within an hour.



“More than 800 paratroopers jump from C-130s on Feb. 22, 1967, launching Operation Junction City with the only battalion-size combat jump of the Vietnam War.”

(web photo)

Among other accomplishments, the Brigade’s warriors destroyed Viet Cong’s public information office for psychological propaganda and their communications center

In the spring of 1967, intelligence reports indicated a massive build-up of North Vietnamese forces in the central highlands of Vietnam. The enemy’s strategy was to slice across the narrow waistline of Vietnam and cut lines of communications between its northern and southern sectors.

In May of 1967, Sky Soldiers were ordered to deploy to the Vietnamese highlands and establish an operating base near the Dak To Special Forces camp.

Between June and October of 1967, brigade elements, along with Vietnamese and other American units, conducted six major battles in the Dak To area. The first of these, known as The Battle of the Slopes, occurred on 22 June.



Sky Soldiers fighting to take Hill 1338 during *The Battle of the Slopes*. (web photo)

Alpha Company of the Second Battalion, while moving down a ridge toward the Dak To camp, fought a lengthy meeting engagement with a superior North Vietnamese force -- 24 Sky Soldiers were wounded in the hours-long battle and seventy six were killed -- some executed as they lay wounded on the ground -- before American firepower could drive the enemy away.

Intelligence reports estimated that the North Vietnamese suffered more than four-hundred casualties during the battle and in its aftermath as the enemy fled toward the Cambodian border. This battle was an omen of the fighting to come over the next few months

In mid-July, the 4th Battalion fought enemy forces west and south of the Dak To Special Forces camp in a multi-day engagement. Other elements of the Brigade fought numerous battles as they conducted search and destroy missions.

Throughout August, fighting continued in the Central Highlands near the Special Forces camps west of Dak To. But, by mid-September, NVA forces seem to have withdrawn and with a diminished threat, the Brigade was ordered to deploy to the coast area near Tuy Hoa. Yet, even as the Brigade was moving to the coast, the NVA was moving to the coast.

The NVA threat in the Central Highland reappeared, and by mid-October, the North Vietnamese had committed four regiments – approximately 6,000 fighters – to the area.

On 1 November, the 4th Battalion returned to Dak To, and were soon joined by the First and Second Battalions. The Third Battalion, 503rd Infantry, which was formed at Fort Bragg, arrived in Vietnam in mid-September, but U.S. commanders considered the unit too green to join the fight at Dak To.

Throughout the early days of November, U.S. and Vietnamese forces engaged the NVA in multiple battles.

The Brigade’s First and Fourth Battalions fought North Vietnamese units in heavy fighting on three successive days in early November.

Battles were fought on numbered but unnamed hills of no strategic importance, only because the enemy was there; and the hills were abandoned – sometimes within a day of their capture – as the NVA conducted tactical withdrawals.

The battles took a toll on all brigade forces, but despite the gaps in their ranks, the Sky Soldiers continued to take the battle to the enemy.

(continued....)



Following an attack on the Dak To base, the Brigade's Second Battalion was ordered to take Hill 875. The most prominent terrain feature in the area and where intelligence indicated that the North Vietnamese Regional Command Headquarters was located.



“Hill 875 casualty, Dak To. Swathed in battle dressings, but still gripping his weapon, a wounded soldier of the 173rd Airborne awaits evacuation from Hill 875. American troops captured the summit of Hill 875, climaxing the longest and costliest battle of the Vietnam war. The battle claimed the lives of 280 Americans and nearly 1400 North Vietnamese: photographer unknown, 23 November 1967.” (web photo)

2nd Battalion launched a three-company attack on Hill 875 on the morning of Sunday, 19 November. The companies came under heavy enemy fire and multiple enemy assaults as they neared the crest of the hill. The attack ground to a halt and the Battalion consolidated into a perimeter which was pelted with mortar and rocket fire.

In a horrific case of friendly fire, a 500 lb. bomb landed close to the perimeter in the early evening, and another struck the edge of the perimeter. Among the heavy casualties, eight of sixteen company grade officers who participated in the initial assault were killed, and all of the eight surviving officers were wounded, some seriously.

On the next day, Monday, three rifle companies from the 4th Battalion moved overland to Hill 875. The relief columns brought much needed water, food and ammunition to the beleaguered 2nd Battalion soldiers since most resupply attempts by helicopter that had occurred throughout the day were aborted because of heavy enemy fire.

On Tuesday, the 4th Battalion soldiers attempted to seize the crest of Hill 875, but were met with withering fire. By day's end, the three attacking companies were forced to withdraw with their dead and wounded to the Second Battalion perimeter.

On Wednesday, mortar rounds pounded the remnants of the two battalions as plans were drawn up for another effort to seize the hilltop.

On Thursday, November 23, Thanksgiving Day, following murderous Air Force and artillery strikes on the top of the hill, the Fourth and Second Battalion survivors launched another ground assault. Simultaneously, two companies of the 4th Infantry Division soldiers launched an attack from the base of the hill.



“Weighted down with ammunition and other gear a trooper of the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade leans against a battered tree wiping the dust of battle from his eyes after the battle of Hill 875 came to an end during the week of Nov. 19, 1967. The Americans fought entrenched North Vietnamese troops for four days before taking the crest of the hill located near Dak To, South Vietnam, Nov. 23, 1967. (AP photo from web)

(We believe the trooper is the late Rocky Stone, B/4/503. Ed)

(continued....)



The U.S. forces quickly reached the top of the hill after meeting only minimal resistance. The enemy fled leaving their vast network of bunkers, trenches and caves. Two days later, the war weary Sky Soldiers turned the battlefield over to the 4th Infantry units and returned to their Dak To base.

Over a sixteen day period, the gunners of the 3/319th Artillery Battalion fired upwards of 45,600 rounds of high explosive and illumination shells. The 335th Assault Helicopter Company, the Cowboys, who had provided invaluable support to the Brigade for many, many months, lost twelve of twenty-one helicopter to enemy fire.

The capture of Hill 875 ended the 173d's major combat role at Dak To. By mid-December all Brigade elements had departed from the bloody battlefield of Dak To. 208 Sky Soldiers were killed during the November battles, and 645 were wounded. The Brigade was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation.

The next pitched battles for Brigade elements occurred during and immediately after the February 1968 Tet Offensive.

During the Tet attacks the gunners of the 3/319th fought pitched battles on their guns to repulse attacking enemy elements. The Second and Fourth Battalions fought several engagements against Viet Cong and NVA forces with great success.

In March, D Company, 16th Armor distinguished itself in a pitched battle near Tuy Hoa, effectively destroying two NVA battalions.

In late March 1968, the Brigade's mission changed. With increased emphasis on turning major combat operations over to the South Vietnamese army, the 173d supported pacification operations in northern II Corps, protecting populations and rice growing areas.

Elements of the Brigade conducted an amphibious assault as part of an operation to clear the rice growing lowlands along the Bong Song littoral. But there were exceptions to the pacification missions .

In early 1970, a North Vietnamese Army Regiment appeared in the 173d's area of operations and launched attacks at what they believed would be soft targets such as artillery fire bases that appeared to be unprotected. But, the artillery men of the Third of the 319th Battalion excelled at infantry tactics and 105 howitzers fired at zero degrees elevation, and with anti-personnel rounds convinced the NVA of their folly. After several failed attempts, including the destruction of an NVA sapper battalion in a claymore ambush, the NVA withdrew

The sizeable number of enemy troops killed in action, the enormous amounts of supplies captured, and the enemy's failure to mount an attack in northern II Corps were indicators of Sky Soldier combat success.

Consistent with the withdrawal of forces from the Republic of Vietnam in 1971, elements of the Brigade began their redeployment in April to Fort Campbell, Kentucky to be integrated into the 101st Airborne Division. By August 25th, all of the Brigade's combat units had been withdrawn.

The Brigade was officially deactivated on 14 January 1972, and its colors furled.

During its more than six years of continuous combat, the Brigade earned fourteen Campaign Streamers and four Presidential Unit Citations.

Thirteen Sky Soldiers were awarded Medals of Honor, ten of which were posthumous awards.

Forty-six Sky Soldiers received the Distinguished Service Cross.

1,737 warriors were awarded Silver Stars, including one veteran who belatedly received his award earlier this year.

Over 6,000 received Purple Hearts.

1,647 Sky Soldiers assigned to the Brigade were killed, and Units attached to the Brigade lost more than 165 warriors.

The 173d Airborne Brigade wrote a unique page in the annals of Army history.

Its unparalleled accomplishments were the result of the professionalism of its leaders and the courage and tenacity of its combat and support warriors, great commanders such as General Ellis Williamson, the brigade's first commander, who enlisted in 1935 as a trumpeter in a National Guard band, and served with distinction in World War II and Korea; and General John R. Deane, Jr., affectionately known as Uncle Jack, whom in 1942, as a second lieutenant led a platoon in World War II and as a lieutenant colonel in 1945, was commanding a battalion.



Gen. Williamson in Than Binh with the 173d in August '65.

(George Dexter photo)

(continued....)



Superior sergeants major trained, led, and inspired the troops; such as Vincent Rogiers, who served twice as brigade command sergeant major and also as the command sergeant major of the Second Battalion. It has been said that Rogiers could correct an erring Sky Soldier for five minutes without repeating himself or using a single swear word.

The list of outstanding battalion commanders is too long to cover in detail -- their exploits resonate through the brigades' history.

Then, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Boland, deserves special mention. He became enhanced by the theme song, "Rawhide" and on Okinawa started playing it over loud speakers when his troops gathered for formations. Soon, the Brigades' warriors became known as The Herd, a title that Vietnam era Sky Soldiers proudly claim, even today's Brigade warriors became known as The Herd.



Colonels Richard Boland (holding mic) and Bob Sigholtz at 2/503 reception during Brigade reunion in Daytona Beach.

The chaplains who accompanied the Sky Soldiers into battle were not rear echelon residents. Their names and memories come easily to mind. The Leapin' Deacon, Chaplain Connie Walker, was well loved not only in Vietnam but throughout his entire life by men who respected his courage and his wisdom.

Father Charles Watters, who was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for heroism during the Battle of Dak To, where he left the perimeter on numerous occasions to retrieve the wounded from the battlefield. And Pat Hessian, who later became Chief of Chaplains, and Father Edwin O'Brien, now a Cardinal of the Catholic Church, and so many more great men whose belief in God equaled their courage in combat.

The host of company commanders and platoon leaders are again too numerous to mention. Men like Tom Needham, who directed the Defense Departments' POW/MIA recover program in the latter part of the 25th Century with great success; and Jack Price, who raised money to buy a lifetime subscription to *Playboy* for his company because of the promise that the first issue would be delivered by a *Playboy* bunny. Bunny Jo Collins raised Sky Soldier morale during her visit in 1966.



B/2/503's Jack Price, on right, dining with "G.I. Jo".

But perhaps most decisive in establishing the heritage of the Brigade was the level of leadership provided by the Brigades' non-commissioned officers. They led from the front.

Consistent with the finest traditions of the Brigade, more than two-thirds of the 554 Sky Soldiers who died in 1969, 1970 and 1971, were junior combat leaders. Corporals, sergeants and staff sergeants -- fire team and squad leaders who were killed *Leading* the men entrusted to their care.

The hundreds of Sky Soldiers who provided point and flank security, who manned listening posts every night and conducted ambushes, and did so willingly, were -- in my opinion -- heroes, although most were never recognized officially for their actions...a few were.

The stories of the Medal of Honor recipients who served in Vietnam are extraordinary.

Sergeant Larry Pierce used his body to suppress the explosive force of a landmine, and PFC Milton Olive grabbed an enemy grenade in his hand and then fell on it to save the lives of his fellow soldiers.

(continued...)



Specialist Alfred Rascon, a medic, treated the wounded under fire, protecting them and giving them aid over prolonged periods of time while sustaining serious wounds.



1/503d's Al Rascon being helped off battlefield by his buddies on 16 Mar 66, in the "D" Zone. (web photo)

Staff Sergeant English led an attack against forces that ambushed his armored vehicle and then reentered the vehicle to evacuate his trapped men. He died when the vehicle exploded as he carried a wounded comrade from the vehicle.

As the Vietnam conflict receded into history, the legacy of the Sky Soldiers engaged in that conflict lives on.

Included in the ranks of those who learned the art of leadership and traits of personal and professional courage are doctors and lawyers, congressmen and law enforcement officers, businessmen, scientists, teachers and so many more.

More than 40 general officers emerged from the ranks of this Separate Brigade, including such notables as Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff, Hugh Shelton, and Commander of the Special Operations Command, Wayne Downing .

Dentist Charlie Norwood served in Congress as did Mike Thompson and Duncan Hunter.

MP Bob Finan served for many years in the secret service, protecting our national leadership. He subsequently served as Assistant Director of the Navy Criminal Investigate Service and then as Assistant Director of the U.S. Marshalls.

And Bob Kimmitt, whose battery fired the last artillery shell for the 3/319 Artillery in 1971. Kimmitt subsequently served as Assistant Secretary and then Acting Secretary of the Treasury, and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and Ambassador to Germany.

And, of course, Les Brownlee, former Bravo Company Commander, 2/503, who served as Acting Secretary of the Army.

Sadly, we will never know the accomplishments which could have been from the ranks of the 1,647 Sky Soldiers who fell in combat -- what great leaders, scientists, doctors, clergy, musicians and artists were lost to us and our nation.

As we gather here in contemplation of what the 173d Airborne Brigade did in Vietnam, the voices of those no longer in our midst are heard from decades past. They do not call us to remember their deeds, for we will never forget what they did.

Their voices cry out instead for us to remember their legacy.

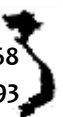
The lasting legacy of Sky Soldiers is not one of combat and captured hills, of missions accomplished or awards received. But one of unbelievable courage, of commitment, sacrifice, and love of country.

Those of us whose lives were spared have this as the cost of our unique legacy. The story of our deeds and the memories of our departed must never be forgotten.



[Photos and captions added]

###





(short round)

INCOMING!



~ Beautiful Streamer ~

Thank you again for sending that outstanding news-
letter to me!

Felt a bit sorry for the 105th Fld. Bty. Diggers that felt
as though they were not appreciated for their
outstanding support! (Pages 26-27, Issue 67) Would
think that even after all these years, that someone
from 2-503d with some big "nuts" and not concerned
about creating waves, get the powers that be to get
those Aussies that PUC!

And yes, if I were AIRBORNE, I would vote to keep it
as it is!

Did I mention to you that back in '58 I took all of the
required paperwork for jump school, took the P.T. test,
passed with flying colors, was to go to HQ the following
day for final signatures. That night I had a dream of a
making a jump and lo and behold I had a Streamer!!
Had to make that call and let them know I changed my
mind!

From a Leg Army 1Sgt Good Buddy

"Beautiful Streamer"

(Sung to the tune of "Beautiful Dreamer")

Beautiful streamer, open for me,
Blue skies above me and no canopy;
Counted nine thousand, counted too long,
Reached for the rip cord, the damn thing was gone.

Beautiful streamer, why must it be?
White silk above me is what I should see,
Just like my mother that looks over me;
To hell with the rip cord, 'twas not made for me.

Beautiful streamer, follow me down,
Time is elapsing and here comes the ground;
Six hundred feet and then I can tell,
If I'll go to heaven or end up in hell.

Beautiful streamer, this is the end,
Gabriel is blowing, my body won't mend;
All you jump happy sons of a gun,
Take this last warning as jumping's no fun.



"If you've never run
off the canopy of
another Paratrooper's
chute, you've never run."
Smittyism

C/2/503's RTO Steve Haber & His LT



Good buddy Steve at the ready with friend outside his
new cabin in the Carolina's. Why? Because he could.
The 'career PFC' even promoted himself to Sergeant.
What you don't see is, he's wearing sockless loafers
under the canvas. I can just see his new neighbors,
"Who the hell is that crazy bastard?! Lock the doors
Martha!" You guys send me this stuff, I'll print it! He
should have known better. ☺ Ed



Sky Soldiers...just doing what they like to do....



“Members from the US Army 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team conduct combat-jump operations from a C-17 Globemaster III during a joint coalition training exercise, March 23, 2011, at Aviano Air Base, Italy.” USAF/SSgt.Nadine Y. Barclay



“During the Vietnam War, Martha Raye was made an Honorary Green Beret after she visited United States Army Special Forces in Vietnam. Above is a photo of "Colonel Maggie" sitting in a Casper Platoon Huey before taking off to visit with our 173d Airborne Brigade troops. Casper was honored to have provided her the ride!” Anyone know who her escort is here? (Photo provided by Ned Costa/Caspers)

Visit the Casper website at: <http://www.casperplatoon.com>

“U.S. paratrooper Sgt. James R. Cone of Clarksville, Tenn., holds a puppy that nipped him as he groped about in a cave entrance on a river bank in Lam Dong Province, July 24, 1966. Troops of the 173rd Airborne Brigade were searching for Viet Cong guerrillas dug into the caves, but the men had fled, leaving only women and children, and one dog. At left is Pfc. George R. Rosen of Whitehall, Mont.”



(Photo credit: Henri Huet)

###



Father's Death Unites Two GI's In Viet Nam

By William Sanderson
Staff Writer, *The Oregonian*

The two Portland brothers, both combat infantrymen were stationed within 55 miles of each other in Viet Nam -- and didn't know it.

Their paths didn't cross until each had received sad news from home. Mike Walker, 19, a machinegunner with the 173d Airborne Brigade met his brother Jim, 20, at the Saigon airport as both headed home for their father's funeral.

Jim, with the 1st Division 96th Infantry, knew Mike was in Viet Nam somewhere. Mike was not aware his brother was there.

Jim was stationed at Phouc Bihn, north of Saigon, and Mike was at Bien Hoa, south of the capital city. Mike had been in Viet Nam 11 months. Jim had been in Germany when the Army called for Viet Nam volunteers.

Seizure Fatal

Their father, Bruce Walker, a salesman, died of a heart attack Jan. 31. He was 47. Besides his two sons in the Army, Mr. Walker (left) a widow, Mildred, a daughter, Judy, 18, a son, Bob, 16, son Sam, 13, and another son, Adam, who is 4. The family lives at 6842 SE Carleton St.

Jim is married. He and his wife, Rita, have a son, Jamie, who is three months old.

The infantry is a tradition in the Walker family. Grandfathers in World War I, uncles in World War II and Korea, the father volunteered for service in World War II but ulcers kept him out.

"They all came back," said Mrs. Walker. "Every one came back."

Mike Wounded

Mike got hit by a stray bullet and won the Purple Heart. "It laid me up a couple days but it wasn't much," he said.

Both boys are privates first class. Jim's reconnaissance platoon had the job of scouting ahead. "We're the ones they'd ambush," he said. Caught in an artillery barrage once, Jim saw men on either side of him hit. "I didn't get a scratch," he said.

Neither is anxious to return to Viet Nam but each would volunteer for combat duty again "If the situation changes over there." Concern for his family may force Jim to petition the Army for a "hardship discharge."

Mike's photograph appeared on the cover of *U.S. News and World Report* on Dec. 20. "His father bought every issue he could find," Mrs. Walker said.

The photo shows Mike and another soldier standing in tall grass. Mike has the machinegun. In the background, above the horizon, are a half dozen helicopters.

"The photographer told his boss we were under sniper fire. I guess that was to sell the picture. To tell the truth, we were just standing there watching the helicopters take off," said Mike.

"A lot of those reporters and photographers," said Jim, "seemed to have the feeling they couldn't get shot." "But some did," said his brother.

Neither brother has much use for "peaceniks". "I'd like to lob about five hand grenades in the middle of one of those demonstrations," said Mike.

"They're just a bunch of kids showing off," Jim added.

There are "too many rules" in the Viet Nam war and both Jim and Mike feel the U.S. cannot win the war under those "rules".

"They're starting to issue 12-gauge shotguns," Mike said.

Shotguns Popular

"That's the only kind of weapon for jungle work," agreed his brother.

"A couple days before I came home, I killed a Viet Cong. He tried to infiltrate our perimeter. A flare from a helicopter lit up the area and caught him. I shot him four times with a .45 caliber automatic. I guess he was about 15 years old."

"Boy, I tell you one thing, that sure bothered me."

Source: 173d SCRAPBOOK, edition 3, 1966

Thanks to Col. Ken Smith and the late Chap. LTC Frank Vavrin for saving these historical records from the 173d SCRAPBOOK which will continue to appear in our newsletter. In the Chaplain's words from 1997:

"Enclosed are some pamphlets/booklets that are of historical interest, it is hoped, to our troops. I feel that keeping them any longer in my filing cabinet is a terrible waste of their potential value.

It is hoped you (The Society) can agree! Do with them what you will...but please read them and give them a chance first!

Ever Airborne,"

Frank O. Vavrin
CH, LTC, USA, RET.
BDE Chaplain 1964-65

Chap. Frank Oscar Vavrin, age 94, passed away August 4, 2015.



A family of Airborne troopers....



Frank Oscar Vavrin



"Vavrin, Frank Oscar, age 94, passed away August 4, 2015. He is preceded in death by parents, son Frank Neal (1970) and daughter Kristine Elizabeth (1976). Frank served as a U.S. Army chaplain in Korea, Berlin Germany, France and Vietnam. He was a proud member of the 82nd Airborne and 173d Airborne (Sep) units. Frank received the Bronze Star for activities in Vietnam, unusual for a Chaplain. He was a wonderful and steady husband, father, grandfather, great grandfather, and friend. Frank is survived by Jean his beloved wife of 70 years; son Paul and Anne Vavrin; granddaughter Kate and Paul Young; grandsons John and Victoria Vavrin and James Vavrin; and great grand-daughters Mary Beth Kruyer, Abby Young and Gwendolyn Vavrin. A private family prayer and memorial service was held in Minneapolis."



Frank Neal Vavrin

Date of Birth: 10/28/1946
Date of Casualty: 9/8/1970
Home of Record: AUGUSTA, GA
Branch of Service: ARMY
Rank: CAPT
Casualty Country: RVN
Casualty Province: Quang Ngai



"Captain Frank Neal Vavrin, United States Army Infantry, was killed in action on 8 September 1970 by an enemy mortar and rocket attack on his base camp while serving as an Advisor to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

Captain Vavrin, the son of Chaplain and Mrs Frank O. Vavrin was born in Puerto Rico, October 1946. He attended school at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and in Minnesota (while his father was in Korea). For five years they felt homesteaded at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and then moved in 1960 to Berlin, Germany 8 months before the infamous Wall started to grow. He graduated from Orleans American High in France, Class of 1964.

Returning to the States he attended Carthage College in Konesha, Wisconsin, and then transferred to the University of Texas in El Paso while Dad went to Vietnam and Mother and his brother and sister stayed here. While his father went to Vietnam with an Ordinance Battalion they knew that sooner or later he would find an Airborne unit and he did.

The family moved to Fort Gordon, Georgia. Captain Vavrin contracted mononucleosis at El Paso and dropped out long enough to lose his credits for the year. He called home, spoke to his Dad, and said "Sooner or later you'll join the Army; why not come home and do it now?"

An army friend was coming back from leave in California who stopped by El Paso to form a two car convoy to come east.

After Basic and Advanced Training he entered the Reserve Officers' Training Corps School at Fort Benning where the commission of Second Lieutenant was granted on 28 March 1968. His next duty was Ranger Training School followed by assignment to the 2nd Ranger Training Company at Dahlonga, Georgia. Before being assigned to Vietnam in 1969 he completed Airborne Training and owing to being involved in waiting for some administrative untangling spent his time accumulating 13 jumps.

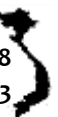
The 199th Light Infantry Brigade was spread in a circle around Saigon. While on patrol a grenade was thrown from the bamboo that lined the roadside. Every member of the patrol was wounded or killed. Captain Vavrin had a severe gash to his hand that got him to the hospital at Camp Zama and then to the States. He was assigned to the Transportation School at Fort Eustis. At least that was the intention. A wrong MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) number was listed that sent him to the Ranger School in Florida! The word got to us later that he claimed, "That was not my intention!" However, he stuck it out, became a qualified Ranger and then went on to Fort Eustis as a junior member of the School Faculty.

He was awarded a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart for the Saigon experience. Before his life ended, Captain Vavrin would be awarded three Bronze Stars and a Silver Star.

At the end of August, 1970 he returned to Vietnam after a 30-day refresher training in Hawaii. One week after arrival "in country" the mortar and rocket attacks struck his compound with the wounding of two of his colleagues (one temporarily blinded by grit blasted into his eyes and the other losing a foot. Both men are still alive and very active at this writing.)

Captain Vavrin was an Airborne soldier in every sense of the word and lived a life of experiences far beyond most of his contemporaries. He loved our Lord, his country and his family.

He was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors." ###



Vietnam's Sky Soldiers remembered with new memorial at Jacksonville National Cemetery

By Dan Scanlan,
Florida Times-Union
May 13, 2016

Army Pvt. Sir Isaac Singleton played taps as members of the Florida chapter of the 173rd Brigade Association dedicated a memorial to the 1,731 members killed in action in Vietnam War combat.



The memorial stands next to the main lake at the Jacksonville National Cemetery.

The simple memorial stands in the shadow of Jacksonville National Cemetery's 40-foot, three-bell carillon tower near pristine white headstones in the 526-acre site.

Planted on a walkway, the new memorial honors

"The Sky Soldiers of the 173rd Airborne Brigade who served with honor."

Just two weeks before the nation honors its veterans on Memorial Day, the Florida chapter of the 173rd Brigade Association dedicated this memorial Friday to the 1,731 members killed in action in six years of combat in the Vietnam War. The marker, third of nine it is installing in military cemeteries in Florida, also honors its 8,345 wounded in action in Southeast Asia battles of the 1960s and '70s.

For William Smith, a U.S. Army Ranger and Purple Heart recipient who was in the 173rd in those Vietnam days, the display on the 7-year-old cemetery's Memorial Walk brings back memories for him.

"It does, as I see some friends who I served with," the 80-year-old Jacksonville man said. *"... The unit I served with was one of the best and I think of all the fallen heroes who it is dedicated to."*

Cemetery director Alphaeus Richburg said the 173rd's marker is part of a planned series of memorials that will line a walkway ringing a lake, pointing to others nearby honoring Vietnam War veterans, Pearl Harbor victims and the Marine Corps.

"I understand what the 173rd Sky Soldiers are, and it is a monument to their accomplishments and for those who have fallen and for the victories they have gathered over the years," said Richburg, an Army veteran himself. *"... We are just now building this history, and monuments like this will show visitors that we have people interred here from different wars and units who really gave their all."*

Sky Soldiers took part in 14 campaigns during Vietnam, earning four unit citations, 1,772 Silver Stars, 52 distinguished service crosses and 13 Medals of Honor. That makes the 173rd Airborne the most decorated combat brigade in Army history, according to statistics.

More recently the brigade deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, earning another unit citation, four distinguished service crosses, 32 Silver Stars and three more Medals of Honor as 33 more were killed.

A handful of Florida brigade veterans Friday joined Ronald Smith, an 173rd artillery officer in 1969 in Vietnam, as he offered a prayer.

"We thank you for those who served with us at various times both in Vietnam as well as in Iraq and Afghanistan, who lay before us in this cemetery and other cemeteries around the country," the Jacksonville Beach resident said. *"We unite with them to give you thanks for the opportunity to be in such an elite unit as the 173rd."*

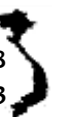
Each "Operation Honor Roll" marker costs \$3,500, most raised by the veterans themselves, he said. The association plans to install the next one at Tallahassee's veterans cemetery, then Miami and Fort Lauderdale over the next two years. Donations can be made at

OperationHonorRoll.com or
floridaskysoldiers.com/donate-memorial.htm

Photos by Dan.Scanlan@jacksonville.com

Dan Scanlan: (904) 359-4549

(Reprinted courtesy of the *Florida Times-Union*)



Vietnam Veteran overcomes war injuries to win four Super Bowls with the Pittsburgh Steelers

by Melissa Heintz
February 19, 2016



Secretary Bob McDonald invited Rocky Bleier, Army Vietnam Veteran, Pittsburgh Steelers star and four-time Super Bowl Champion, to the VA to share his gripping story of courage on the battlefields of Vietnam and his time on America's football fields.

A year after his 1968 rookie season with the Pittsburgh Steelers, Bleier was drafted for the second time; he entered the U.S. Army in December 1968 during the Vietnam War. Bleier was a squad grenadier and operated a 40mm M79 grenade launcher with the 196th Light Infantry Brigade.

He was in Vietnam for only three months when he was wounded on a patrol when his platoon was ambushed in a rice paddy near Heip Duc. He took a bullet in his left thigh moments before a grenade sent shrapnel through his right leg, removing part of his right foot. Bleier was evacuated to an aid station in Da Nang, Vietnam, to recover from his injuries before being transferred to Tokyo then back to the United States.

His doctors told him that he would never play football again.

It was at the field aid station in Da Nang where he met a Veteran that changed his perspective on life. Across from him was a young soldier, a triple amputee who lost his left arm and both legs. Every day before that soldier left for therapy, he'd stop at each bed in the ward, including Bleier's, to give them words of encouragement.

"He'd stop by my bed and he'd say, 'Hey, how are you doing today? You know, you look better today than you did yesterday... Now we've got some good docs here, they're going to take care of you. And don't worry about it, we'll get you out of here and I'll see you back in the real world one of these days,'" said Bleier retelling his story. "I thought if anyone could be embittered with their life it would be that young soldier, having to live with those atrocities that we'd seen everyday. But yet he chose to make a positive impact. And I thought, 'Wow, if he could do that, what about me?'" he said. It was at that moment that Bleier decided then that he would walk again someday.

Bleier overcame his war wounds to win four Super Bowls with the iconic Pittsburgh Steelers of the 1970s. Since his retirement from football, Bleier is still involved with the Pittsburgh community. He works with the Veteran Treatments Courts, helping keep Veterans out of jail and working with VA to get Veterans the treatment they need.

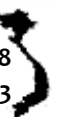
"The great success rate that we have there is largely due to people like Rocky who make a difference in the lives of Veterans every single day," said Secretary Bob McDonald.

Source: www.va.org To see the full presentation by Rocky Bleier, watch the video on VA's YouTube page:

www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/25921/vietnam-veteran-overcomes-war-injuries-to-win-four-super-bowls/



Rocky in action on the gridiron. (web photo)



Casper pics thanks to Ned Costa....

The Casper Aviation Platoon history starts with formation of the 173d Airborne Brigade (SEP). The Brigade was formed on the island of Okinawa on March 26, 1963. The MTOE of the Brigade included an aviation platoon as a part of Headquarters & Headquarters Company under the operational control of the Brigade S-3, Operations Officer.



On May 5, 1965, the Brigade was deployed to Vietnam becoming the first U.S. Army ground unit committed to the Vietnam War. Casper Platoon's Areas of Operation were: Bien Hoa, Dak To, Kontum, Pleiku, An Khe and Bong Son (LZ English).

Here are some Casper photos while supporting our troops in Dak To in 1967.

Ned



Casper Huey's arrive Dak To.



Casper Huey 143 on a support mission for the 2/503d line units in Dak To.



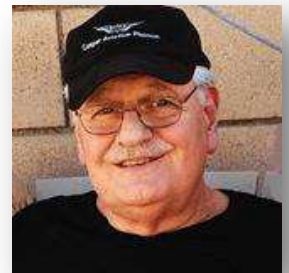
Casper Huey 587 bringing in wounded in Dak To.



Casper Platoon crew on a resupply mission in Dak To.



Casper Huey just landed on a hill in Dak To.



Ned Costa
Casper 721
HHC/Casper Platoon '68/'69

See Ned's story, "*Casper 721: The Last Flight*" on Pages 49-52 in Issue 67 of our newsletter. Ed



The Enemy Is Groggy, General Says

By Garnett D. Horner

Star Staff Writer

(Circa March 1966)

SAN ANTONIO, Tex. -- President Johnson got a "things are going well" report yesterday from a front-line commander recently back from South Viet Nam.

Brig. General Ellis Williamson who led the first large American unit into the Viet Nam war last May, said he told Johnson that "We have the enemy groggy – we're getting the best of him."

The comment, Williams (sp) said, was part of his response when Johnson asked what he would do about Viet Nam if he were commander in chief.

Williamson added, "We should keep the pressure on and continue the build-up so there is no question but what he (the enemy) must give up."



BG Williamson (web image)

Led Airborne Unit

Williamson, who was commander of the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Viet Nam, conferred with Johnson at lunch at the LBJ Ranch and later talked with newsmen at the temporary White House press headquarters here.

Asked if he thought the North Vietnamese port of Haiphong should be mined, Williamson said: "It is a military base. It is supporting their war effort. We should deny its use." He said this question did not arise in his discussion with Johnson, however.

Williamson returned from Viet Nam on Feb. 22 to become assistant commander of the Army's Infantry School at Ft. Benning, Ga.

No Easy "Victory Indicators"

In the Viet Nam war, he said, there are "no easy indicators of victory," such as advances for miles along an entire front as in World War II.

"We do have some indicators though," he added. Among them, he said, are "withdrawal of civilian voluntary support from the Viet Cong." Increasing voluntary civilian support of the government side, and "voluntary surrenders" of enemy soldiers.

He said his unit had its first voluntary surrender of enemy soldiers last November when 53 surrendered – and 22 brought their weapons with them.



We don't know, but this doesn't appear to be one of those "voluntary surrenders" the General spoke about. Ed (web photo)



Maybe this man in Di An, RVN in October '65, is one of those "voluntary surrenders"? In background is Major Bob Carmichael (LTC retired), 2/503 Bn XO and later CO.

(Photo by LTC George Dexter, (Col. Retired) Bn CO).

(continued...)



Intelligence Improved

Thanks to increasing civilian support, Williamson said the allied intelligence effort, which left a "lot to be desired" when he first reached Viet Nam last spring, has improved markedly.

It used to be, he said, that thousands of troops might walk through a jungle for days in search of the Viet Cong, sometime stumbling across a target but often missing them.

Since last fall, however, he said, intelligence has so improved that "we can go after specific targets." He recalled that in December he was "told the location of an enemy battalion, went in by helicopter and destroyed it." He had two similar experiences in January.

Optimistic on Securing Areas

Williamson talked quite optimistic about the problem of securing areas of the Viet Cong.

"The Viet Cong has never reclaimed a single populated area that we have cleared out," he said. *"In every area we went in that had houses, had people on a permanent basis, the people were so happy to have the Viet Cong pushed out, the Viet Cong never came back to control a populated area."*

The Viet Cong do come back in "jungle areas," Williamson said.

He said he thought that "often we psychology give the Viet Cong more than he has," when considering who controls what in South Viet Nam.

He said the usual statistics count on our side only the areas known definitely to be under control of the South Vietnamese government, and list all other areas under Viet Cong control.

The White House, meanwhile, made public a report to the President by Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, echoing Williamson's optimism about the Viet Nam war, but in more cautious words.

Humphrey's report summarized his conclusions after his recent two-week mission to South Viet Nam and eight other Asian countries as a follow-up in the Honolulu conference last month between Johnson and South Vietnamese leaders.

There was little difference in the written report from what Humphrey has said publicly since his return.

"In Viet Nam," he wrote to Johnson, *"The tide of battle which less than a year ago was running heavily*

against the government of South Viet Nam has begun to turn for the better. Ahead lies a long and costly struggle...yet I am confident that we can prevent the success of the aggression in South Viet Nam."



Vice President Humphrey in Saigon, 1966. (web photo)

Significance of Struggle

Humphrey also reported:

"The significance of the struggle in Viet Nam is not simply the defense of a small nation against powerful neighbors. Viet Nam is, in a larger sense, the focus of a broad effort to restrain the attempt by Asian Communists to expand by force."

"Most Asian leaders are concerned about belligerence (sp) and military of Communist China's attitudes. None wishes to permit this country to fall under Communist domination in any form. All are dedicated Nationalists."

"Among the leaders with whom I spoke, there was repeatedly expressed a concern as to whether our American purpose, tenacity and will were strong enough to persevere in Southeast Asia. I emphasized the firmness of our resolve but also to the right of free discussion and dissent."

Source:

173d SCRAPBOOK

Edition 3, 1966

(Photos added)



Excerpt....

Armed with sleep: The importance of sleep on warfighter performance

By: Rachel Markwald
Naval Health Research Center



Army Soldiers catch a few minutes of sleep on board an Air Force C-17 Globemaster III. Overall research findings suggest that inadequate levels of sleep when sustained over time increase the risk of physiological disease, allowing greater susceptibility to illness. (USAF photo by Heide Couch)

Sleep disruption is common among military personnel; often unavoidable during deployments, up-tempo operations, and other evolutions critical to mission success. Several studies indicate a large portion of military members do not routinely get the recommended seven or more hours of sleep each night. This increases the risk of developing insomnia and other sleep disorders.

Scientists at the Naval Health Research Center's Sleep and Fatigue Research Laboratory are studying the sleep concerns warfighters face. Their research addresses sleep throughout the continuum of military service; from the new recruit to the transition back to civilian life.

There is currently no available ambulatory sleep monitoring device that is operationally-practical and capable of accurate, real-time auto-assessment and user feedback within operational settings. This capability gap has been identified at military workshops and meetings as a major obstacle to identifying sleep issues and managing fatigue. The availability of such a device would also allow for reliable at-home monitoring and the ability to gain awareness of how behaviors impact sleep quality before and after operational engagement.

To address this gap, the NHRC sleep research team is evaluating new consumer-available technologies in order to determine which, if any, perform well against the gold-standard methods of laboratory-based polysomnography and mobile wrist actigraphy for assessing sleep.

NHRC is also conducting studies with colleagues at the Naval Medical Center San Diego Sleep Clinic to determine if emerging sleep assessment technologies and smart phone applications can be used to help flag suspected sleep disorders and/or supplement the treatment of insomnia at clinics....

Overall research findings suggest that inadequate levels of sleep when sustained over time increase the risk of physiological disease (including metabolic diseases such as obesity and diabetes), may decrease testosterone levels, and lower immune system functioning, allowing greater susceptibility to illness. These are just some of the physiological effects poor sleep can have over time.

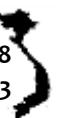
Tips for getting good sleep include:

- Avoid too much alcohol before bed....
- Don't exercise intensely too close to your bedtime....
- Avoid large meals within two-three hours of bedtime.... If you're hungry, have a light snack....
- Skip the caffeine six hours before bed....
- Caffeine taken too close to bedtime can also interfere
- Create a sleep environment that is quiet, dark, and not overly hot....
- Whenever possible, this includes limiting potential interruptions from pets, roommates, and street noise. Fans, white-noise generating machines and earplugs can help with unwanted noise interruptions.
- Avoid exposure to bright light at night—this includes overhead lights and light exposure from TVs and handheld electronic devices. Light can impact your ability to fall asleep at your desired bedtime by delaying your body's internal clock and propensity to fall asleep until a later time.
- Set a time for going to bed and waking up that is as consistent as possible from one day to the next.

See entire article at:

Health.mil

www.health.mil/News/Articles/2016/03/22/Armed-with-sleep-The-importance-of-sleep-on-warfighter-performance



'THESE KIDS . . . BEST SOLDIERS U.S EVER HAD'

Troops Praised by Officer

(Original Editor's note) *This is the war and what it means as seen by a company commander in Viet Nam, Capt. Romie Brownlee. Photographer Horst Faas was nearby earlier this month when Viet Cong grenade fragments blasted into Brownlee in D-Zone. Now, in a hospital bed, Brownlee talks about his eight months in Viet Nam.*

By Horst Faas

BIEN HOA, Viet Nam (AP) – *"I wish all the people back home could realize what these kids go through over here... Boys become men very quickly...And they are probably the finest soldiers the United States has ever seen."*

Capt. Romie L. Brownlee spoke with conviction in the 93rd Evacuation Hospital. He spoke with pride, humor and sadness.

BROWNLEE, AT 26 THE FATHER of two, had been through eight months of war with these soldiers, first as executive officer and then as commander of B Company, 503rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade. He has led men into battle against some of the toughest Viet Cong guerrillas in Viet Nam.

"A few weeks ago," Brownlee said, "I read a book written during the Korean War. It said a very high percentage of American soldiers did not fire their weapons, and threw grenades without pulling the pin...that sort of thing maybe out of cowardice or panic.

I'll say this, you don't have to tell these kids here to fire their weapons. You don't have to tell them how to use grenades. They are well trained. And some have more guts than they need.

I HAVE SEEN THEM charging a machine gun. *I have seen them exposing themselves to help their wounded buddies. I have seen them doing things far beyond what you would expect.*

There were a lot of times I have been very very proud of my men.

They do exactly what you tell them...it never enters your mind that they might not be brave enough.

AS A COMMANDER you have to be very careful what you tell them...they'll do it exactly...no hesitation. *So, I've been overly cautious sometimes.*



"Soldiers of the 173rd Airborne Brigade set off a smoke grenade in the jungle during Operation Silver City in Long Khanh Province." (AP) (web photo) The wounded trooper standing on right waiting for dust off in the "D" Zone jungle in this March 1966 photo is Capt. Les Brownlee (Col. Retired), former 2/503 Bravo Company Commander, and the future Acting Secretary of the Army.

Things that happen here will remain in our minds for the rest of our lives -- people get killed. We will think about that for a long time.

What we have to do now is to make sure the boys died for something worthwhile...and that the guys over here continue what they are doing until this thing is won."

BROWNLEE LEANED forward from his pillow and went on:

"The United States Army is one of the few organizations today that I think is really fighting communism. A lot of people talk about it but these are the guys that are really doing it.

And it is tough. Even if the Viet Cong weren't over here, the hardships imposed on an individual are very trying. A man never sleeps dry. During the monsoon season he is constantly soaked by rain. He carries far too much weight on his back, but he has to have it – ammunition, rations, water.

YOU CAN BE stationed in Saigon and have a nice life down there in a villa. Or you can be with an infantry unit and have a rather austere arrangement as far as your comfort and personal conveniences are concerned.

And yet (in the infantry) you have more of a sense of accomplishment...you know that you are one of the guys that are going out daily to get the VC.

(continued...)



These are the guys that will win the war when it's won. This may not be the best way to do it, but it is the only way we are doing it right now -- beating the VC in the jungle where he lives.

I'M PROUD that I was able to be one of them, even though it was not fun -- anybody who enjoys this sort of thing must have something wrong with him."

Brownlee looked down at his left arm.

The bandages were off and several stitched gashes marked the places where grenade fragments had slashed into him. He had continued directing his men through a firefight with the Viet Cong despite wounds from shoulder to wrist.

"OF COURSE you can get down in the dumps," he said. "What really keeps me going are the letters from my wife. She always seems to know what to say.

The worst part is the separation. It's hard on all of us."

His wife and children are with her parents in Casper, Wyo. Brownlee attended the University of Wyoming and met his wife there. His parents are in Odessa, Tex., where he grew up and went to high school.

[Source: *New York Journal-American*, April 1, 1966]

(Web photo & caption added, likely taken by Horst Faas)

~ Secretary Brownlee ~

Sky Soldier Les Brownlee served as the Undersecretary of the Army from November 2001 to May 2003 and as Acting United States Secretary of the Army from 10 May 2003 until 2 December 2004, he is a retired Army colonel. He was commissioned in 1962 as a lieutenant in the infantry through the Reserve Officers' Training Corps program at the



University of Wyoming. He is a distinguished honor graduate of the U.S. Army Ranger Course, an honor graduate of both the Infantry Officer Advanced Course and the Command and General Staff College, and a graduate of the Army's airborne course as well as the Army War College. Brownlee served two tours in Vietnam. During the last two and a half years of a four and a half year tour in the Pentagon, before retiring in 1984, he was Military Executive to Under Secretary of the Army James Ambrose. His military decorations include the Silver Star with oak leaf cluster, the Bronze Star with two oak leaf clusters, and the Purple Heart. He holds a master's degree in business administration from the University of Alabama. Brownlee became the 27th Under Secretary of the Army on 14 November 2001, following his nomination by President George W. Bush and confirmation by the United States Senate. From 10 May 2003 until 19 November 2004, he served as the Acting Secretary of the Army.

Woman who earned a U.S. Army Ranger tab has smashed another barrier and made history again



By Jen Hayden

Wednesday Apr 27, 2016



Capt. Kristen Griest smiles at the U.S. Army Ranger tab ceremony

Capt. Kristen Griest successfully completed the U.S. Army Ranger training in 2015, becoming one of only two women in history to complete the Army's notoriously rigorous training. This week Capt. Griest has smashed yet another Army barrier, becoming the first female infantry officer in U.S. Army history:

Griest is expected to graduate from the Maneuver Captain's Career Course on Thursday and earn the right to wear the distinctive blue infantry cord, officials confirmed to Army Times.

"Like any other officer wishing to branch-transfer, Capt. Griest applied for an exception to Army policy to transfer from military police to infantry," said Bob Purtiman, a spokesman for the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning, Georgia. "Her transfer was approved by the Department of the Army and she's now an infantry officer."

The move comes as the Army prepares to open all specialties to women, including the infantry: On the enlisted side, at least three women have signed up to become infantry soldiers. They are not expected to start training until next year.

"An incremental and phased approach by leaders and soldiers who understand and enforce gender-neutral standards will ensure successful integration of women across the breadth and depth of our formations," Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley previously said in a statement.

Congratulations to Capt. Griest and all the women who will follow in her military boot steps.

Source: Daily Kos



BATTLE OF THE SLOPES... CLOSURE?

By Wambi Cook

A/2/503, 173d Airborne, 2/67-2/68



Wambi, in deep reflection at the base of The Slopes.

From my standing vantage site that early April morning on the Dak To airstrip, the summit of Hill 1338 was indisputably familiar. I hastened a mental note that starting at the point of its apex then descending, the once impenetrable amalgam of thick bamboo and vast forestry I'd remembered so defiantly had undergone a dramatic transformation. All that remained of the Hill's once formidable frontage of the many Dak To campaigns of the late sixties was literally a half dozen or so extremely tall, lonely looking lifeless structures passing for trees. It reminded me of post card images of tropical palms on a deserted island. I'd said many times over that if challenged, I was supremely confident I could, without difficulty, pinpoint this specific range of flora out of a lineup of a hundred similar undulating ranges.

For the most part, much hadn't changed of the former landscape where I had first set sight sometime in the middle of June 1967. On this warm spring morning, the topography had gradually transmuted into an unimposing, dry, fallow, and barren wasteland. The once menacing **Slopes**, as I once remembered it, was no more.

This onerous piece of terra firma lay in the rugged region of the Central Highlands located on South Viet Nam's western most border, a mere eight kilometers from where Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam intersect. I remember well the day the Brigade's land and air procession from Bien Hoa to our new basecamp in Kontum Province commenced in early May of 1967. Our fresh Central Highlands' headquarters set adjacent to a Special Forces basecamp and the two Dak To airstrips. The entire flatland boundary was surrounded by some of the Highlands most treacherous jungle imaginable. I recall one seasoned veteran commenting how it even surpassed the wildernesses of Panama where they'd recently trained in preparation for this equatorial macroclimate.

All 173d south lying land operations were usually initiated by first traversing the Po Ko River. The habitually ankle-deep waterway was normally navigable by foot, but on some occasions, especially during summer monsoons, waist to chest-deep maneuvering was unavoidable. From bank to bank at its closest point measured approximately 150 meters. From there the range upward steadily increased as much as 45 degrees. An average 60 lb. rucksack made any slog an arduous task to say the least. Damn, how I hated those hills.

My reference materials indicated that the uppermost section of the Hill to be approximately 4-5 kilometers from the river's edge. On my two preceding trips in 2008 and 2011, I had the occasion to view the *Slopes* each time. The visage on both instances was either from one of the two long abandoned airstrips or the north side of the Po Ko. On the earlier endeavors I'd never thought to ask our local guides to inquire if there was the possibility of diverting from our pre-approved itinerary with a side trip to the *Slopes* instead. In retrospect, I probably realized that why bother asking when I was physically incapable (my assessment) of successfully completing such an obviously daunting enterprise: 290+ lbs., diabetes, high cholesterol & BP, two bad knees, and acute arthritis in every conceivable joint. Who was I fooling? I was a physical wreck. And lastly, I was uncertain of how my emotional and mental facilities would hold up. Was I prepared to face the possible unknown consequences of reliving the most traumatic experience of my life?

(continued....)





Wambi returns our colors to The Slopes.

Fast forward to the Wambi Cook 2.0 version (210 lbs., two successful knee procedures, documented above average health prognosis, and a generally better outlook on my mental wellbeing). Without question, *"I am up to the challenge this time around!"*, I proclaimed to all who would listen. It was now or never.

Even though I expected an unequivocal rebuff of this wish to once again mount the *Slopes*, I entreated my stateside travel agent to include the *Slopes'* zenith on my itinerary this last and final expedition. I was pleasantly surprised to see my objective was 'somewhat' granted. Ostensibly, neither my stateside agency nor their Viet Nam counterparts could find any governmental restrictions forbidding my endeavor to the Hill. On the other hand, all were in agreement that they could not guarantee permission would be granted once I got to Dak To. I would ultimately require formal approval by the region's local communist's officials first and foremost -- and the chances of sanction were remote at best. In other words, any reconnoitering beyond the Po Ko was left up to my own devices and a lot of luck.

At this point in time, I'd been in Viet Nam seven days. My itinerary listed Dak To on day eight. Our principal guide, Tranh, had been with us since our arrival in Hue from Hanoi four days earlier. He'd continued to accompany us southward through the five-hour mountainous ramble by SUV to Kontum Province via Da Nang and the Hai Van Pass, by way of ill-famed Highway 14 -- Ho Chi Minh Trail. Once in Kontum Province, an extra "local guide" was commissioned to augment our time in the Dak To district. I'd come prepared with the latest Google maps, GPS coordinates, and aerial maps provided by former Cowboy pilot Jim McLaughlin, and battle specific drawings from my inestimable internet friend, amateur *Slopes* investigator, Keith Hale, and lastly, the renowned 173d historian, Joe Nigro. I could not have done this without their priceless contributions.

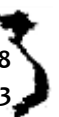
I was confident the maps and other extraneous materials I held in my possession were probably not necessary, but they subconsciously provided me a tangible sense of tranquil security in that I wasn't alone on this journey. When I displayed the maps to the local guide, he straightaway stated that I should best "view" the Hill at the foot of the village located just on the other side of the river. *"Hell, no!"* I insisted. *"I want my boots on the Hill and nothing short of this is acceptable,"* I proclaimed. Message received.

He went on to advise that such an undertaking required formal authorization from the region officials. No shit Sherlock! I'd long awaited his trump card, *"It might take some negotiating,"* he stated in perfect English. Oh? So they might require a few unaccountable Dongs or two as a tribute of good will as it were, I reasoned.

"Check it out", I nippily instructed him. After less than five minutes with the resident constabulary and the equivalent of twenty-five US dollars later, we were headed to the village for phase II where another \$10 was donated to the local capo for his final endorsement. If that's the way to **'Get it done,'** so be it. The village rep, of course, inquired as to why I wanted on the Hill? I modestly responded that this particular parcel of land was especially important to me for a number of reasons all of which would be of little import to him or anyone or his constituents. I had decided early on to not disclose that 76 Americans were annihilated and over twenty-wounded just shy of forty-nine years that coming 22 June. I didn't think they'd give a damn so why bother with details. Besides, how would I react if I perceived their response in a negative light? Providentially, my calmer sense prevailed. Why chance ruining the opportunity of my lifetime because of my ill-timed temperament superseding the greater good? I would not risk jeopardizing my ultimate goal of reaching the battle site. As luck would have it, he didn't insist on further details so my trepidations were all for naught.

He did, however, adamantly caution me that the area I pursued, though cultivated for decades with rubber tree plantations, manioc, and banana farmsteads throughout, were still perilous grounds to tread. There existed copious pockets within this specific expanse where local farmers regularly came upon all species of unexploded ordnance. I thanked him for his sage advice then made it crystal clear that the reward I sought was worth the risk.

(continued....)



From the naked-eye, I detected what appeared to be the same well-worn north-south path we had used decades back. The biggest difference then was that it was impossible to see anything beyond the grunt in front of you through the all-pervading, capricious overbrush. Straying more than five meters to the left or right could mean disaster. I convinced myself that this must be the route that would take us directly to the battlefield? Now, the \$64,000 question; were my 69 year old body and mind up to humping four miles to its peak? Thankfully, Trinh wisely interceded and advised his fellow guide to hire a couple "antiquated" motorbike taxis to assist in our ascent. Why walk when we can ride? Another well invested \$15 and we were off.

Before mounting the bikes it suddenly hit me that I was about to embark on a journey that I could only dream of a few years before. My obsession for the past dozen years was about to be realized. I literally became giddy and unabashedly began to laugh aloud much to the delight of the guides. It took a moment or two to compose myself, and a self-assured broad smile would accompany me throughout the entire expedition from that juncture on.

Our ascension commenced at precisely 9:30 AM. The temperature marked in the upper 70s -- not as high as I expected, thankfully. As soon as we began motoring uphill, I instantly discerned how different the terrain looked from 1967. Forty-nine years ago triple canopy jungle greeted you once you set foot on the southern side of the Po Ko banks. This hamlet was non-existent. The only other friendly human element to be found at that time, other than the Herd and Special Forces, was our Montanyard allies. All others were enemy.



Wambi, back in the 'Nam.

We no sooner reached the outer perimeter of the village when a vast forest of rubber trees engulfed us. To my relief, the staggered configuration of the rubber plantation's rows produced welcomed shade and coolness. These 20'-30' spires reduced the temps by ten degrees at least. This portion of the trek was mercifully sufferable, I ruminated. Perhaps the remainder of this ride will be just as pleasant?

I recalled that throughout my 12 month tour fearing, and equally marveling at the thickest of bamboo that stretched what seemed like forever. It would occasionally comingle with a variety of indigenous trees along with any number of unforgiving prickly undergrowth. Rubber and banana trees, along with rice paddies and cornfields were bountiful farther south, especially in the far reaches of War Zones C and D. Now the Zone's much anticipated unrelenting, vegetation, and intolerant bush-life had literally vanished -- much to my amazement and chagrin.

For the first kilometer or two the bikes functioned well, all things considered. It measures 1338 meters from base to pinnacle. Looks are deceiving, I soon discovered. The varying stages upward became much steeper and deceptively more intimidating. Now, this is what I expected. I had to more than once un-ass the decrepit bike and walk 50 meters or so to the next hillock or risk the vehicle breaking down or worse me falling off into a natural drainage ditch that ran alongside most of the course. We had motored perhaps another kilometer with the summit now totally obscured to our immediate left-front by what was left of the old tree-line, and only partially viewable off our right, when at the top of my lungs I cried out, "Stop! Stop!"

I leapt from the bike only taking a cursory glance as it pounded the ground, its motor still running. I then quickly pulled from my bag one of the maps I'd thought I wouldn't need. It was intended to identify where sub-units (platoons, squads, etc.) within Alpha Company had clashed during the battle on 22 June -- details of which were supposedly gleaned through radio transmissions and eyewitness anecdotal remembrances. My own personal recollections of that day's events would take me from the crest of the Hill starting soon after first contact was made early that morning on to the epicenter 300 meters down the path minutes later beginning with the first of three horrific human waves assaults.

(continued....)



"This is Ground Zero," I loudly bellowed. My startled guides were obviously taken aback by my spontaneous outpouring of emotions -- I heard verbal sounds, but comprehended nothing. Tranh asked if I was OK, I think. I remember inhaling several deep breaths while gathering my senses. I had purposely not prepared myself mentally for this occasion fearing if I failed how much a toll it might take on my delicate psyche. After what was likely fifteen seconds or so had passed, I began to reflect on the experience. The enormity of this Eureka moment isn't easily describable.

This particular piece of acreage, I scrutinized, was inimitable. It was the flattest parcel in what had been up to that point, a landscape made up of a myriad of rolling up and down geography. Since nothing I'd seen so far came close to what I recalled taking place during the battle that summer of 1967, this must be the place, I determined. Without question, this is the site of the massacre of 22 June 1967. It was the perfect location for an enemy ambush. The width across measured about 30 meters with natural mound to mound downward berm firing positions. The length overextended some 50 meters east to west on both sides of the path. A Company had been wedged in what can only be described as a *killing zone gully*. And the opportunistic enemy took full advantage of their positioning. We were trapped on three sides at the lowest portion of the entire expanse. There was absolutely no way out. We had no chance for survival; I remember thinking at the time. Do I die today? How a handful of us made it out alive will forever mystify me.

Up to this point, I'd had the guides video some slices of the trip at their discretion. I then serenely requested they stop shooting while I took a moment to pay homage to My Brothers both dead and living. Once again I had nothing prepared, and I can't recall the text verbatim, but once I'd finished, an intense calm swept over my being.

The descent down got off to a ruckus start after mounting my bike when I shouted from the guts of my soul the loudest *HOO RAH* any human could muster. I was later informed that many of the locals thought the worst had happened to the crazy, **Dark American**. As was the case with my ascent an hour earlier, I maintained an unbreakable smile from start to finish on the descent.

I've memorialized many of these venerated sites with still photographs in addition to both iPad and iPhone videos, all of which can be viewed on either my Facebook page or YouTube. I also extracted a substantial amount of sacred soil which *somehow* made it through Viet Nam and United States customs that I'll make available to whoever requests it.

I relish the fact that I hold the infamous distinction of being one of two of surviving members of Alpha Company 2/503 to revisit Hill 875 (22 February 2011), and the only **Survivor** to conquest *The Battle of the Slopes*. I also recently discovered a statistic delineating that during my time in country, February 1967 – February 1968, Alpha Company sustained over 118 KIAs and innumerable WIAs. This distinction, unfortunately, lives up to our ubiquitous title of *No DEROS* (Date Estimated Return Overseas) *Alpha*.

Upon hearing my story, I'm frequently asked, *"How'd you make it when so many others didn't?"* My pat response is, *"I guess it just wasn't my time."* I don't think my will to live was any greater than those many that didn't. In reality, I suppose, I was chosen to chronicle the human back-stories behind the events for which I happen to have been a 'reluctant' participant. For many surviving family members and friends, mine is the only intimate account they have to treasure surrounding their loved one's final moments. Not a day passes without some instance where either Hill 875 or 22 June or any number of other deadly encounters doesn't find its way into my consciousness. Some might perceive this as a mental burden that should be avoided at all costs. It is not, I assure you. Others might think I should now put the past behind me. I choose not to. My Past will always influence my Future. I also would not wish my Viet Nam experiences on my worst enemies. Indeed, I want never to forget a single moment. I cherish my good fortune. I'm a privileged human being.

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

###



Wambi with Gold Star family members.



Fittingly, treatment of the preceding report by Wambi was completed this day, May 30, 2016, Memorial Day. And the memory of the men listed below is what beckoned Wambi to again return to his and our *Mistress*.

Killed in Action, Kontum Province, Vietnam, June 22, 1967

Terry Lee Odis Allen, A Co.
Erling Alton Anderson, 39th Scout Dog Plt.
James Arnold, A Co.
William Joseph Boehm, A Co.
Ervin L. Burns, A Co.
Albert Butler, Jr., A Co.
Darrell Wayne Butts, A Co.
Carlin Martin Campbell, Jr., A Co.
Ronald Cleveland Clark, A Co.
Thorne M. Clark, III, A Co.
Vernon Terry Cochran, A Co.
Jack Lester Cripe, A Co.
Lloyd Dwain De Loach, A Co.
Lester Michael De Riso, A Co.
Charles Orvis Deedrick, Jr., A Co.
Thomas Alfred Deschenes, A Co.
Thomas Benedict Duffy, Jr., A Co.
Timothy James Egan, A Co.
James Richard Emmert, A Co.
Russel Warren Engle, A Co.
Bobby Lee Finney, A Co.
Burrell Gibson, A Co.
Kenneth Lawrence Greene, A Co.
David Junior Heller, HHC
Alvin Gene Hill, A Co.
Doyle Holcomb, A Co.
Richard E. Hood, Jr., A Co.
Vins Ronald Hooper, A Co.
David E. Johnson, A Co.
Harry J. Johnson, A Co.
Richard Bruce Johnston, A Co.
Richard J. Johnston, A Co.
Donald R. Judd, A Co.
Stephen Allen Kelly, A Co.
Kenneth Kawika Lima, A Co.
Frederick Hugo Liminga, HHC
Robert Richard Litwin, A Co.
Jimmy Clint Lowry, A Co.
Gary Allen Luttrell, A Co.
Walter Christian Mayer, A Co.
Ellia A. McBride, Jr., A Co.
William Stanley McBroom, A Co.
Frank McCray, Jr., A Co.
John McEachin, Jr., A Co.
Stephen Adam Mika, A Co.
Donald Martin Munden, A Co.
William Arthur Munn, A Co.

Timothy John Murphy, A Co.
Daniel Lee Negro, A Co.
Jerry Lynn Noe, A Co.
Michael Donald O'Connor, A Co.
George Patton, HHC
John Perry Patton, A Co.
Nguyễn Phuc, 2/503 Bn Scout
George Albert Poor, Jr., A Co.
Leonard Burton Poore, A Co.
Robert Lee Preddy, A Co.
Floyd Elmer Quarles, A Co.
Ralph Joseph Rizzi, A Co.
Trine Romero, Jr., A Co.
Hector Mario Saenz, A Co.
James Walter Sanford, A Co.
Warren H. Schrobilgen, Jr., A Co.
Jeffrey Ross Sexton, A Co.
John Sharber, Jr., A Co.
Lloyd Edgar Smith, A Co.
Charles Harry Snow, A Co.
Johnson Augustus Steidler, A Co.
David Allen Stephens, A Co.
David Richard Stephenson, A Co.
Robert Louis Stevens, Jr., A Co.
Edmond Ceasar Sutton, A Co.
Fa'Asaviliga V. Tafao, A Co.
Larry Burns Turner, A Co.
Daniel Viramontes Valdez, A Co.
Charlie Lewis Walker, A Co.
Willie Craig Warren, 173d Eng. Co.
Michael J. Waterman, A Co.
Edwin Jerome Williams, A Co.
Alexander C. Zsigo, Jr., A Co.

Other 173d KIA - Operation Greeley June 21, 1967

Jimmy Lee Cook, C Co.
Clifford W. Leathers, Jr., E-Troop
June 23, 1967

Ellis A. McBride, Jr., B Co.
June 27, 1967

Michael Parker, HHC

*Rest Easy Boys,
We Remember You*



Reclaiming your life is purpose of PTSD program

By: Elaine Sanchez
Brooke Army Medical Center
Public Affairs, 6/8/16



JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-FORT SAM HOUSTON, Texas —

Army Spc. Jen Smith struggled with the aftermath of a sexual assault for nearly six months before she hit rock bottom. Plagued by nightmares and depression, Smith told her supervisor she was contemplating suicide. *"I was at the end of my rope and that was my cry for help,"* said Smith, whose name was changed for this article to protect her privacy. *"I knew something had to change."* Smith was referred to Brooke Army Medical Center's Intensive Outpatient Program for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which proved to be a game-changer for the soldier. *"It was like my prayers had been answered,"* she said.

Since attending the program last year, Smith said, her life and attitude have changed. *"I went from complete isolation to going out and having fun with friends again,"* she said. *"Life isn't perfect, but the program has given me an amazing foundation to build from."*

BAMC's six-week program launched two years ago to offer short-term, focused care to service members with PTSD resulting from traumatic experiences such as combat, childhood abuse or sexual trauma. Providers have seen tremendous success combining individual and group sessions with evidence-based treatments, explained the program's chief, Public Health Service Capt. Richard Schobitz.

"The program is making a tremendous impact and is changing lives for patients with PTSD," he said.

Recapturing Joy

When they first begin the program, many patients are suicidal or struggling with substance and alcohol abuse. The resultant depression and anxiety can lead to crippling isolation, Schobitz noted, as well as nightmares, insomnia, panic attacks and outbursts of anger.

"Patients with PTSD are less apt to engage with family and friends and do enjoyable activities, such as going to birthday parties or the pool with their kids," he said. *"Some stop leaving their homes at all. We focus on helping our patients recapture the joy in their lives."*

Providers encourage patients to end the isolation and re-engage with the world around them through therapies called Prolonged Exposure and Acceptance and Commitment. They take trips downtown and to department stores, and re-learn how to navigate crowds. They also focus on mindfulness, or being present in the moment, Schobitz said, an important aspect of Acceptance and Commitment therapy.

"PTSD patients often dwell in the past or have anxiety about the future," he said. *"Walking around gardens at the Warrior and Family Support Center, observing nature, just being present in the moment, can be very healing. We want patients to feel their emotions, not fight them."* Providers also encourage patients to identify and take steps to achieve their values, such as being a better spouse or parent.

Impressive Results

Smith is among the nearly 100 service members who have attended the program. The success has been impressive across the board, Schobitz noted, both anecdotally and statistically.

At the conclusion of a recent female-only cohort, the scores on the Post-Traumatic Diagnostic Scale, or PDS-5 -- a self-report measure used to measure the severity of PTSD symptoms -- decreased by an average of 49 points. This is important, as PDS-5 scores range from 0 to 80, with 80 reflecting the most severe symptoms, noted Melissa Ramirez, a licensed clinical social worker at the program. Other cohorts have reported a nearly 25-point drop on the PDS-5, she said. *"A drop of 10 is significant,"* she said. *"We're doubling that, on average, in only six weeks. These results are very rewarding,"* she added. *"We see service members who are five to 30 years post-trauma, and it's had a major impact on their lives. We are seeing people regain the joy in their lives, reconnect with their loved ones. ... They still have moments of challenge, but now they can better handle it."*

Ramirez said what's most striking is the difference in their appearance post-program. Providers take a photo of patients at Week 1 and during the final week. *"There's a profound difference in their faces,"* she noted. *"In the final week, they look well-rested, less stressed, happier, more relaxed. The impact is highly visible."*

A year out from the program, Smith says she has good days and bad, but feels confident that she now has the tools to cope. *"I still see counselors to keep myself on track. But I'm doing so much better than I would have done otherwise,"* she said. *"My biggest takeaway is life does go on. It gets better."*

"It's important to step forward and get help," she added. **"People do care. If you don't find the help you need right away, keep asking. Keep on searching for what's going to help you."** (emphasis added)

Disclaimer: Re-published content may have been edited for length and clarity.

Source:

Health.mil

The official website of the Military Health System
and the Defense Health Agency



173rd Paratroopers Get Suspended Sentences in Vicenza Brawl



FILE PHOTO -- Soldiers from 173rd Airborne Brigade, out of Vicenza, Italy, perform pre-inspections on their T-11 parachute systems during an airborne operation held at Adazi Military Base, Latvia.

(Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Brooks Fletcher)

By Nancy Montgomery
Stars and Stripes | May 13, 2016

VICENZA, Italy -- Twelve paratroopers received eight-month suspended sentences on Thursday morning after pleading guilty in connection with a bloody fight outside a disco with a group of African men.

The 12 did not appear in the local Italian court and were represented by a Vicenza lawyer.

A 13th paratrooper involved in the Sunday morning brawl was injured in the incident and had not been charged, said the lawyer, Alberto Negri. The injury was not serious, he said. Original reports said all 13 were arrested.

The sentences mean the soldiers, all from the 173rd Airborne Brigade, face no further punishment from local authorities. It's unclear whether the Army will discipline them.

The judge also fined the troops 2,600 euros in damages to be paid to the owner of the Liv nightclub in Bassano del Grappa. But experts on the Status of Forces Agreement between the U.S. and Italy said that only the Army -- not individual troops -- can be asked to pay damages.

The sentences were the result of a plea agreement. The soldiers had been charged with "rissa," an Italian word that translates as "brawl."

Club owner Samule Buccioli had asked for 150,000 euros in damages, according to Il Giornale di Vicenza. "They split acoustic systems and sofas, smeared ... blood, kicked parked cars and even an ambulance," Buccioli told the paper. "Many people, perhaps out of fear, came out without paying."

What's more, he said, the incident had damaged the club's formerly pristine reputation. "We're the real victims of this affair," he said.

A lawyer with knowledge of the case said that not all the soldiers had agreed to plead guilty until Thursday. That's because they thought it was unfair that they had been arrested, though they believed they had acted responsibly by remaining at the scene, while the Africans had fled.

The Associated Press reported that three Senegalese men had also been arrested in the incident. But Negri said he couldn't confirm that. "We don't know about that," he said.

It was still unclear Thursday morning what had caused the clash. According to local media, the soldiers said they'd reacted after one of them had been stabbed by an African man. All but one of the troops is African-American, said the lawyer who knows about the case and declined to be identified.

The AP quoted Carabinieri Lt. Col. Martino Salvo as saying that one soldier was slashed in the arm. In all, four Americans and two Senegalese were injured, he told the AP.

The fight included knives and was among the worst instances of barroom brawling in the past 20 years, according to local media.

The soldiers were still riled up when police and ambulances arrived at the nightclub a little after 4 a.m. According to Buccioli, when the fight was over, they were "crazy."

"It had never happened such a thing; we have done everything to calm the people, help the wounded and to protect other customers. Our staff, together with the security men, has done a commendable job, managing to bring the protagonists of the fight outside the club."

Source:

<http://www.stripes.com/news/173rd-paratroopers-get-suspended-sentences-in-vicenza-brawl-1.409225>

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Heart-healthy breathing blows stress away



Airmen and Soldiers practice breathing and relaxation during their off duty time in a deployed location. Stress can take its toll on your mental and physical health, including your heart health, but there are breathing techniques to buffer yourself from it. (USAF photo by MSgt. Lance Cheung)

Stress can take its toll on your mental and physical health, including your heart health, but there are breathing techniques to buffer yourself from it! When you're less focused on your breathing, it's typical to breathe erratically—especially when you face the stressors of day-to-day life. In turn, your heart rate can become less rhythmic, causing your heart to not function as well.

But when you have longer, slower exhales—breathing at about 4-second-inhale and 6-second-exhale paces—your heart rate rhythmically fluctuates up and down. This rhythmic variability in heart rate mirrors your inhales and exhales so that you have maximum heart rate *at the end of the inhale* and minimum heart rate *at the end of the exhale*. More importantly, this physiological shift could help you feel less stressed, anxious, or depressed—and experience better heart health.

It's easy to go thru the motions of breathing while absorbed in your own thoughts; instead, take notice of your breathing and other body sensations. Regularly tuning in to your body sensations could help you feel more resilient and ready to: Adapt to change / Deal with whatever comes your way / See the brighter, or funnier, side of problems / Overcome stress Tolerate unpleasant feelings / Bounce back after illnesses, failures, or other hardships / Achieve goals despite obstacles / Stay focused under pressure / Feel stronger.

Source: Health.mil

WHAT MY MEDALS MEAN



I'd never worn my medals, they were left there in the draw, so when I finally took them out, it had been twenty years or more.

My daughter saw me take them out, and asked me what they're for.

I looked at her and calmly said, *"They're a reminder of a war"*.

They remind me of the mates I had, who never made it back; Who died in a stinking paddy field, or on a jungle track.

They remind me of the troubles, and the hardships we went through.

They remind me why we went there, it was for people just like you.

They remind me of the hellhole, while we were over there.

They remind me of our countrymen, who really didn't care.

They remind me of the mateship, forged in a foreign land.

They remind me of a certain mate, who lost a bloody hand.

They remind me when we went away; we thought the reason was just.

They remind me of when we came back; they turned their backs on us.

They remind me of the time we spent, left there on our own.

They remind me that it took twenty years, to welcome us back home.

They remind me of the suffering, the heartache and the pain.

They remind me if we're called upon, we'd do it all again.

They remind me when I wear them next; the thoughts will come thru then,

at the going down of the sun, and in the morning; *"WE WILL REMEMBER THEM"*.

Then I looked down at her smiling face, and I knew it had not got thru.

I said *"Listen love, they're to remind me, I did it all for you"*.

Jim Egan

Ex Delta 4RAR, 1971-72 Vietnam

[Sent in by Ray Chapman, RAA]



'Sky Soldier Buddies....Forever'



A/1/503 Sky Soldier Frank Martinez presents poster to Tracy Arnold, widow of Peter Arnold who was also A/1/503, at unit gathering in San Antonio, TX. (Photo by Billy Robinson)

A while back we received a note from Mrs. Tracy Arnold, the widow of Peter Arnold who passed away in August last year. She had spotted a piece of artwork in one of our newsletters Frank Martinez of A/1/503 had sent her, and wanted to know if it was available for purchase – she wanted to display the piece on a wall at her home in honor of both her late husband, Pete, and Alexander Rodarte (KIA), both of A/1/503 – Frank had served with both men. She explained Alex died in her husband's arms in combat, and in memory and honor of his friend, Pete and Tracy named their daughter *Alexandra*. Tracy thought the artwork would be a nice addition to her wall of honor.

The particular piece of art was lifted from the 503rd PRCT Heritage Bn website, so we asked Paul Whitman who manages the site, if it would be o.k. for men of the 173d to have a poster of the art produced for the widow of one of our Sky Soldiers. Without hesitation, Paul gave us his blessings; and not only was a poster made for Tracy, but a second poster was produced for her daughter, Alexandra. We, of course, wrote to Tracy stating, regrettably, the artwork was not available for purchase.

Frank had informed us Tracy was planning a trip to San Antonio, so the two posters were sent to him, where he had them framed then later made the presentation to Tracy at a gathering of Sky Soldiers there. Frank's note follows:



It is with great honor and sincere feelings, I report that the mission of honoring Tracy Arnold, Pete's wife, was accomplished during a final gathering of my fellow San Antonio Area Sky Soldiers in our 173d civilian ceremonial attire, plus again, other fellow paratroopers from our sister units, all in her honor.

The last, but not least, of the semi-formal ceremony, after several other mementos presented her in Pete's memory and her visit to San Antonio, to her surprise was the presentation of the beautiful poster provided by 173d Sky Soldiers who asked me to present it to Tracy. As agreed, I framed the poster and additionally the one also provided for her daughter, Alexandra, whose name she proudly carries for 173d Sky Soldier Alexander Rodarte, KIA, Vietnam, March 1966.

Unfortunately, I was not present when Alexander was mortally wounded, a deep regret. With Pete Arnold having been my Platoon Leader and Alexander Rodarte an outstanding member of my squad, words cannot express my profound personal gratitude at having been asked to finalize this honor by making the presentation.

I told not only Tracy, but the 25-30 people assembled, the story of how the idea of the poster had come about, including Sky Soldiers misleading her about the non-availability of the artwork, while we worked "behind the lines" in seeing to her initial request.

Additionally, when the second poster, for Alexandra, was brought forward and the reasoning behind it was explained, you can just picture the reaction.

Again, I am totally honored, with the help of my Airborne Brothers to have accomplished this mission for Tracy and Alexandra in the memory of Pete and Alexander.

Your Herd Brother,

Frank Martinez

A/1/503d, 1964-66, 173d Abn Bde (Sep)



Tracy, with Pete and Alexander's buddies in San Antonio.

(Photo by Billy Robinson)



Combat Veterans Get Telephonic Health Care Application Option from the VA

VA News Release
3/16/2016

Accelerates Enrollment of Combat Veterans; All Veterans to Get Option on July 5, 2016

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that it has amended its enrollment regulations to allow Veterans to complete applications for enrollment in VA health care by telephone without the need for a signed paper application. The change is effective immediately for Combat Veterans and will be effective July 5, 2016, for all Veterans.

This phased implementation accelerates VA's effort to enroll all Combat Veterans with pending applications as part of its ongoing Veterans Enrollment Rework Project. The VA is working to complete the review and rework of all pending health enrollment records for living and deceased Veterans this summer. Veterans can view the amended regulation on the Federal Register website [here](#).

"This improvement to our Veterans' experience is one we can implement now, and it's the right thing to do for Veterans," said VA Deputy Secretary Sloan D. Gibson, *"Enrolling all 31,000 Combat Veterans with pending applications is the top priority in our effort to fix our enrollment system. Our analysis of our current application process convinced me we could enroll Veterans more quickly using this method, particularly Combat Veterans and those who are transitioning from active duty to Veteran status,"* Gibson said.



Army Ranger Sloan Gibson

By adding this telephone application option to VA's regulations, VA will now offer three ways to enroll. This change provides Veterans an even more convenient way to apply for enrollment, in addition to the paper VA Form 10-10 EZ and online enrollment application process. With publication in the Federal Register today, Combat Veterans may now apply by phone. All other Veterans may apply by phone starting on July 5, 2016.

When Veterans choose to enroll, VA offers an enhancement to their enrollment experience through "Welcome to VA" (W2VA). Veterans enrolled since July 1, 2015 have received a personal introduction to VA health care services, programs and resources to help them become more familiar with VA's services. In addition, VA sends each new enrollee an introductory letter and personalized handbook in the mail. W2VA enhances communication by reaching out to newly enrolled Veterans through personal phone calls upon enrollment, providing assistance with health care inquiries and assisting with their initial appointment at their preferred VA healthcare facility.

For more information, Veterans can contact the Health Eligibility Center Enrollment and Eligibility Division toll free at [1-855-488-8440](tel:1-855-488-8440).

[Sent in by Gary Newman, USN]

Sloan D. Gibson



"Before his appointment as Deputy Secretary, Gibson was the 22nd President and CEO of the USO. He assumed that role on September 1, 2008. In 2004, he retired as Chairman and Chief Financial Officer of AmSouth Bancorporation. During his tenure, AmSouth became part of the S&P 500. In 2002, Gibson chaired the United Way campaign in Central Alabama.

Mr. Gibson is the son of an Army Air Corpsman who served as a B-17 tail-gunner during World War II, later earning his commission in the U.S. Air Force. He is also the grandson of a World War I Army Infantryman who was wounded while serving in the 3rd Infantry Division at the Second Battle of the Marne. Sloan Gibson earned both Airborne and Ranger qualifications and served as an infantry officer in the United States Army.

A 1975 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, he also earned a Master's in Economics from the University of Missouri-Kansas City and a Master's in Public Administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University."



~ Correction ~

The caption shown with the image we selected from 2/503 Bn Cmdr Col. George Dexter's photo collection for the cover of Issue 67 of our May-June newsletter (right), stated:
"Paratroopers of the 2/503 arrive Bien Hoa AFB, RVN on 5 May 65 as the first U.S. ground combat force to enter the war."

The caption should have read:
"...the first U.S. Army ground combat force to enter the war."

Of course, it was the U.S. Marine Corps who came ashore at Da Nang in March '65 who were the first major U.S. ground combat unit to be committed to the Vietnam War. Ed

WAR FOOTING



"There were no presidential speeches proclaiming crusades 'to make the world safe for democracy' or days which 'shall live in infamy.' There were no Congressional declarations or United Nations resolutions. There were no banner headlines or home front mobilizations. But in April of 1965, America was at war.

Already, on March 8, two Marine battalions totally 3,500 men had landed at Da Nang. Now, in mid-April, they were joined by two more battalions to augment the Marine forces at Da Nang, as well as to establish a new base at Phu Bai, forty-five miles north of Da Nang near Hue. By April 20 the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), as the Marine contingent commanded by Brigadier General Frederick J. Karch was named, totaled 8,607 men, including one full battalion (the 3d Battalion of the 4th Marines, or 3/4) and ten UH-34 helicopters at Phu Bai.

In early May the first U.S. Army ground combat unit arrived in South Vietnam. The 173d Airborne Brigade landed in Vung Tau, at the mouth of the Saigon River. They would soon establish their headquarters at Bien Hoa, twelve miles north of Saigon, guarding the airfield there. At the same time, the Marines were establishing their third tactical area of responsibility (TAOR) at a newly constructed airfield in Chu Lai (-). By the end of May approximately 20,000 American combat troops—seven Marine battalions and supporting units and two Army battalions—had swollen the ranks of American forces in Vietnam to 46,500."

*The Vietnam Experience
America Takes Over*

By Edward Doyle, Samuel Lipsman
and the editors of Boston Publishing Company



2/503d Vietnam Newsletter, Issue 67, cover photo.



"At approximately nine o'clock on the morning of 8 March 1965, the United States Marine Corps' Battalion Landing Team 3/9 splashed ashore at Da Nang on the mainland of Southeast Asia. Although there were already over 20,000 American servicemen in Vietnam, this was the first time that U.S. ground combat units had been committed to action."

The Pentagon Papers
(web photo)

(continued...)



THE PENTAGON PAPERS

(and the 173d Airborne)

Top Secret – Sensitive

(Declassified -- Excerpts)

Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton proposed that the 173rd Airborne Brigade from Okinawa be deployed to Da Nang instead of the Marines.

2 Mar 65

ASD(ISA) McNaughton cabled (Ambassador) Taylor that the 173d Airborne Brigade (then on Okinawa) would be deployed to Da Nang instead of the Marines. (This last minute change may have been Mr. McNaughton's attempt to emphasize the limited, temporary nature of the U.S. troop deployment and to reduce the conspicuousness of the U.S. presence. Airborne troops carry less equipment and look less formidable than the Marines plus they have no history of peace-keeping intervention in foreign wars.)

Taylor and Westmoreland – who argued that the Marines were more self-sustaining than the airborne – objected to the proposed substitution of Army airborne for Marine troops.



John T. McNaughton with President Johnson. (web photo)

[Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, confided privately that McNaughton could have been his choice to replace him as Secretary of Defense. McNaughton resigned from his post of Assistant Secretary of Defense and was to become Secretary of the Navy on August 1, 1967 after being confirmed by the United States Senate. But he died in the crash of Piedmont Airlines Flight 22 with his wife and younger son on July 19, 1967].

3 Mar 65

CINPAC strongly objected to Mr. McNaughton's proposal. It denied him the only airborne assault force in the theater and, more importantly, completely upset his contingency plans for combat operations in Southeast, Asia.

Eleventh Hour Change

One final obstacle to the Marine deployment was raised when Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton cabled the Ambassador in Saigon on 2 March stating that the 173rd Airborne Brigade, then stationed on Okinawa, would be substituted for the Marines. Other than exchange of cables, there is no documentary evidence in the files to indicate what might have been the rationale behind the belated attempt to deploy the 173rd Airborne to Da Nang in place of the Marines. One can only surmise the reasons behind such a move, but certain characteristics of the two forces may provide a clue. The Marines present prima facie a more formidable appearance upon arrival on the scene. They have organic a complement of heavy weapons, amphibious vehicles, and various other items of weighty hardware, including tanks, in contrast to the small and lighter airborne. Together with their accompanying armada of ships, the Marines might be seen as a more permanent force than the airborne. This, coupled with the common knowledge that the Marines have a long history of interventions in foreign countries for purposes of peacekeeping and stability, might have influenced someone in the decision apparatus to consider using the airborne in their stead as a positive signal that the Da Nang deployment was to be of short duration. If this was indeed the case, it suggests that there were still high-ranking people in Washington who were hoping to make the deployment of U.S. troops temporary and limited.

General Westmoreland objected to the proposed change on the grounds that the Marines were more self-sustaining and the Ambassador agreed with him. CINPAC, in objecting to the proposed change, sent the following telegram to JCS:

'The action outlined in Ref A, which would place the 173rd Airborne Brigade, a two-battalion brigade, at Da Nang, embodies several features which are undesirable. A light and flexible airborne force would be committed to a fixed task depriving CINCPAC of his air mobile reserve. It is the only airborne assault force in the theater. A comprehensive array of plans and logistic preparations which affect many of our forces, and the forces of other countries, would be undermined. The action would employ units which are less adequately constituted for the purpose.'

Source:

<https://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-C-4.pdf>

(Photo added)



503d Infantry Regimental Memorial For Infantry Museum Walk of Honor



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

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



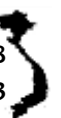
Weik and Smith have obtained the approval of the National Infantry Museum leadership to erect a memorial (depicted below) adjacent to the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial and have opened a dialogue with Columbus Monument (the builders of the 173d National Memorial) to undertake the project. The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

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

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

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

Airborne...All The Way!



The Gift

Today, May 8, 2016, Mother's Day; our dog Lilo gave us her final gift. She was a "rescue" dog found wandering the streets in Oak Ridge, TN.

In 2005, some heartless SOB threw her from a car and drove off. When we found her she was sick, her fur was matted, and her ears were infected. She wasn't long for that world since we had coyotes, bears, and wild dogs roaming the woods near our home. My late wife and I took her to a veterinarian, got her cleaned up and medical treatment.

Lilo liked women: for months she'd run up to every woman she met and wag her tail as if to ask, "*Did you come back for me?*"

Lilo was an unusual animal; she had facial expressions. You could see her disappointment when she realized the woman she was wagging her tail for was not her "family." Once, when I reached for her she bit me. You could see that I had startled her and scared her at the same time. She cringed, as if expecting a blow. She expected some retaliation for, literally, biting the hand that fed her. Instead, keeping my voice calm and low, I spoke to her and then gently touched her until the trembling stopped. I wanted to demonstrate that Love was something you give — not withhold. I also wanted her to know that Love was something everyone and everything deserved.

For years Lilo would sleep at my bedroom door, greeting me with a wagging tail when I emerged. She would follow me around the house, often crawling under my big chair in the living room for safety. Lilo felt safe and loved by me. She was right.

These past few years she has been less playful, choosing to sleep most of the day. She snored! She was having trouble with her spine and her legs. Lately, she'd become incontinent, her bladder often releasing as she struggled to get out the doggie door. It was often a race between her, her bladder, and my wife, Peggy, to get her to the grassy area outside. You could almost see the



Lilo

embarrassment on Lilo's face. She was unhappy and she knew she made others unhappy too.

Today, May 8, 2016, Mother's Day, our dog Lilo gave us her final gift. She crawled through the doggie door, and walked away from the grassy area, crossed the concrete apron, and slipped beneath the surface of the pool. I pray her passing was as peaceful as it sounds.

I will always remember the Love she gave me. I hope to always remember that Love is stronger than fear, stronger than hate; and in the end — is its own reward.

Let's keep that in mind as we go through the week — and, please remember to give somebody one of my momma's smiles.

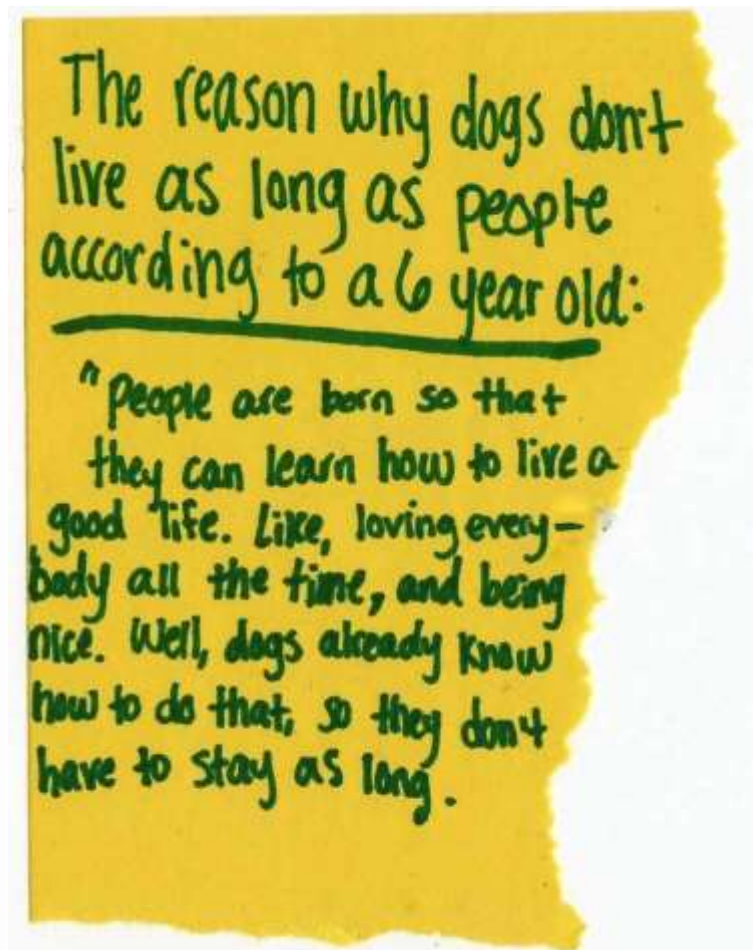
Bill Reynolds

A/2/503

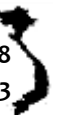
One of Bill's favorite quotes:

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

~ Frederick Douglas



[Thanks to Michaelene Adams]



Republicans attack double amputee veteran for 'not standing up for our veterans'

By Laura Clawson, Daily Kos
Tuesday Mar 08, 2016



The National Republican Senatorial Committee quickly deleted the tweet below Tuesday afternoon, but “quickly” wasn’t soon enough for a screw-up of this magnitude.

The Tweet:



IOM Releases *Veterans and Agent Orange, Update 2014:*



Bladder Cancer, Hypothyroidism, Parkinson-like Symptoms, Hypertension, and Stroke Upgraded; Spina Bifida in offspring Downgraded

(Washington, D.C.) Today, the Institute of Medicine released *Veterans and Agent Orange Update 2014*, the tenth biennial evaluation of relevant scientific studies--published between October 1, 2012, and September 30, 2014--on Agent Orange and other herbicides used during military operations in Vietnam.

“Vietnam Veterans of America thanks the IOM’s Veterans and Agent Orange Committee for upgrading the status of **Bladder cancer** and **hypothyroidism** to the Limited/Suggestive Category of Association; for clarifying that **individuals with Parkinson-like symptoms** without other known etiology should **be included in the presumption for Parkinson’s disease**; and for firmly supporting the VAO’s prior decisions--but not yet recognized by VA as presumptive conditions: **hypertension** and **stroke**,” said VVA National President John Rowan.

“VVA calls on President Obama and Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald to immediately initiate the process for adding all of these conditions to the service-connected, presumptive list for those who served in Vietnam and elsewhere in the Southeast Asia theater of operations,” said Rowan.

“Most disturbing,” noted Rowan, “is the rationale behind the Committee’s recommendation to **downgrade Spina Bifida to Inadequate or Insufficient Evidence**. As stated on Page 10 of *Update 2014*, ‘since *Update 1996*, no new analyses of birth defect data, finding increased rates of spina bifida among children of men exposed to the chemicals of interest have become available.’ IOM, in previous updates, has repeatedly called for the VA to conduct research on this issue. The VA has not spent a dime on this vitally needed research.”

Of the more than 7,600 abstracts of scientific and medical articles related to **Agent Orange**, **Agent Blue**, and **Agent White**, none of these studies were funded by VA,” said Rowan. “It is time for Congress to demand that the VA do their job by passing the Toxic Exposures Act (S. 901/ HR 1769) before Memorial Day.”

Mokie Pratt Porter

Director of Communications, VVA

[Sent in by CCVVA Chapter 982]



A bit of history: Before Agent Orange was considered evil, killing and maiming Vietnam veterans and their offspring as well the local populations in the War Zones; as a reminder to those responsible for the well-being of our servicemembers....*never again.*

Agent Orange: VA Cover~Up

I thought Vietnam was simply a cancerous splotch on our nation's history. But I was wrong. A ghost from that obscenity half-a-world away is returning to haunt us and our future generations. And to compound their past blunders, the Department of Defense and the Veterans Administration have been conspiring in an incredible post-Vietnam cover-up that makes Watergate look like child's play.



We know, all too painfully, that the 44 million pounds of Agent Orange we dumped on Vietnam did more than kill trees hiding the enemy. This deadly chemical defoliant also infected the more than 2.4 million American young men and women exposed to it. Vietnam vets are suffering from blood and skin diseases, cancer, liver ailments and other disorders. More and more of their offspring are suffering from birth defects. And what are the big boys in Washington doing to help these tragic victims? Not a damn thing! Of the more than 30,000 claims filed with the VA for medical benefits, only two have been approved. Even then, the claims were only approved for chloracne, a sometimes-fatal ailment caused by the chemical in Agent Orange.

Naturally, the Veterans Administration wants to cover up this sad state of affairs. A classified VA memo dated October 12, 1979, said this about one Agent Orange victim:

"The veteran would appear to have no immediate ill effects but he would produce deformed children."

Since there are few immediate ill effects from the chemical – like arms or legs dropping off – the VA policy in the past has been simply to drug any veteran who complains of various proven side effects.

Fortunately, in the midst of all this madness, some reasonable people are forcing the issue. Class-action suits have been filed in three cities – Los Angeles, Chicago and New York – demanding some very basic actions on the part of the Veterans Administration.

First, they want this bureaucratic jungle to notify all Vietnam combat veterans and their children that they are *"at risk of genetic and bodily damage."* Further, they demand a detailed medical examination of any

combat veteran who complains of skin, nervous or alcoholic problems that might indicate lethal exposure to Agent Orange.

My hopes and prayers go to the attorneys brave enough to drag this vile mess into the courts, taking on the combined legal arsenal of government and Big Business. But most of all, my prayers go to the countless men and women exposed to and damaged by this deadly chemical, as well as to the silent terror they face while wondering if they will bear healthy offspring.

Attorneys for some of the 2.4 million veterans requested me to ask any *HUSTLER* reader who might have been exposed to Agent Orange during the years 1962 to 1971 and who is suffering from any unexplained ailment to fill out Form 95, available through any General Services Administration office. In addition, it is advisable to contact a lawyer and to file a disability claim. I am doing this gladly, because I firmly believe if we the people allowed this harmful chemical to be used, then we the people should own up to responsibility for it. And part of owning up to that responsibility involves having our government help out the victims, instead of sweeping them under the carpet.

Larry Flint
Publisher &
Chairman of the Board
HUSTLER MAGAZINE
May Issue (some decades ago)

(Photos added)



(web photo)



Route 173 designated as 173rd Airborne Brigade Highway

By Sallie Graziano | For NJ.com
January 12, 2016



CLINTON — Route 173 between Clinton and Phillipsburg has been named in honor of the 173rd Airborne Brigade.



Legislation sponsored by state Sen. Michael Doherty (R-23) has been signed into law. The road, which runs along Interstate 78, is now designated the *173rd Airborne Brigade Highway* in honor of the brigade's many years of heroism and sacrifice in defense of this country's freedom.

"From service in France during World War I to recent deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 'Sky Soldiers' of the 173rd Airborne Brigade have distinguished themselves for nearly a century," said Doherty. *"It is fitting that New Jersey honor the 173rd Airborne Brigade's service and sacrifice by naming part of Route 173 in their honor."*

The brigade was first constituted as the 173rd Infantry Brigade and deployed to France during World War I, and later designated the 87th Reconnaissance Troop during World War II, entering combat in 1944 and serving in central European, Rhineland and Ardennes-Alsace operations.

The brigade was reconstituted as a separate brigade and special airborne task force, the 173rd Airborne Brigade, as part of an Army reorganization in the early 1960s. The brigade, which earned the moniker "Sky Soldiers," was the first Army unit sent into the republic of South Vietnam in May 1965. For the brave service of its members in Vietnam, as a whole, the brigade earned four unit citations, 13 Medals of Honor, and more than 130 distinguished service crosses.

Nearly 1,000 members of the brigade participated in the 2003 invasion of Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and between 2005 and 2010 the brigade served three tours in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Doherty's legislation was first introduced in the prior legislative session at the suggestion of the Gem Vac Veterans, a local veterans group that counts as its members some who served in the 173rd Airborne Brigade. The legislation was reintroduced at the beginning of the current session on Jan. 14, 2014.

"When the Gem Vac Veterans approached me with the idea to do this, I realized it would be a wonderful way to pay our respect to the 173rd Airborne Brigade for its longstanding service to our nation," said Doherty. Under the legislation, no state funds will be used to produce, purchase or erect signs marking the designated portions of Route 173, with all funds supplied by private sources.

A similar funding model has been successfully employed to pay for signs designating Route 31 as the *"Tri-County Purple Heart Memorial Highway,"* a measure also sponsored by Doherty, a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point and former captain in the United States Army.

Sallie Graziano may be reached at sgraziano@njadvancemedia.com. Follow her on Twitter [@SallieGraziano](https://twitter.com/SallieGraziano). Find *The Hunterdon County Democrat* on Facebook.

[Article reprinted here courtesy of Sallie Graziano]
###

Our *We Try Harder* battalion became *Second to None*



In 1972....

**GENERAL WILLIAM C. WESTMORELAND
PRESENTED
LIFETIME HONORARY MEMBERSHIP**

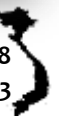
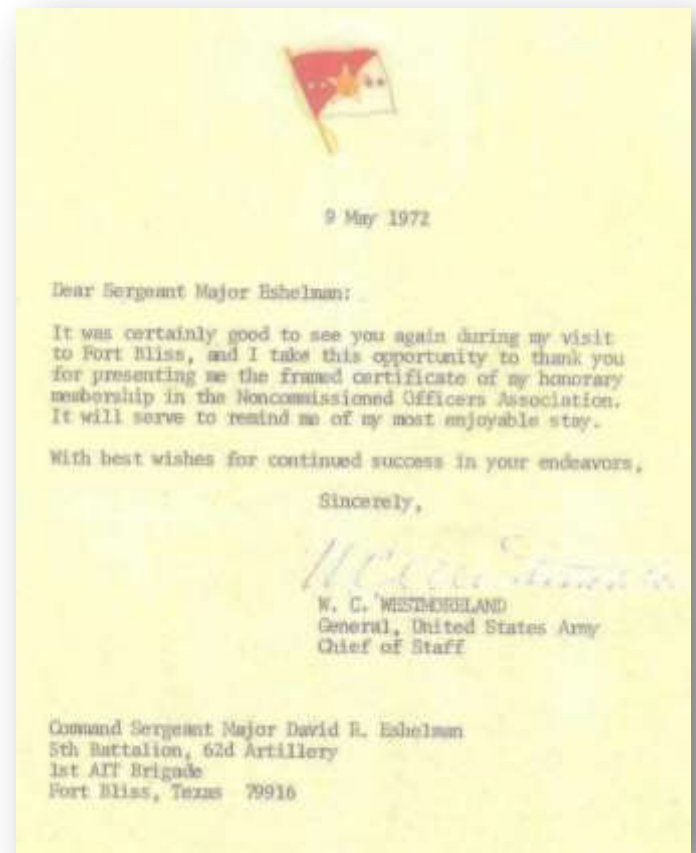
On the 21st of April 1972, "Pass of the North" Chapter presented Lifetime Honorary Membership to General William C. Westmoreland, Chief of Staff of the US Army. The certificate, beautifully framed by the El Paso Art Center, was presented in ceremonies at Pace Hall, Fort Bliss. Present at the ceremonies were Major General Raymond L. Shoemaker, Commanding General of Fort Bliss, Pass of the North Chapter Chairman, First Sergeant Richard O. Hartley and Vice-Chairman, Master Sergeant Luther Clemmons. Presenting the certificate was Command Sergeant Major David R. Eshelman, who was recently added to the rolls of Pass of the North. Sergeant Major Eshelman was selected to make the presentation due to his past association with General Westmoreland. Sergeant Major Eshelman was a member of the 101st Airborne Division during the period that General Westmoreland, then a Major General, commanded that Division. He later served in the 173d Airborne Brigade, the first ground combat unit committed to the Vietnam war, in 1965. General Westmoreland, then Commanding General, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, accompanied the 173d Brigade on many of their operations. Sergeant Major Eshelman is the Command Sergeant Major of the only airborne unit stationed at Fort Bliss: 5th Battalion 562d Air Defense Artillery, which is also the only Airborne Airmobile Air Defense Artillery Organization in the US Army.



L-R: Gen. Westmoreland, Sgt. Maj. Dave Eshelman, and MG Raymond Shoemaker, CG Fort Bliss.



After presentation of the certificate, General Westmoreland asked for a group photo, including General Westmoreland, Major General Shoemaker, Command Sergeant Major Eshelman, First Sergeant Hartley, and Master Sergeant Clemmons.



~ From '65/'66 Photo Collection of Col. George Dexter, 2/503 Bn Cmdr ~



Visit by Ambassador Maxwell Taylor to 2/503, 1965. Bn Cmdr LTC George Dexter on right.



Capt. Art Stang, Alpha Company CO in rubber trees, 1965.



Charlie Company positions in rubber trees, 1965.

(continued....)





RTO with SGM Mish in the jungle, July '65.



Capt. Roy Lombardo, Bravo Company CO, 1965.



Alpha Company positions in the rubber trees, 1965.

(continued....)





2/503 troopers attending a musical performance by Vietnamese singers and dancers in 1965, with loaded weapons at the ready.



Finale of Vietnamese musical troupe performance, 1965



Qualified military service members and veterans have a refinancing option that allows them to lower their interest rate and get money out of the value of their home with the VA's **Cash-Out Refinancing Loan**.



If you're thinking this sounds like a home equity loan, it's different. When you take out a home equity loan, you still have your original mortgage. The home equity loan is essentially another loan, which runs next to your mortgage. A Cash-Out Refinance Loan takes the place of your current mortgage and at the same time allows you to get cash from the equity you have in your home.

What can you expect?

In some cases, if qualified, borrowers may be able to refinance every penny of your mortgage debt. You can refinance an FHA, USDA, or a conventional loan with the Cash-Out Refinance program. One of the biggest reasons borrowers choose this option is because, once refinanced, your new loan usually has a longer repay time frame as well as a lower interest rate.

To summarize, here's what you need to know about the VA Cash-Out Refinance Loan:

- Fees and closing costs can be included in the new loan
- This program follows the same credit processes and underwriting as other VA programs
- Texas residents are not eligible for this program due to regulations by the state
- You do not have to take out cash, it is only one option
- You must confirm that the property you are refinancing will be occupied by you

Here are some additional benefits:

- You can use the money you get back for whatever you want
- The equity you have already built in your home provides the cash you need now

Some ideas of what you could use the cash for:

- Pay off nagging debt
- Repair your home
- Help your child out with school needs
- Handle an emergency situation
- Kitchen and bathroom remodels
- Purchase a new car or boat without taking out additional loan

Much more!

Contact one of the many loan specialists in our network to get started on your Cash-Out Refinance Loan.

Source:



"A soldier, assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade, returns fire with an M24DL machine gun during exercise Sky Soldier 16, at Chinchilla Training Area, Spain, Feb. 29, 2016."

(Photo by Staff Sgt. Opal Vaughn /Army)



"U.S. Army paratroopers assigned to the 2nd Battalion,, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, exit a U.S. Air Force 86th Air Wing C-130 Hercules aircraft at Juliet Drop Zone in Pordenone, Italy, Feb. 18, 2016."

(Photo by Massimo Bovo/Army)

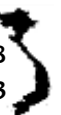
Excerpt....

Army halts cuts to airborne brigade

Michelle Tan, *ArmyTimes*, March 22, 2016



The Army announced Monday it will delay plans to convert 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division into a smaller, battalion-sized element....The 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, stationed at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, was due to be converted into a smaller, battalion-sized task force. The move was part of sweeping cuts being made across the Army due to budget cuts; the Army in July announced the brigade was one of two scheduled to be converted. The conversion would have cut the brigade from about 4,000 soldiers down to about 1,050.





~ Reunions of the Airborne Kind 2016/2017 ~

~ 2016 ~



USARA Annual Ranger Muster 2016, July 11-17, 2016, Columbus, GA.

Contact Web:

www.ranger.org/Annual-Ranger-Muster-2016



101st Airborne, 71st Annual Reunion, Norfolk, VA, August 17-21, 2016.

Contact:

Web: screamingeagles.org



187th ARCT "Rakkasan's" Reunion, Kansas City, MO, September 12-18, 2016.

Contact:

Web: www.rakkasan.net/reunion.html



Airborne OCS Reunion, 66 Company – Officers Candidate School Class 20-69, San Antonio, September 29 to October 2, 2016 at the Hyatt Regency, San Antonio Riverwalk.

Contact:

Phn: **210-222-1234**

~ 2017 ~



3rd Brigade LRRP, 101st Airborne Division Reunion, March 15-18, 2017, Fort Benning, GA.

Contact:

Dr. Rick Shoup

Phn: **978-505-3253** or **978-371-7108**

Eml: rfs.concord@gmail.com



Firebase Airborne Reunion, May 12-14, 2017, Nashville, TN.

Contact:

<http://beardedarmenian.wix.com/fsbairborne>



11th Airborne Division Association Reunion, to be held in Boulder, CO. Date to be named.

NOTE:

If you are aware of any upcoming "Airborne" or attached unit reunions, please send complete details to rto173d@cfl.rr.com for inclusion in our newsletter.

~ America's War Dead ~

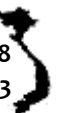
Military Action	Hostile Deaths	Wounded	Non-Hostile Deaths
Vietnam War	47,434	153,303*	10,786

* Hospitalized wounded only.

Proud Sky Soldier / Granddad



RTO extraordinaire Wayne Hoitt, HHC/2/503, '65/'66, with his grandson Jace during Memorial Day parade in Sarasota, Florida 2016.



~ 173d Support Battalion ~

By Thomas Ayers, Col. (Ret)

A/2/503

The first elements of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) arrived at Bien Hoa, Republic of Viet Nam, on 05 May 1965. The last elements of the Brigade departed Viet Nam on 25 August 1971. The 173d Support Battalion (Airborne) ~ and Company C (Supply & Service) in particular ~ was a key player in every Brigade operation.

From 05 May 1965 through much of 1967, the Support Battalion ~ along with the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 503rd Infantry Regiment ~ occupied Camp Zinn near Bien Hoa, Dong Nai Province, in III Corps. Notable was Company C's support and participation in the combat jump into Tay Ninh Province on 22 February 1967.

Shortly after the Infantry Battalions deployed to do battle in the hills around Dak To in late 1967, the Support Battalion redeployed to Camp Radcliff near An Khe, Binh Dinh Province, in II Corps. It remained there until early 1968, when the entire Brigade was reassigned to Binh Dinh Province, after which the Support Battalion redeployed once again to locations in southeastern Binh Dinh.

From early 1968 through 25 August 1971, the Support Battalion Headquarters and Company A (Administration) were located at Phu Tai, Companies B (Medical) and C (S&S) were located at two different compounds in Cha Rang Valley, while Company D (Maintenance) was located at Landing Zone English.

Following are several photos which offer some sense of what life was like for the paratroopers of Company C (S&S) at Cha Rang Valley during July of 1970. At that time, C Company's Transportation Platoon was tasked with running truck convoys between the port city of Qui Nhon and the Brigade's three combat bases: Landing Zones Uplift (1st and 3rd Battalions), English (2nd Battalion), and North English (4th Battalion). The Transportation Platoon also supported the 2nd Battalion's two moves: first from LZ English to Camp Radcliff (November 1970), then from Camp Radcliff to LZ Uplift (March 1971). So, too, the Platoon supported the entire Brigade's redeployment back to "The World" (August 1971).



DUI of the 173d Support Battalion (Airborne).



Shown here is the entrance gate to "Compound Lifeline" at Cha Rang Valley, Binh Dinh Province, in July of 1970. This was the last base of operations for Company C (S&S), 173d Support Battalion, while in Viet Nam. One of the three guard towers is visible through the gate, the 2½-ton Line is further to the right, while the Motor Pool is at the far right. The big gray structure further back is an EM barracks. Imposing mountains overlook the Compound on two sides.



Here is the 5-ton Line at "Compound Lifeline" at Cha Rang Valley, Binh Dinh Province, in July of 1970. Just beyond the entrance gate is Highway 19, linking Qui Nhon with An Khe and Pleiku. Beyond the Highway are a few of the hundreds of rice paddies dotting the Plain to the mountains in the distance, and beyond the mountains is the South China Sea. The sign urges "Drive Safely"!

(continued....)



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Shown here is one of Company C's 3/4-ton gun trucks after it skidded off of Highway 19 following a brief rain shower in August of 1970. Although the truck did roll over, no "Sky Soldiers" were injured. After a few minor cosmetic repairs were made, "Spirit" was ready to rock 'n' roll again!



This is another of the three guard towers in "Compound Lifeline" at Cha Rang Valley, Binh Dinh Province, in July of 1970. Visible to the left of the tower is a three-man fighting position. Do you see any VC in them-thar hills?



Above is the office of the Battalion S-4, 173d Support Battalion, located across Cha Rang Valley from "Compound Lifeline" in July of 1970. Visible in the middle right are the firing range and grenade pits belonging to the 173d Airborne's Jungle School. When the Brigade was ordered to redeploy back to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, all of its paratroopers out-processed through the Jungle School ~ so this is one of the last sights they saw in "The 'Nam."



Shown here are the Yard and one of the Warehouses belonging to the Support Platoon, Company C (S&S), at Cha Rang Valley in August of 1970. The small structure at the right belonged to Company B (Medical). Visible in the distance are Highway 19 and "Duster Hill," assigned to a leg transportation battalion.



Kenneth A. Jolemore. A Korean War infantryman, West Point graduate, and Special Forces Company Commander, he commanded the 173d Support Battalion in the Summer of 1970. He was later promoted to major general and retired as Commandant of the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia.

(continued....)





Johnnie E. Wilson. A Special Forces soldier and OCS graduate, he commanded Company C (S&S), 173d Support Battalion, in the Summer of 1970. He was later promoted to General and retired as Commander of the US Army Material Command in Alexandria, Virginia.

Fare-Thee-Well Sailor, You Good Buddy And Friend to Vets Everywhere



Rick, on left, with an old Sky Soldier he called friend.

The notice shown above was posted outside the other day by his wife, Kathy, near the entrance to the Gunnery Sergeant Elia P. Fonteccio VFW Memorial Post 10148 in Cocoa Beach, FL announcing a *celebration of life* for our friend Richard "Ricky" Johnson -- he was always Rick to me.

While Rick never served in the military, he spent much of his youth traveling the world as an Army/Air Force brat, and for the past 13 years worked at the VFW here in service to veterans representing all branches of the military. Rick was a smart man with an inquisitive mind, and in spite of any diversity which might have crossed his path from time to time, he was an optimist, a forward thinker, a futurist, and a defender of the underdog and those too weak to defend themselves -- Rick would have made a fine soldier, sailor, airman or Marine.

For too long a time Rick suffered with diminishing health due to cancer, but he never lost his sense of humor, his ever inquiring character, and his lust for life. But, the big C never got him -- Rick spit in its' eye.

I speak for countless people, Vets and others, here on the Space Coast of Florida....he is dearly missed by all, and will be forever remembered. It was an honor to be considered a friend of his. Rick was a good man, and if he called you friend, well, that was an award in itself.

Our thoughts are with our friend and his bride, Kathy. Clear sailing, Rick, you left your gentle touch on the world and made it a better place.



Story entitled "173rd: It's All Over But the Shipping Now" from the 07 August 1971 issue of the *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, page 7. (See text of report in Issue 67 of our newsletter).

###



ANSAC DAY IN AUSTRALIA



HHC 2/503's A.B. Garcia, on t.v., marching with 173d banner on Anzac Day along with his little buddy.

This young boy carried our 173d placard on our special day last Anzac Day. I was so happy to see this as it was the first time ever we were able to march as our unit. I just had to reward him for marching proudly, and decided to give him something he would love and cherish forever. Hence his email to me on his reaction to a simple gesture that will be his and for the future of our memory.

I love his thanks. Makes me very happy to give to our young, in memory of all who gave their all. Then Some.

A.B. Garcia
HHC/2/503, '65/'66

To AB,

Thank you so much for the coin. I will definitely keep it forever. I will definitely tell my grandchildren about this. I will grow up and remember you forever. I am very proud of this coin. It will take place proudly in my mini Anzac memorial. My grandpa also served in the war, in the Borneo conflict. He was in the navy. I can't thank you enough about the coin, thank you so much.

On the Anzac day March I had lots of fun. My legs were very tired in the end. My dad took a recording of it and we were all on tv! Please see picture below (above). It turns out I walked in total 18km! I also went to the dawn service, I had to get up at 4:00am. I am still tired today.

~ Cameron

ANSAC DAY

Anzac Day /'ænzæk/ is a national day of remembrance in Australia and New Zealand that broadly commemorates all Australians and New Zealanders *"who served and died in all wars, conflicts, and peacekeeping operations"* and *"the contribution and suffering of all those who have served."*

Observed on 25 April each year, Anzac Day was originally to honour the members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) who fought at Gallipoli against the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

Anzac Day is also observed in the Cook Islands, Niue, Pitcairn Islands, and Tonga, and previously also as a national holiday in Papua New Guinea and Samoa.

Anzac Day marks the anniversary of the first campaign that led to major casualties for Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War. The acronym ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, whose soldiers were known as Anzacs.

Anzac Day remains one of the most important national occasions of both Australia and New Zealand, a rare instance of two sovereign countries not only sharing the same remembrance day, but making reference to both countries in its name.

When war broke out in 1914, Australia and New Zealand had been dominions of the British Empire for thirteen and seven years respectively.

Dawn Service

After the First World War, returning soldiers sought the comradeship they felt in those quiet, peaceful moments before dawn. With symbolic links to the dawn landing at Gallipoli, a dawn stand-to or dawn ceremony became a common form of Anzac Day remembrance during the 1920s.



The emergence of Anzac Day, 1916.



1RAR SOLDIER PRESENTED WITH THE EMBLEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM CROSS OF GALLANTRY WITH PALM UNIT CITATION



Chapter 23 members John McNamara (Rtd) and Capt Bob Davis (Rtd) attaching the Streamer of Meritorious Unit Commendation and the Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry Unit Citation to the Battalion Colours.

On the 14th of May 2016 the First Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment held their annual Battle of FSB Coral Parade and what an outstanding parade it was. The CO, LTCOL Jason Groat and the RSM W01 Tas McKinley decided that this year the battalion would commemorate both tours in Vietnam. During the parade the two streamers were attached to the Battalion's Colours this honour was given to two Chapter 23 members. John McNamara and Bob Davis both were platoon commanders on the first tour. There were many aspects to this parade that the majority of us veterans had not seen before. A detailed commentary of aspects of both tours was presented by a professional broadcaster who had volunteered his services. His annotation brought forward many reminders of those long past years. For the veterans gathered the honour of presenting the emblem of the CGWP to the diggers on parade was a highlight. It was pleasing that Chapter 23 member Alan Larson was acknowledged for his efforts in finally gaining approval for the award to the 1RAR Group.

Toward the end of the parade the commentator announced that the RSM would be the last person to leave the parade ground and as RSM stood there the 4 APC's on the parade ground rushed up to the RSM circling him a number of times, stopping and when they moved off the

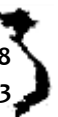
RSM had vanished without anyone seeing him board any of the APCs. An excellent completion to a truly moving and unique parade ... THANK YOU 1RAR.



Colours marching off the parade ground.

[Source: **SITREP**, VOL #3, Issue #29, July-Sept. 2016]

Congratulations to our Brothers Down Under!





The Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm Unit Citation has been awarded by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam to the 173d Airborne Brigade and its assigned and attached units for outstanding service during the period 5 May 1965 through 26 September 1970.

The 173d United States Airborne Brigade is a combat-experienced unit, composed of courageous soldiers who always display an enthusiastic anti-Communist spirit. During its five years of fighting in the Republic of Vietnam, the 173d Airborne Brigade has conducted 15 large-scale operations on battlefield in Military Regions 2 and 3, including Operations IRON TRIANGLE (1965) in Khanh Province; SMASH 1 (1965) in Phuoc Tuy; MARAUDER (1966) in Han Nghia; CRIMP (1966) in Binh Duong; SILVER CITY (1966) in War Zone D; Bien Hoa; and Long Khanh, NIAGARA/CEDAR FALLS (1967) in the Iron Triangle area; JUNCTION CITY ALTERNATE and JUNCTION CITY II (1967) in War Zone C; GREELEY and MACARTHUR (1967) in Bong Son; and WASHINGTON GREEN (1969) in Binh Dinh, inflicting heavy losses upon enemy, both in personnel and war-making materiel. Furthermore, the 173d United States Airborne Brigade coordinated with and effectively assisted Republic of Vietnam Army Forces units in carrying out civil affairs, pacification and rural development programs in its area of responsibility, such as building military dependent housing areas and hospitals; digging wells; providing desks, chairs and student materials for schools; and repairing roads, bridges and culverts, bringing about superior results. The 173d United States Airborne Brigade has made substantial contributions to the struggle against the Communist aggressors in the Republic of Vietnam.



*Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm Unit Citation
Awarded to the First Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment Group*



[Source: **SITREP**, VOL #3, Issue #29, July-Sept. 2016]



D Zone Is a Green Monster to U.S. Trooper

By Peter Arnett

Pacific Stars & Stripes

Friday, July 2, 1965

ZONE D, Republic of Vietnam (AP) – Groping his way down a tiny jungle path festooned with vines and creepers Tuesday, the young American paratrooper was blasted to pieces by a Viet Cong grenadier hiding only feet away.

With a twist of wire the Viet Cong detonated a grenade. This struck the paratrooper full force and set off the five grenades hung around his waist. He was blown to pieces.

The only trace of the Viet Cong was the thin wire he used to detonate the first grenade.

This boy read his Bible 24 hours a day, said his company commander, Capt. R.E. Marshall of Reading, Penn.

***“Not even the Lord
could save us out here
in this jungle,”***

said an enlisted man, with terror in his eyes.

An hour earlier another paratrooper in the same company, Bravo Co., of the 1st Bn., was wounded seriously when a bullet sliced down from the overhanging trees and passed through his chest and bowels.

In neither of these cases did the U.S. paratroopers combing a tiny part of D Zone ever see the enemy.

“Where are they? Why don’t they come out?” said Capt. James A.G. Stewart of Milwaukee, Wis., a member of a line platoon.

“They’re everywhere they don’t have to come out,” another soldier replied.

The jungle itself as much as the snipers was intimidating to the Americans, for many of them it was their first visit to Zone D. A soft bush with long tentacles and fleshy leaves frightened Sgt. S.C. Wylie from White Sulphur Springs, W. Va.

“Look at that. I tell you, look at that,” Wylie exclaimed as the bush drooped toward him. *“That’s almost human.”* The leaves closed gently around his finger.



Paratroopers of the 1st Bn., 173d Airborne Brigade, rush wounded comrade to ambulance helicopter somewhere in Zone D. The soldier was struck down by a Viet Cong sniper bullet in the dense jungle combat area about 30 miles north of Saigon. (AP Radiophoto)

Vines tangled down from tall rain forest trees. Ancient rubber plantation trees were twisted grotesquely. Amidst it all was the rain.

During one long lull, when the troops were squatting under make-shift shelters from the rain, an enlisted man called out:

“I wish they’d do something even if it’s the wrong thing.”

By Tuesday evening, after two days of painstaking progress, the paratroopers had given up hope of coming across the Viet Cong.

The Viet Cong, however, seemed determined to fight the war their own way.

The jungle seems one of their weapons.

The medic of one company was bitten by a black snake late Tuesday afternoon.

“I’ve been sniped at and I’ve dodged a grenade. And here I am sidelined by a damn snake bite,” he exclaimed.

“What can you expect?” one of his buddies answered. *“That’s a Viet Cong snake.”*

[Sent in by Ron Thomas, 173d LRRP]



A compassionate judge sentences a veteran to 24 hours in jail, then joins him behind bars

By Yanan Wang
Morning Mix
April 22



District Court Judge Lou Olivera, who presides over a treatment court for veterans with mental health issues in Cumberland County, N.C., explains what the court does and what it means to him. (Cumberland County PIO)

The judge knew that Sgt. Joseph Serna had been through a lot.

The former Special Forces soldier did four combat tours in Afghanistan over a nearly two-decades-long career with the U.S. Army. Through those years, the *Fayetteville Observer* reported, Serna was almost killed three times: once, by a roadside bomb, then again by a suicide bomber.

During a tour in 2008, Serna and three other soldiers were driving down a narrow dirt road in Kandahar when their armored truck toppled into a canal, the Associated Press reported. As water filled the vehicle, Serna struggled to escape.

It was his fellow soldier, Sgt. James Treber, who saved him.

"I felt a hand come down and unfasten my seat belt and release my body armor," Serna recalled to the AP. "Sgt. Treber picked me up and moved me to a small pocket of air. He knew there was not enough room for both of us to breathe so he went under water to find another pocket of air."

Treber died from the accident, but Serna survived. He was the only one who did.

While Serna's years in combat earned him three Purple Hearts and other military accolades, like many combat vets, he's been unable to leave the battlefield behind him. Since returning to the U.S., the decorated Green Beret has suffered from post-traumatic stress

disorder, WTVD reported, and been charged with driving under the influence.

He entered the veteran's treatment court program in Cumberland County, N.C., over which state District Court Judge Lou Olivera presides.

Serna has fought to stay sober, appearing before Olivera 25 times to have his progress reviewed. He confessed to Olivera that he lied about a recent urine test last week, according to WRAL.

In response, Olivera sentenced Serna to one day in jail.

The judge drove Serna to the jail in a neighboring county.

"When Joe first came to turn himself in, he was trembling," Olivera told the Fayetteville Observer. "I decided that I'd spend the night serving with him."

"Where are we going, judge?" Serna asked, the Observer's Bill Kirby Jr., reported Wednesday.

"We're going to turn ourselves in," the judge said. As Serna sat down on the cot in his cell, WRAL reported, he heard the door rattle open again and saw Olivera standing before him. Olivera sat down beside him. Someone came and locked the door.

"This was a one-man cell so we sat on the bunk and I said, 'You are here for the entire time with me?'" Serna told WTVD. "He said, 'Yeah that's what I am doing.'"

A Gulf War veteran himself, Olivera was concerned that leaving Serna in isolation for a night would trigger his PTSD.

The two passed the time trading stories of their experiences in the military. Serna told WRAL: *"It was more of a father-son conversation. It was personal." "They have worn the uniform and we know they can be contributing members of society," Olivera said. "We just want to get them back there."*

The incident, which occurred April 13, was reported Thursday in the *Observer* under the headline: **"Judge's unbelievable compassion for a veteran."**

Source:

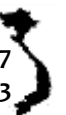
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/04/22/a-judge-sentences-a-veteran-to-24-hours-in-jail-then-joins-him-behind-bars/?wpisrc=nl_az_most

DE OPPRESSO LIBER

"To liberate the oppressed"

[Sent in by Tony Bolivar, Caspers]

Hot damn, Judge! Who loves ya, baby!



THIS WEEK

ON OKINAWA

Est. 1955 as THIS MONTH ON OKINAWA

April 23, 1965, Vol. 11 No 17

10 ¢

Oh Brothers!

Three brothers are now assigned to Okinawa, in the form of twin airmen at Naha Air Base and a soldier at nearby Camp Sukiran.

When Harvey L. Holloway arrived at the 2152nd Comm Sq (APCS) at Naha last month, he completed the unique trio on Okinawa. He was preceded by his twin brother, **Harlan D.**, in December of last year and their brother, **Melvin. E.**, who arrived two months ago and was assigned to "C" Battery, 319th Artillery, 173rd Airborne Brigade at Sukiran.

The twins, since their enlistment in June of 1952, have served together on each of their assignments, both in the States and overseas. They are now both staff sergeants and both work at the Ground Control Approach (GCA) unit at Naha, operated by the 2152nd Communications Squadron.

PFC Melvin, the youngest of the three, entered the Army in December 1963 and has only one other assignment to his credit, at Fort Campbell, Ky. He serves both as an assistant gunner with the 105mm Howitzer unit and as a paratrooper with the brigade.

All three of the brothers call Mississippi home; all are married and all have at least two children.

Harlan, the only one with his family accompanying him on Okinawa, lives in Naha City with his wife, Ruby, and their daughter and son.

Harvey's wife is presently living in Ocean Spring, Miss., with their three sons. He plans to have them join here in June of this year.

Melvin is the father of two girls who reside with their mother at Owensville, Mo. They will remain there and await his return next year.



2/503 jump onto Yomitan DZ. (Photo by Col. George Dexter)

In Memory of 2/503 Sky Soldier

Wayne Kenneth English

July 1, 1947 – April 4, 2016

"We didn't leave anybody behind."

Tribute

Mr. Wayne Kenneth English, age 68, of Flovilla, GA, passed away Monday, April 4, 2016 in Griffin. He was born on Tuesday, July 1, 1947 in Philadelphia, PA. He was preceded in death by his father, John E. English.

Wayne proudly served his country in the 173rd Airborne Brigade Separate 2nd Battalion in Vietnam from 1965 until 1966. The 173rd was the first Army ground combat unit in Vietnam. His favorite saying was, *"We didn't leave anybody behind,"* because his unit did not leave a man behind.



For 28 years, Wayne helped veterans maneuver through the VA. He helped veterans with PTSD transition into a society that did not understand the disorder. From 1988 to 2002 Wayne spoke to Linda's U.S. History Classes about Vietnam.

Wayne is survived by his loving wife of 26 years, Linda White English; children, Tracie English King, Jennifer English Ford, Jessica English Teitelman, Elaine Harvey, Becky Law; mother, Marie Euston; brothers, Stanley English, Doug English, Edwin English, Mike Euston; sister, Barbara Boyette; 12 grandchildren; aunt, Irma Gooden; best bud, Joe Cloud; and several loving nieces, nephews, and cousins.

Funeral services for Wayne were held on Saturday, April 9, 2016 at Sherrell Memorial Chapel with Mr. Rudy L. Mangham officiating. Interment followed in the Fullerton Memorial Cemetery in Hillsboro, GA.

Those who wish may sign the online guest registry at www.sherrell-westburyfh.com.

~ Rest Easy Brother ~



Veterans Groups Criticize Secret Proposal to End VA Healthcare

Apr 02, 2016 | by Bryant Jordan



A new VA Health Care center in Salisbury, N.C. -- set to open this year -- would be shut down by a new proposal concocted in secret by a group of federal legislators.

(VA photo)

Several of the largest veterans' service organizations in the US are criticizing a proposal drafted in secret to shut down veterans' hospitals and clinics across the country and turn over veterans' health care to the private sector.

The proposal was circulated outside the normal process by several members of a congressionally mandated Commission on Care created to study how VA will provide health care over the next couple of decades.

"We are greatly alarmed by the content of the 'proposed straw man document' that was developed and drafted outside the open Commission process by seven ... of the fifteen members -- without the input or even knowledge of the other Commissioners," states the letter to the panel's chairwoman, Nancy Schlichting. It was signed by the heads of Veterans of Foreign Wars, The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, AMVETS, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Vietnam Veterans of America, and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

The 34-page proposal would privatize veterans' health care and completely eliminate the Veterans Affairs Department health care facilities over the next 20 years, they said. (emphasis added)

The proposal also calls for an immediate halt to new VA construction and for a "BRAC-like process" to begin shuttering existing hospitals and clinics, referring to the Pentagon's base realignment and closure process. The

department's future role would essentially be to pay the bills of veterans getting care in the private sector. Schlichting, chief executive officer of Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, had previously warned commission members against recommending a "payor-only" role for VA.

The VSO chiefs said what is "most unsettling about the [recommendation] is the utter lack of consideration that veterans would want to improve and expand the VA health care system. There is also no discussion of how this proposal would affect the coordination of care, the quality of medical services and the health outcomes of veterans."

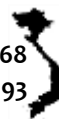
Instead, the document simply asserts that "the current VA health care system is seriously broken and ... there is no efficient path to repair it" without backing up the assertion, the chiefs wrote.

Commissioners behind the straw man document are David Blom, former president of OhioHealth's central Ohio hospitals; Dr. Toby Cosgrove, chief executive officer of The Cleveland Clinic; retired Rear Adm. (Dr.) Joyce Johnson, formerly with the US Public Health Service and a former surgeon general of the US Coast Guard; Darin Selnick, the Senior Veterans Affairs Advisor for Concerned Veterans for America; retired Marine Gen. Martin Steele, associate vice president for Veterans Research, executive director of Military Partnerships, and co-chair of the Veterans Reintegration Steering Committee at the University of South Florida in Tampa; Dr. Marshall Webster, senior vice president of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center; and retired Marine Corps Maj. Stewart Hickey, national director of AMVETS and former CEO for the Hyndman Area Health Center, Pa.

Five of the seven commissioners backing the shutdown of VA health care are Republican appointees, including all three named by former House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio before he resigned last year. Concerned Veterans for America, **the group advised by Selnick, is a lobbying group largely funded by the billionaire Koch brothers that seeks to cut budgets and responsibilities of the VA.** (emphasis added)

Mr. Jordan can be reached at bryant.jordan@military.com.

Note: We'll be pleased to consider running in our next newsletter brief comments by our Sky Soldier readers about this proposal to shut down VA-provided health-care facilities. Email your comments to: rto173d@cfl.rr.com



On display in the wheat fields of Iowa.....



Here is a picture of our Iowa Vietnam Memorial of dog tags in memory of our fallen. From Dana Evans (USN).

Trooper Re-Enlists in Combat

PFC James Duro of Boston (left) becomes the first U.S. soldier to re-enlist during combat operations in South Vietnam.

Administering the oath is Capt. Robert Metz of Miami, while MSgt. James White of New Britain, Conn., witnesses the ceremony. The three are assigned to the 173d Airborne Brigade.



(UPI Radiophoto, July 2, 1965)

319th Arty Excels in Volleyball Too!

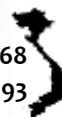
(Well, a few years ago)

“Representatives of Headquarters and Service Battery, 3rd Battalion, 319th Artillery Volleyball Team for 1965 received trophies won by the team during the season on March 29. Receiving the trophies were **Pfc Rodert W. Revilla**, 3rd Battalion Trophy; **MSgt. John Carreira**, Second Place Company Battery Level 173rd Airborne Brigade Trophy; **MSgt. David M. Fernandez**, Second Place First Battalion Level USARYIS competition trophy; **Capt. Johnnie P. Byrd**, First Place Battery Company Team USARYIS level competition award, and **Capt. Charles L. Milhorn**, the individual award for First Place presented to each team member.”

[Source: *This Week on Okinawa*, April 16, 1965]



Note: The late Jim Duro served with the 2/503rd.



300 82nd Airborne Division soldiers deploy to South Korea

By Drew Brooks Military editor

Updated Jun 3, 2016



Capt. Nickolas Lupo and his wife, Aubrie, hug before the deployment ceremony, at Fort Bragg Simmons Army Airfield, for the 1st Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade, before deploying to South Korea, Friday, June 3, 2016. (Staff photo by Carrie A Kirkpatrick)

More than 300 82nd Airborne Division soldiers gathered in a hangar on Simmons Army Airfield early Friday to bid their family and friends farewell. For the next nine months, the soldiers of the 1st Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade - will serve in South Korea, partnering with allies there and serving as part of a deterrent against North Korea's aggression on the peninsula. When they take over their mission in Korea, the squadron will become the Army's last OH-58D Kiowa Warrior squadron.

Already, the unit has handed over its 30-plus helicopters that had been based at Fort Bragg, following a mass flight over the installation and downtown Fayetteville in April.

The deployment is the latest "last" for the squadron, said the commander, Lt. Col. Adam Frederick.

The unit also was the last to fly the helicopters in Afghanistan and the last to fly en masse in the U.S. Now, they'll be the last Kiowa squadron, period, and the last unit of its kind to participate in a Korea rotation that began in 2013.

Frederick said soldiers have been hearing about "lasts" for more than a year, and the importance of those milestones has not been lost on the troops. *"It's not just the last time in this unit, it's the last time in the Army,"* he said. *"This will be the last OH-58D unit in the Army."*

Speaking to his soldiers before their last few good-byes, Frederick said the unit was truly *"one of a kind."*

"You're part of this. Be proud of that," he said. *"I could not be more proud of you guys for what we're about to do."*

Soldiers and their families met at the hangar on Simmons at 3 a.m. to start the process of saying goodbye.

Some young children wore pajamas. Others napped in folding chairs as their parents spent time together. Spc. Michael Sandoval spent the time with his new wife, Leah. The pair were married fewer than three weeks ago, and on Friday still acted very much like newlyweds. They held hands and traded smiles, repeatedly poking each other.

Sandoval said he has deployed before, but this time would be very different.

"It's a bit tough," he said. *"I'm definitely going to miss her."*

"We'll be in touch," Leah promised.

While family members spent a final two hours with their soldiers, the troops dropped off their bags and checked in ahead of their flight later in the morning. Among them were Pfc. Tyrus Brown, his wife, Bailey, and 8-month-old daughter, Stevie.

Brown said it's been difficult preparing for the deployment, knowing he will miss milestones in Stevie's life. But he said the squadron was like a family and would help ease the stress of being apart.

"We're ready to get over there and do what we have to do," Brown said.

It was a sentiment Spc. Felix Villafranca could relate to.

Villafranca was among those soldiers who had already said goodbye before Friday's deployment. Last month, he took his wife and young son - almost a year old - to Texas to be close to family while he is in Korea.

(continued....)



Villafranca said he was torn by the deployment. On one hand, he would miss his family. But the soldier said he was ready to start the mission.

"I know this is why I joined," he said. "Now I'm just ready to get it over with and get back home."

Speaking to the soldiers, Col. Erik Gilbert, the commander of the 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade, promised the soldiers that their families would be taken care of during the deployment.

"We look forward to your return," he said. "We'll make sure you're not forgotten."

Gilbert told the soldiers to wear their maroon berets and 82nd Airborne Division patches with pride in Korea. He said the unit was more than the last of its kind, but could be ranked among the best Kiowa squadrons the Army has ever had.

Frederick said the squadron - more than 350 soldiers will be deployed to Camp Humphries, South Korea - would work closely with soldiers and Marines in Korea. They'll replace the 6th Squadron, 6th Cavalry Regiment of Fort Drum, New York's 10th Combat Aviation Brigade.

Frederick said the squadron prepared in many ways as they would have for Iraq or Afghanistan, but the understanding is that Korea will be a different environment.

As part of the 82nd, the squadron is all too familiar with the notion of being ready at a moment's notice, Frederick said. But Korea has its own challenges. "The difference is, you're there," he said.

Despite those challenges, Frederick said no unit in the Army was more ready for the challenge. "Everybody's eager," he said.

Following the April flight over Fayetteville, which is believed to have set a new Guinness World Record for a helicopter formation, the squadron has divested all of its helicopters, save for a single Kiowa sitting in the corner of the Simmons hangar.

Frederick said that while the squadron no longer had its own Kiowa helicopters, the unit would not be going away.

After their deployment, the soldiers will return to begin a new organization, a heavy reconnaissance squadron with AH-64 Apaches and unmanned aerial vehicles.



Caden (age 10) with dad, SSG Ramon Baker before the deployment ceremony at Ft. Bragg Simmons Army Airfield, for the 1st Squad, 17th Cav Reg, before he deploys to South Korea Friday, June 3, 2016. (Staff photo by Carrie A. Kirkpatrick)

Military editor Drew Brooks can be reached at brooksd@fayobserver.com or 486-3567.

[Source: fayobserver.com]

Reprinted courtesy of Mr. Drew Brooks and fayobserver.com



Feature Topic

PTSD and Families

Family can be a source of support and strength. But Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can take a toll on the most caring family. Living with someone who is easily startled, has nightmares, feels detached from others, and avoids social situations can be difficult and stressful.



Introducing PTSD Family Coach

This free mobile app provides extensive information about PTSD, how to take care of yourself, how to take care of your relationship with your loved one or with children, and how to help your loved one get the treatment they deserve.

The app also provides a great deal of information that is specific to Veterans and active duty members of the military.

PTSD Family Coach includes 24 unique tools to help you manage stress including:

- mindfulness exercises
- tools to help you re-build your social networks
- tools to help with difficult thoughts and emotions you may be experiencing

The app also provides a way for you to track your stress level over time, using scientifically valid measures, and can provide specific feedback about your progress. PTSD Family Coach offers a number of ways for you, and your loved one, to connect with support.

Find out more about the Family Coach App.

Download the Family Coach App (iOS version). The Android version will be available later this year.

Resources for Family Members

Learn about:

- The effects of PTSD on relationships
- Common reactions that family members may have and how children may respond
- How to respond to a loved one with PTSD and how to take care of yourself



Reach Out:

- Help your Veteran get care
- Get connected with VA's Coaching Into Care - a free and confidential coaching service to help you talk with a Veteran in your life about your concerns and about treatment options
- Hear from family members of Veterans about the impact of PTSD and how treatment helped turn things around

Resources for Military Families

- Learn ways to cope when a family member is called to War
- Get help when your loved one is Returning From the War Zone
- Strengthen Parenting Skills with a free online course and the Parenting2Go iOS mobile app

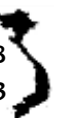
Search web for www.ptsd.va.gov for more information.

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“PTSD ISN’T ABOUT WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOU. IT’S ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU.”

Help is available through the VA and many volunteer organizations at no cost to Veterans. If you do not wish to seek help personally, then do it for your spouse and children – you have earned the right.



In Memory of 2/503 Sky Soldier

Ron Sedlak

July 25, 1945 – June 18, 2016

Tribute

Ron was born in Owosso, on July 25, 1945, the first child of the late Gilbert and Loretta (Carmody) Sedlak. He proudly served his country in Viet Nam. He was an active member of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Gaines, Michigan, often helping with mass. He was a member of the Knights of Columbus Division at St. Joseph's Church. Ron enjoyed putting together models with his grandson, working on old cars with his son, spending time with his family, and spoiling his grandchildren.



The following words best describe Ron and what he held important in life.

If walls could talk they would speak of a man with great faith practiced throughout his life. They would speak of times prayed for strength to go on – to do what was right.

They would speak of sweet moments of his life as he shared his stories, laughter and fun, with his children, family and friends – his love for each one.

They would speak of his pride in continuing the family legacy of serving his country. Ron served in the U.S. Army as a paratrooper in the 173rd airborne – a Viet Nam veteran. Seriously wounded in Viet Nam, he would later narrate his story of the battle where he was wounded to share with many, many people.

Were they to speak, it would be a story of love, a good story that might change depending on the audience. They would speak of a man of simplicity, a great man and his heart.

Left to mourn his passing are his children, daughter, Rhonda (Tim) Bleisner of Oakley and son, Virgil (Hollie) of White Lake, and an extended family.

The family would like to recognize and thank Gary and Deb Bendall for their care of Ron and for opening their home and hearts to Ron and his family. There are no words that can express the gratitude to Gary and Deb from the family. Thank you to the many family and friends for the visits and many acts of kindness during Ron's illness.

A mass of Christian Burial was held at St. Joseph Catholic Church.

U.S. service member hospitalizations for mental health disorders drops to lowest level in seven years

A new study shows the number of hospitalizations for active duty service members suffering from mental health disorders dropped to the lowest level in seven years.



By: **Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch**
5/27/2016

A new study shows the number of hospitalizations for active duty service members suffering from mental health disorders dropped to the lowest level in seven years. The report published in the April issue of the *Medical Surveillance Monthly Report (MSMR)* by the Defense Health Agency's Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch (AFHSB) says just more than 15,000 warfighters in 2015 were hospitalized for treatment of mental disorders. The analysis examined several health care burdens that quantify the impacts of various illnesses and injuries among the U.S. Armed Forces and beneficiaries of the Military Health System.

"In recent years, mental disorders have had the attention of the highest levels of the U.S. military and significant resources have been employed focused on detecting, diagnosing, and treating mental disorders—especially those related to long and repeated deployments and combat stress," said Air Force Col. Dana Dane, the chief of AFHSB's Epidemiology and Analysis section. *"It is also conceivable that the concerted efforts to decrease stigmas and to remove barriers to mental health care might have prevented the need to hospitalize service members diagnosed with these disorders."*

The report says the leading cause of hospitalizations for mental health conditions among both female and male service members were for adjustment reaction – an abnormal and excessive reaction to an identifiable life stressor such as a significant impairment in social, occupational or academic situation....

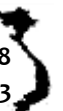
Read entire report at:

www.health.mil/News/Articles/2016/05/27/US-service-member-hospitalizations-for-mental-health-disorders-drops-to-lowest-level-in-seven-years



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Part I

SKY SOLDIERS INTO THE “CRAB TRAP”

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

(July 1966 Time Frame)

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



Charlie Company Commander Capt. Jack Leide, foreground, with his *Chargin' Charlies* at Camp Zinn in '66.

Someone recently asked a Vietnam Vet: When was the last time he was in Vietnam? “*Last night*” he replied.

A couple of blustery, damp, rainy days after my great (and very stupid) adventure at the Bien Hoa Officer’s Club, I woke up the next day feeling like someone, that invisible someone, had driven a railroad spike right down the center of my skull. My Company First Sergeant poked his head into my hootch and barked, as only first sergeants can do, that I needed to head down the battalion street to the battalion command post (CP) tent and report to the S-3 (Operations Officer). His voice broke me from a numbed, bummed-out mood, because I had just finished writing a couple of

excruciatingly difficult letters of condolence to the families of some of our beloved Charlie Company troopers who had been recently killed in action (KIA). This administratively required task was one of the hardest things that I had ever been asked to do up to that point of my life and, frankly, since.

According to brigade SOP, the company commander was required to personally write these agonizing letters of condolence to the next of kin, describing the action in which their beloved trooper was killed in action and how he had been such a great American soldier and patriotic warrior, within ten days of the deadly incident. Frankly, writing them in the somewhat sordid solitude of my hootch, as bad and emotional as it was, was marginally better than what I had experienced in order to fulfill this difficult requirement a couple of times previously, when we were out in the bush. I vividly recall to this very day writing one of these incredibly emotional letters, at night, with a flashlight, under a

poncho, while the wind and monsoon rain pelted loudly on the protective rubber making an almost constant and eerie, and seemingly appropriate thunderous rumble. I remember thinking to myself, it’s as if God is showing his anger as to what was happening to our beloved troopers and to this God-forsaken country and its people.

As careful as I tried to be, I accidentally splashed some mud on the handwritten (certainly not as impersonal as typewritten) letter, but because of the tactical circumstances and the time requirement, I had to put this sadly finished, but soiled letter on the next

resupply chopper, so it would meet the time deadline and could be sent on its way to the bereaved family back in the “world”. I have never, ever forgotten that tortured, emotional incident and wondered how the family took, not only the crushingly sad news, but also the seemingly insensitive, but maybe appropriate, smudge of mud on the letter. To this very day, I still very emotionally remember that time and I wonder, uncomfortably, always with misty eyes.

(continued....)



I popped up from my ammo box seat, put my fatigue jacket and my brownish-red mud-streaked old faithful steel pot on, popped open the screen door and trudged out of my hootch. I jumped out and splashed down onto the ever-present slushy mud and onto on the PSP (Pierced Steel Planking) steel meshing that was used to make runways where there was uneven and inhospitable ground that covered most of the company area -- and much of the whole battalion area for that matter. The PSP at least enabled us to stay somewhat above the almost constantly muddy ground.



The PSP "street" in front of Charlie Company hootches.

I decided that I had to get rid of some of the beer I had the night before and moved gingerly towards the nearest "piss tube". That hallowed ground consisted of a cylinder cut from a couple artillery round containers and when you had to go, you would let it all hang out over the "piss tube". Because it was raining like a sonofabitch, I was the only guy doing his thing. I thought about the many times standing around as a bunch of guys were doing their thing and seeing a bevy of orange streams going down the rat hole. It was a sign that a guy or guys had a case of the clap and were taking the little orange pill (Doxycycline, I think) that made one piss orange. Needless to say there was a lot of ball busting that went on around the old "piss tube". Not that that was bad enough; if you dripped on your fatigues, you carried around an orange badge of honor as a guy who had the clap. But again, I digress.

As I trudged and splashed down the company "street" and onto the main battalion "street", I could smell the overpowering, ever-present musty tentage. Vietnam was a cacophony of sounds, feelings, and smells. What I remember most from my Vietnam experiences was the constant sense of foreboding, the sense of camaraderie, the sense of strange and often danger-announcing sounds like the incessant "wop-wop" of choppers, and the constant sense of incongruent smells. In our base camp this included the smell of musty everything, especially the tents and

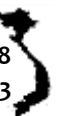
numerous sand bags, the pungent but comforting aroma emanating from the mess tents, the constant smell of diesel fuel from the brush ever-grinding generators, and smells of vehicles parked and moving all over the base area. Out in the bush, there was a constant scent of must, mold, mud and death present in the triple-canopy jungle. There were the incessant huge mosquitoes, which were relentlessly gnawing at your neck and face causing welts and interminable itching. We also had a special ever-present fear of what the troops called "Mr. Two Step", a deadly snake that, if it bit you, you died after supposedly taking about two steps. Then, there were those ugly bastard leeches that were in ever-present large numbers in the rivers and streams.



Charlie Company troopers fording stream on search and destroy mission.

When we frequently had to cross those rivers and streams, some which were very fast running and deep, especially during the rainy season, we had to secure ourselves from being dragged downstream by using repelling ropes stretched across to the far bank. While we were struggling to get across, these tiny, dirty-bastard leeches would slither into any opening between the cammy jackets and pants and latch on to your stomach and waist. Once the crossing was over and we eventually got a chance to stop and take a short break, we all checked for leeches (and other things) and, frequently found that they were clinging to our skin where they became as big as a thumb from sucking our blood. We would normally have to burn them off with a lit cigarette. The cigarette, aside from the inherent bad physical elements, was, strangely, one of the infantryman's best friends....

(continued....)



....Firstly, it took a lot of pressure off by just sitting there and smoking a cigarette making you almost feel human, and they were also useful for burning off parasites like leeches, chiggers and ticks so that their suckers and grabbers did not stay in the skin and become red and infected. I did not smoke normally (a pipe occasionally), but as soon as I got to Vietnam, both times, because of the availability of cigarettes in the C-ration packets, I began smoking again, only to quit each time, once I got back to our base camp.

Finally, and frankly, in Vietnam, there was always the constant smell and feeling of death or dying, even when there was apparently no immediate presence.

I slapped through the flap of the battalion command tent opening and reported, with a high degree of apprehension, to the S-3, a major. Since we still had some reasonably expected downtime “earned”, after just returning from the field following a rather lengthy and debilitating armed reconnaissance mission (so called “search and destroy”), I just knew that whatever he was going to tell me, he was going to stick it in my ass and cut our well-deserved company downtime short again!

He said Field Force II and brigade intelligence had identified some large, winding and long “VC high speed logistical trails” in the Xuan Loc area, deep in the heart of which we called “Indian Country”. The brigade was assigned the mission to plan an operation to disrupt those key, critical resupply routes. Brigade had decided to give this critical mission to the 2nd Battalion. Charlie Company then had been in turn selected by the Battalion Commander to conduct a chopper insert into the area to conduct what they called “a company-level ambush operation”. I was told, almost proudly, that this would be the first company-level ambush mission in the Vietnam War. I thought to myself, “*another fucking first*”.



Charlie Company trooper watches over his squads' gear before heading out on ambush mission.

I then quickly recalled the day after I took command of Charlie Company in June; we were tasked to conduct the first night heliborne assault (at Vung Tao) in the war up to that point and we had no prior after-action reports to rely on for some semblance of guidance. I asked the S-3 what kind of experiential factor do we have on how to conduct such a large unit ambush operation and what had been the lessons learned. He said that some ambush operations had been conducted in Vietnam in the past, but by smaller units such as Special Operations teams, Rangers and Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols (LRRP's), but never at an infantry company-level. No question, the larger the unit the more difficult it would be to keep such an operation covert, but to be able to conduct the operation for a long enough period of time to be truly effective in order to inflict great pain on the Viet Cong infrastructure and its ability to operate effectively in and around the important VC areas and installations in Vietnam.

The ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) had reported that the Viet Cong logistical lifeline between II and III Corps areas was winding up and down a large series of supply trails that were cut through to and into the Xuan Loc area. Later, as I continued to look at the situation and did a map reconnaissance with the Brigade S-2 section, it appeared that the VC logistical lifeline came out of the Ho Chi Minh trail in Cambodia, crossed into Vietnam and wound through Xuan Loc and into the heart of the logistical support structure around Saigon. Therefore, this series of trails was critical to the VC effort in the III Corps and even IV Corps areas. I remembered from my time in the Brigade S-2 section that the Xuan Loc area was really a huge Viet Cong rat's nest and one of the nastiest areas to conduct search and destroy or, frankly, any other types of operations.

The battalion gave us the semi-specific mission orders and said that the planning between battalion and Charlie Company would begin immediately and we would have to look to a mission launch in about two or three days. There was no precedent for such a large ambush operation, but an ambush primarily requires intricate planning, covert-style insert and operations and a continuous need for security and stealthy action until an eventual planned egress is affected. I asked the S-3 how long did he think we would be “out there” and how would we, after the mission is “complete”, egress from the objective area....

(continued....)



....He told me *"right now it's most likely open ended"*. Holy shit! That answer didn't make me feel really comfortable because "out there" can become very complicated and deadly very quickly, especially if we are really hurting Charlie and digging into his comfort zone. After all, the Xuan Loc area was really *his "country"* and almost totally infested not only with hardcore VC, but some NVA (North Vietnamese Army) but dedicated VC sympathizers, as well. If this were, initially, to be a true ambush, it would last only until Charlie knew we were there, and he would certainly and quickly know we were there, and would probably quickly know what our real mission was -- and that would really piss them off. That realization would undoubtedly take place shortly after our first contact.

The only way to at least hold off the VC's immediate response was to confuse him about our strength and location. After all, an ambush by definition is "a surprise attack by people lying in wait in a concealed position".

As I returned to my company area, I kept thinking of all the important tactical preparations we had to plan for and accomplish. My first thought was that I had to break the crappy news to the company troopers that they had cut our between-missions downtime short (nothing new, unfortunately) and go on some unknown, unique, special mission that was going to be most likely potentially difficult, certainly dangerous and in the end, probably deadly. I asked myself: *"why hadn't company-level ambushes been attempted before in Vietnam and, why is it being ordered now and, why is the objective and the objective area so different to warrant such a mission?"*

I thought back to my first day in command, when we were tasked to conduct, during the early dark hours of the next morning, the first night heliborne assault ever during the Vietnam conflict. I thought, *"Holy shit, there's not going to be a learning transition into command here"*. That mission, back in June, was to conduct a nighttime heliborne air assault into the Vung Tau area, a US resupply and R&R destination, attack up into the high ground overlooking the Vung Tau, Ba Ria port area where, supposedly, no non-VC had ventured in 22 years. The VC had begun launching an increasing number of direct and indirect attacks particularly on the Vung Tau cantonment area and evidently so much that they had to be stopped. We would use trained pathfinders to guide us into the Landing Zone.

After we planned and executed the night operation, in concert with the wonderful chopper pilots, we moved towards the high ground overlooking Vung Tao. The trudge up the high ground was steep, wet and slippery. We clung to trees, bushes, vines or anything we could in

order to pull ourselves, with our heavy load, up that very slippery and steep slope. It was a tough, slug-it-out mission and we ran into a mountain full of booby traps. Many were made from dud 105mm artillery rounds the VC dug up and armed them as booby traps.



Charlie Company troopers, 'moving on up', one step at a time.

As we proceeded up the mountain, we heard what sounded like something or someone was crashing down the hill towards us. Suddenly, there was a black machine gunner, crashing and tumbling *bang! boom!* into the brush in front of us, covered in grey mud and coming to an abrupt halt against a tree, his steel pot and machine gun clanking down behind him. One of the other black troopers, who was his buddy and was about two yards away from us, looked down at the guy, said to him, *"You sonofabitch, who said you could fucking rest?"* In the midst of all the serious bullshit we were going through, we all laughed like hell. It was a brief interruption from the bleak turmoil that only humor can break.

(continued....)



During many a night out in the bush, as I would move around the company perimeter talking to the troopers, the most enjoyable and tension-breaking times would often be when I sat with two or three of our black troopers and talked. The humor that evolved around and between these men would always tickle my funny bone and help break the mind-numbing tension if only for a very short period of time. I would never forget those sessions. It almost felt like a therapeutic dream. Humor has always been a huge influence on my life and without it, I have no idea what my life would have been like.

We took a few light casualties, as the booby traps tripped by our leading troopers on the point, followed by covering fire, were poorly placed, and blocked by the thick growth of trees as we continued to slog upwards and onwards. The exploding booby traps caused some casualties but were few and far between -- more like a nuisance. We physically did not encounter large VC units, but had a number of small contacts and in the end killed four VC who had been dug awkwardly into the mountain. Eventually, once we got to the top, we began to slip and slide back down the steep slope clinging to trees and undergrowth as we descended.



Wounded paratroopers of Charlie Company being tended to by medics before Dust Off.

The frustrating thing about that mission was that, just like most search and destroy and most all other kinds of missions in Vietnam, we eventually left the area after physically occupying the ground; and the VC, normally, just moved back into the area again, mostly just as they were before. This was the problem with this so-called war - how were we to gauge mission success?

We then were lifted out back to our base camp. I waited with a small command group until most of the company was lifted and jumped on the last chopper and got out of that mess.



"THE LAST TO GO – Paratroopers of Company C, 2nd/503rd, 173rd Airborne Brigade, keep a close watch about them as they move forward toward their airlift out. They were the last element to leave the area."

(Photo by PFC Paul Epley, 173rd ABN-IO)

Was this mission to the Xuan Loc area rats nest going to be agonizingly similar to Vung Tau? We had to plan for us being in the AO for flexible periods of time. A few days? A week? Maybe more? Before and during every other operation, we needed to at least plan on an initial amount of ammo, rations and water, extra weapons, including Claymore mines, maybe even special weapons such as shotguns, and special devices such as extra multi-color smoke grenades in case the VC had some of the same color smoke. Since we will be on a special ambush mission, we will be out "there" on our own and because it was an "ambush" mission, would have to survive without the normal, periodic resupply by battalion and brigade. We will have to lighten our personal loads and especially be prepared to be able to self-sanitize a hopefully ready supply of our life's blood - potable water.

Potable water was always on our minds, due to the fact that moving through the interminable jungle, whether during the incessant rainy season or scorching heat and stifling humidity, we would be in a constant sweat. Soaking wet with sweat and by the constant rain. So, our normal supply of water purification tablets had to be increased sufficiently, along with our salt tablets taken to replace salt lost to the body by the large amount of sweat that poured out of us.

The other lesser known, but important item we had to carry was mosquito repellent, which aside from our fatigues, was our only defense against those little bastards. Each trooper had a bunch of those little plastic bottles of repellent. We sloshed it on as much as we could and the pungent smell of the stuff was everywhere. It worked some and helped some, but the infestation of the rat bastard mosquitoes never left us.

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We additionally and importantly, also had to plan to take our malaria pills prior to our deployment and make sure we had some spares if we stayed out for what could be an indefinite period. If this was to be an effective mission we had to be able to subsist on our own as much as possible, without the constant hovering of brigade or battalion command or resupply choppers. By knowing we had to travel lightly, we would especially have to lighten our ration load as well.



Charlie Company troopers moving through triple canopy jungle.

As infantrymen, and carrying weapons, a lot of ammo, grenades, at least two, two quart canteens of water (really heavy) and special equipment, we normally carefully looked at our load of rations during missions that would take us thrashing through the triple canopy jungle. The rations that we were provided were "C" rations, mostly those that were left over from World War II and Korea. Normally, as we moved into the field we would pack a minimal amount of the cans in the box of rations. These were actual cans that were not only really heavy to carry through the bush, but the sharp edges of the cans in our rucksacks cut into our shoulders and backs no matter how much we tried to pad them. To give one an idea how old these rations were could be found in some of the ancillary items included with the food rations, such as cigarettes, including non-filtered "Old Gold", "Lucky Strike" and "Camels."

We needed to do a map reconnaissance to not only develop our tactical plan, but also see where we can have access to streams and/or ponds as a water supply. Another planning problem was *"how can we find a landing zone (LZ) that is close enough to the objective, but far enough away so that it would not give away our necessarily surreptitious mission objective's location?"*

Again, if this was going to be a true ambush, we needed to stay in the shadows as much as possible, but

still near our critical objective areas - the high-speed logistical trails. If after we begin successfully tearing into Charlie's logistical gut and the area turns "hot", which it certainly and eventually would, we needed to have a plan for a defense and then an egress the hell out of there.

The VC would undoubtedly respond violently, once they knew how much we were debilitating (hopefully) his critical strategic supply and resupply mission. Ideally and hopefully, choppers would eventually extricate us, but because I felt that it would probably be a hot egress, we would be well advised to have a solid plan to exfiltrate our way out by foot as well. Innately knowing that we would certainly be counterattacked, I asked the S-3 whether we would be in range of direct artillery support.



C/2/503 exfiltrating the combat zone.

Our Brigade policy up to that time was that our infantry units would never operate out of the range of our organic brigade artillery units. The S-3 told me that we would move at least one battery of M-102 - 105mm light airborne artillery to a forward location to be in range to provide direct support of our mission as long as we are out there. He also said that they would position the remaining two brigade batteries to a point where they could move quickly and be able to provide additional supporting fire. Although the brigade artillery battalions were very good, they found that ideal artillery support in most of Vietnam was problematic, because of range and firepower limitations to accuracy and effectiveness in a triple-canopy jungle environment. Having said that, we were more comfortable that at least, and importantly, they were 173d artillery guys, and would certainly primarily be looking out for us.

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He also said that we could request additional support from the Corps Artillery units as well. Actually it was II Field Force Artillery, but we called it Corps Artillery.

What we could expect from the Corps Artillery would be support from 8 inch and 175mm long-range artillery cannons. At the time, the 8 inch was the best, most accurate artillery piece in the world. The 175 was much more long range, but a lot less accurate. (The long barrels supposedly wore out rapidly after about 25-30 rounds and became more inaccurate as time and the number of rounds fired through those long tubes increased).

I also asked about close air support. I just knew that we would have a situation where the possibility of requesting air support from close support aircraft such as A1 Skyraiders, F4 Phantoms and F-100 Super Sabres was a pretty real possibility. All were very good close air support aircraft, but the A1, being a powerful prop-driven aircraft could carry a fairly large bomb load, and had the ability to stay "on station" for lengthy periods of time. The problem with air support, and artillery support in triple canopy jungle was the incredibly high probability for "blue on blue" (friendly fire) incidents. (Thus, the need for much more different color smoke grenades and other marking devices).

Again, we needed, in order to be stealthier and not give away our hand and our objective, to air assault into a remote area some distance from the designated ambush site. The first thing you try to assess when planning a heliborne assault is to look at the possible Landing Zones (LZ's), big enough to land multiple sorties while fast enough to surprise Charlie so that the LZ is not "hot" and give us time to set up a defensive perimeter around the LZ. As during any airborne/heliborne operations, the most vulnerable time in an air insertion is the immediate time just after boots strike the ground, or just before we can set up an initial defensive perimeter.

We did a quick map and photo recon and picked out a fairly remote LZ with what looked like a fairly reasonable line of march to the objective area. "Reasonable Line of March" is a purely subjective term when it comes to moving through triple canopy jungle and its attendant undergrowth, particularly bamboo. We could not use any roads or developed trails because as we move down any used trail, Charlie could anticipate our ultimate objective and set up an ambush (especially a "V" ambush) on our way. So we normally had to cut through the undergrowth with machetes at a snail's pace. We could only move through bamboo at about a hundred meters or less per hour.

We also had to rotate the normally physically and mentally exhausted troopers walking the "point", cutting our path through the bush, using machetes, between 20 minutes to a half hour (depending on the thickness of the bamboo), sometimes less. As we rotated the point out, their cammies were normally ripped to shreds from cutting through the sharp thicket, especially bamboo. The brave troopers who continuously volunteered to walk the point became instant heroes to the rest of the company. We always wondered whether they had a death wish, did it for his fellow troopers, just lived for the excitement of the challenge or all three.



C Company troopers cautiously move forward. Walking point can be a fatal business.

We had one particular trooper who always volunteered to walk the point and he was really exceptionally good at it. He seemed to have a sixth and/or seventh sense at picking up on Charlie lying in ambush positions ahead of our line of march. He also seemed to have nine lives, having survived numerous initial VC contacts and in turn giving warning and probably saving numerous lives of his fellow troopers. He was unbelievable. Finally, during one operation, his luck ultimately ran out when a VC "claymore"-type homemade mine was detonated and ripped into him. ("The US Claymore was developed to defend against mass attacks. Seven hundred steel balls are embedded in C4 Explosives. The mine is shaped like a curved rectangle. This convex design allows for a full sixty-degree pattern of deadly steel balls when the mine is activated. The blast mows right through elephant grass. For an even more devastating effect, a solid material or *tamp* is placed behind the mine....

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....It was not only used defensively, but in ambushes. One deadly method was to detonate mines shoulder high on a tree, and then a second or two later, detonating additional mines at ground level”).

The VC crafted homemade claymore-type mines, casting concrete, metal scraps, explosives and detonators surrounded on the back by a metal pan to direct the metal scraps forward towards their intended target. I was totally devastated when I heard the explosion of the claymore and knew he may have well been hit. As I rushed to him and saw his gaping life-threatening wounds, my heart stopped. We quickly and finally got a “Dustoff “ (the medical evacuation helicopter units in Vietnam all had the call sign “Dustoff”) to land in a nearby LZ to evacuate him. I personally escorted his litter to the LZ and tried to talk to him and encourage him. In thick, triple canopy jungle it was normally impossible for a chopper to land or even get close. So because we never left any trooper behind, alive or dead, we would either carry him out or blow a hole in the jungle canopy with detonation cord in order for a Dustoff to get him out. Fortunately, there was a fairly reasonably close clearing that we could use as an LZ. He was really ripped and torn up and died on the way back to the medical facility. He represented an innate emotional microcosm, because it seemed that everyone, particularly in the Infantry in Vietnam, felt like they were living on borrowed time, but we thought of survival in order to survive both mentally and physically.



Dust Off evacuating a wounded or dead trooper from C Company in thick jungle.

I read some almost unbelievable statistics recently, that the average time in actual face-to-face combat for infantrymen during World War II was 10 days per year. Many spent three or four years during that war, so they spent 30 or 40 days during those years. During Vietnam, the average time a combat infantryman spent in actual combat was 240 days. This is a mind-numbing

figure and it seemed to me, invariably true. For guys like me as an officer, it was bad, but not nearly as bad as the infantry soldier and non-commissioned officers (NCO's). Officers like me, would spend about six or seven months commanding a combat infantry company and then rotate out to a staff job for the rest of his one-year tour. However, the average combat infantry soldier and NCO would normally spend his entire tour out in the bush in a combat infantry squad and platoon, unless he took sick or was wounded. This almost constant experience in an incredibly difficult and dangerous combat situation for 240 days a year and the fact that an NCO would go back “to the world” after his combat tour for a year and then be sent back for another combat tour was devastating, not only to the individual and his family, but unit morale as well.

When I returned to Vietnam a couple of years later with the 101st Airborne Division, I could see a very visible degradation in unit capability and wound up realizing that the key reason was that the NCO corps had been and was being decimated and we had very junior and inexperienced NCO's in the combat units. It appeared that the NCO's had either been killed or badly wounded, and wound up deciding after repetitive tours that they would retire or get out of the Army instead of putting themselves or their families through a third or fourth combat infantry tour. Equally importantly, the average company commander had made captain after two years in the Army, and it seems that they had been in the army all day. They were willing, but inexperienced and it is in situations that are so excruciatingly difficult and dangerous to all around where experienced NCO's would be invaluable. But for the most part, those experienced NCO's were not there and it showed, even in an elite unit like the 101st Airborne Division.

After a mission or two of the normal uncomfortable and terrifying anticipation of and actual experience of close combat in a jungle environment, many times turns a soldier into a numbed robot, with an almost psychosomatic out of body experience. It was almost an emotionally callous feeling, maybe the inner self-reacting and shutting out the ever-present danger and calculable fear. This “callousness” becomes a double-edged sword, because it helped get you through the terror sanely, but, on the other hand, made you less fearful and often more careless. Carelessness, in such a palpably dangerous environment has been the cause of countless deaths in combat.

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We always, always had to guard against carelessness and callousness. Receiving fire from the dark underside of the triple canopy jungle, most of the time not even seeing who was initiating the firefight, is incredibly terrorizing, no matter how many times you've been through it. The sound of incoming fire is easily recognized as being different than anything one has ever experienced -- much different sounding than outgoing rounds. Incoming has the familiar sound of a sharp resonating "crack" as the round breaks through the air and sound barrier on its way towards you and your position.

The big problem in this particular ambush mission, as I saw it, was: how do you "hide" an infantry company (field strength at between 80 and 120 paratroopers) in an area basically that is enemy turf, that is highly travelled, and affect a successful multi-faceted ambush mission? The conundrum was, as mentioned previously, that the more successful we were, as we hit them hard and disrupted their critical logistical supply efforts, they would undoubtedly have to recoil and hit us with a vengeance. I had a real quandary; we had a lot of area to cover due to the number of high speed trails, (just as the Ho Chi Minh trail was a massive complex of trails, not just one) so I had to deploy the company in small units, at least at first, but had to plan how to protect smaller units as they hit the VC from their ambush positions and anticipate that the VC would deploy to surround them and attack and destroy them in detail, once identified as to where they were, as certainly they would.

Another potential problem that worried me, was that as we deployed multiple smaller units to cover the myriad of trails -- they had to be placed so that their attack positions and fields of fire were not putting our different elements in jeopardy from friendly cross-fire (blue-on-blue). Since we know little about the geography of the area, except that it is triple canopy jungle and "Charlie Country", this would be tricky. How to be effective, yet prevent firing into each other, like a circular firing squad, in a very complicated mission-area, was going to be a really difficult problem. But, first things first.

We had to plan our heliborne assault into the area. A full company "chopping" into a single Landing Zone would take a relatively long time (time in a danger zone is contracted, yet seems extended because of the peril involved) and a lot of sorties surely would attract a lot of Charlie's attention. The key is how to avoid a "hot LZ".

We in the airborne have a unique way of looking at an operation and do what we call "backward planning". Whether it's an airborne or air assault operation, the

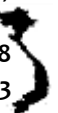
objective area is the most critical part of the process; the most dangerous part of the operation and when the landing troops are most vulnerable is just as the unit touches down onto a drop zone or a landing zone. We worked on our loading plan for the air assault. We planned for an available number of about 110 troopers. In an airborne operation we normally "cross loaded" unit members so that if an aircraft went down, it would not take out an entire unit capability or total unit. Since we might be able to carry about 8-10 troopers per chopper sortie, it would take about 10 or so chopper sorties to get the entire company compliment onto the Landing Zone. The UH1B (Iroquois), which we called the "Huey" transport helicopter ("Slick") is said to be technically capable of carrying 14 troops, but that is without rucksacks, weapons and equipment, so we planned on 8-10 fully loaded troopers plus the standard door gunner.

We decided that 11 "Slicks" would be enough to get our company compliment into the LZ that we had selected according to our requirements and plan. The company leadership (Company XO, Artillery FO, Field First Sergeant, and Platoon leaders) and I gathered around my map and we did a map reconnaissance and evolved a plan as best we could. Mapping, charting and geodesy support for the early years of the Vietnam conflict in a word "sucked". During this period, at times, the best we could get were Michelin road maps. How is that for the most powerful country in the world with its warrior's lives on the line unable to produce maps to help with an almost impossible task? I was terribly frustrated.



The slicks, all in a row.

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I recalled that when I was a rifle company commander with the 82nd Airborne Division in 1965, we were airlifted into the Dominican Republic to help stabilize the very complicated and politically dangerous situation in that key Latin American country. We were to land at San Isidro Air Base at night, set up a perimeter, and then lead our brigade into Santo Domingo. We were to set up a bridgehead at the Duarte Bridge, then attack across the bridge into the heart of the city and have three battalions passing through each other, at night, clear the passage as we went through, and link up with the Marines who were securing the US Embassy at the far end of the city. Every step during the operational plan was very complicated and difficult, but made even more difficult because we had no military operational maps. Initially, we were able to make some sketches of the area from what we knew. We eventually were able to get our hands on some ESSO road maps. For the remainder of my career, I was obsessed with ensuring that the deploying forces, including mine, were well equipped with proper mapping, charting and geodesy support.

We were scheduled to begin to deploy on our ambush mission within 48 hours and we had to rest as much as we could, plan for our support, both tactical (artillery and air for starters), and logistical. Going through the detailed planning process did not ease my apprehension about the mission, its reason and possible outcome. I was beginning to question the reasoning behind even the “normal” search and destroy missions as being calculated to deploy our troops into his “country” and draw Charlie into attacking our positions and being beaten back normally by our superior fire power including artillery and close air support.

Although, as has been generally proffered, we historically never really “lost” a “battle” in Vietnam, but since we hardly ever occupied the area we had “won”, it was surely going to be an ever-losing battle of attrition. I just knew that as soon as the first shot was fired during the initial ambush operation in an area so critical to Charlie, we were going to be, literally, in for an extended fight to the death.

We continued our planning for the ambush mission with increasing anxiety the closer we got to X-hour, as happened before every mission. As we approached the deployment time, every second, every minute, everyone feels differently, differently towards each other, towards the mission, towards our family and of course our country. It all seemed so distant and surreal. We seemingly acted eventually out of some sort of learned or innate animal instinct.

I decided, after some discussion with the platoon leaders and senior NCO’s (I always depended mostly on

the senior NCO’s during my career and it was the best thing I had ever decided to do) to try to get as much “bang for the buck” out of our initial tactical effort. We would put out ambush patrols in section strength at first (there were two sections in a squad). I decided that we would, day by day, consolidate our positions until we would eventually evolve into a company-level position. The following plan was like playing Russian roulette -- how long could we redeploy into ever-stronger perimeters until we would be hit in force? I hoped that it was when we finally, if given enough time by Charlie, moved into a company strength perimeter.

The second day we would consolidate the sections into their integral squads and then the following day into platoon-sized ambush positions and finally on the fourth day, when I felt we were most vulnerable, because the VC would have had enough time and had suffered enough damage to their critical logistical mission, that they would have to counter-attack us, we went into a company-level ambush perimeter. We also emphasized and planned that in any of the unit positions we assumed, that our “fields of fire” would not put us into “blue-on-blue” crossfire jeopardy.

The evening before the planned heliborne assault we made our final operational and logistical checks, had what many would think was their last “normal” meal (and maybe a beer) for a while, and maybe forever. Every time we were about to go on a tactical mission, you thought that this may be the last time that I..... That final dreaded thought is always there in the back of your mind.



Time for only one cold one before C Company moves out again.

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Combat makes a person think in the very basic of terms and at times very dreaded terms. Those that have had this experience understand the finality of sober thought, those that have not, will most likely not be able to feel the anxiety to such a degree as being finality. But I digress -- again.

As part of our backward planning process, we decided that we should arrive at the LZ just at dawn and should leave our jump off point, according to the flight time, about twenty minutes prior. Every trooper was loaded down with gear, equipment, rations and at least two, two quart "canteens" of precious water (heavy to carry, but like liquid gold). Pack mules come to mind.

We waddled to our assigned "stick" position, in physical and chronological order, not saying much, but we in leadership relaying last minute orders almost in whispers. I personally packed my gear. A minimal amount of rations, even though our mission was open ended chronologically. World War II C-rations were really heavy, especially the fat-filled cans. Two, two-quart canteens, my dark green towel to wrap around my neck to help control the sweat. Mosquito repellent, salt tablets to replace that lost through sweating, and my muddy, old faithful steel pot. I then holstered my .45 Cal. with a bunch of spare clips and my ever-faithful map/sketch case.

As I put the .45 on pistol belt, I recalled an incident during one of my first forays as a rifle company commander in the 173d. As I went out on my first patrol, I, for some reason, wanted to carry an M-16 on that patrol. Maybe I just wanted to be a "VC Killer" like the rest of the company. As we disgorged from the Huey and started to slash into the bush, the hair on the back of my neck actually stood up the same way as it did on my first foray into the black night on our first patrol into Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic in 1965. The first thing I found during an early foray into the Song Be area of Vietnam was how hard it was to move through the bush with an M-16 rather than a holstered pistol. The patrol was a relatively short one but, certainly, not uneventful.

I recall vividly that we were in bivouac one night about one day's trudge from our base camp. My small command group was in a clutch in a Michelin rubber plantation and the sun was in the last throes of setting. We heard some rustling noises and the bark of an M-16. My faithful RTO (Radio-Telephone Operator) and I looked at each other, I grabbed my M-16 and he drew his .45 and we quietly crawled "toward the sound of the guns" and into the thick bush. It was really dark, but there were some slits of light coming from the full moon. There was still some muted commotion beyond our immediate sight. A couple of troopers from the 2nd

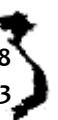
Platoon who were standing perimeter were searching out the VC who had moved into the perimeter and fired a shot at them and they in return. As I lay there in wait, I saw a shadowy figure moving slowly towards the company perimeter. I brought up my M-16, took a quick aim, and squeezed off a couple of rounds. Other troopers were also firing into the thicket. Everything went quiet, and we waited and wondered.



Capt. Leide on the horn, with his faithful RTO, Tom Conley, always nearby.

The two perimeter troopers moved towards the area and called out that the VC had been "bloused" or hit and was a KIA. We got to the area where the VC was down and saw that he was dead and dressed in just a short wrap around his middle, wearing Ho Chi Minh sandals, his AK-47 nearby. An M-16 round went through his breastplate. It was a tiny hole in front, but his entire back was blown away....

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....The thing that struck me then and even more so now was that I/we had no feeling about killing another human being up so close. Was that right? How can that be? I have come to the conclusion that this guy (enemy) was trying to kill me, but more importantly, those I was charged to help survive—my troopers. It all comes down to the very basics in combat. Kill or be killed. It sounds trite, but it viscerally penetrated to the very core of your psyche.



A Viet Cong who made the mistake of meeting up with men of C/2/503.

This mission was tough, especially at the end. I was pretty proud of what I may have had accomplished until a couple of days after we made it to our base camp at Bien Hoa. My field first sergeant came into my hootch and asked if he could talk to me. (First sergeants have a strange way of asking permission, when it really sounds like an order). He said something I have remembered and used the rest of my career. He said:

“Sir, we have 200 guys in this company who are trained VC killers, but we only have and need one person to concentrate on leading this company, making us successful (killing as many VC and NVA as possible) and most importantly saving trooper lives. That’s you, and we have faith in your leadership, so leave killing the fucking VC to us.”

I viscerally agreed with him and told him that I would lead this company and not allow myself to be distracted by stupid shit. He nodded knowingly, smiled and asked permission to leave. After he left, I slapped my forehead with the palm of my hand and thought that I should have known better, especially since I had been a combat company commander with 82nd Airborne Division for 18 months prior to joining the 173d. I certainly should have known better. Another lesson burned into my psyche. But again, I digress.

We were preparing to go on the ambush operation. Why our voices were muted now was incongruous, but that always happened in hours, and at times even days before an operation. Many would try to lessen the tension by telling jokes, stories or even such dark advice such as how to die correctly when presented with the opportunity. The troops had even written a tongue-in-cheek, official-looking directive on how to die with flair, especially when there were combat photographers in the vicinity.

When the chopper motors began to whine, cough and start up, the finality hit us like a ton of bricks. This was it. The familiar “wop-wop” of the chopper blades was like an eerie, ominous, beckoning sound—we are in fact and in reality going into the abyss. As we waddled into the troop compartment, the door gunner, who we greeted like a long lost brother, shouted hello to us with a thumbs up. If the LZ was hot, the gunner was there to help suppress the enemy fire. He was like a security blanket. We clumsily, waddled, crunched and clanked next to each other, mostly in silence, looked at each other in motionless thousand-yard stares as the chopper engine revved up and the wind and whoosh of the downdraft of the blades blew the wind and rain on to the troopers in the outer edge of the compartment who were sitting on the edge of the floor with their legs hanging down like they were ready to spring at any time.

As we lifted off, you could feel the movement as if we were leaving the comfort of a womb for the great unknown. As we lifted vertically and then began to bend down and forward the rain-filled wind passing through the open compartment felt like we were in another dark world. We could see the other choppers in the flight moving along with the trooper legs hanging down. As we looked down at the triple canopy jungle which was just beginning to be visible in the light misting rain there was a feeling of an almost out of body experience. It was like the area was some mysterious moonscape or something very dark and distant.

During other air assault flights during the daytime you could look and wonder at the various shades of green in the absolutely lush foliage below. It kind of looked like large fields of huge broccoli. I always, especially when we flew next to the coastline or in the high hills and mountains in the spine of Vietnam, stared in wonderment at what this beautiful country would be like if this stinking war was finally over. Back to reality.

(continued....)





2nd Battalion's men of Charlie Company off on another aerial assault of an LZ in 'Indian Country'.

As we approached the landing zone, the chopper pilots gave us a time hack and we apprehensively braced ourselves for the landing and a rapid unloading. As the choppers settled into the landing zone, the thigh-high grass showed different patterned bending to and fro, like during a wild, wet and windy storm. The leading troopers snapped to the ground and almost simultaneously bounded in a crouched running movement towards the LZ's edges to set up a defensive perimeter. This was the critical time. We were on the move and hoping there was no VC waiting for us with deadly grazing fire. Hoping against hope.

We were able to rush to the triple canopy jungle to set up an initial perimeter without any sign of the VC, and the more the following choppers that came in with the rest of the company, the more confident we were that we could defend our perimeter. It was so comforting to see our troopers deploying to their designated areas with professional competence. That's what always made me so proud to be a Sky Soldier—the courage and competent professionalism of our fellow troopers.

After we were confident that our perimeter was solid and secure, we were able to plan and execute our withdrawal and movement in column formation from the LZ to the objective area. We began moving with the 2nd Platoon in the lead, followed by the 1st Platoon, Weapons Platoon, and Company Headquarters with 3rd Platoon securing the rear of the column.

We set out a minimal flank security because we had to move rapidly in order to get to the objective area and set up our initial ambush positions quickly, but effectively. Remember, we were on an ambush mission.

Getting there and setting up to be effective and prevent VC reaction for as long as possible was the goal.

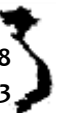
As we moved through the dense, wet, jungle we seemed to quietly and professionally settle into the mission at hand after the initial cacophony of noise, fast movement and apprehensive terror during the air assault. As we approached the objective area but not close enough to be easily observed, we deployed a six-man

scout patrol to attempt to at least try to draw up a basic sketch map of the complicated trail complex that we were charged to disrupt. We held up our forward deployment, settled into a very compact company perimeter and waited for their return. I kept mulling over in my mind - how do we optimally disrupt Charlie's mission and not take a lot of casualties?



Sign warning "Victor Charlie" and welcoming visitors to "C" Company at the battalion's Camp Zinn near Bien Hoa AFB.

(continued....)





Charlie Company hootches/perimeter at Camp Zinn near Bien Hoa AFB.

I always thought as we moved as a company through the bush on any of our missions that, no matter how much we needed to move as quietly as we could through VC territory (everywhere it seemed, except our base camps), it was virtually impossible not to be heard or observed. We were always initially at a disadvantage -- period.

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Part II of MG Leide's report will appear in the September-October edition of our newsletter. Ed



John (Jack) Leide, Major General, USA (Ret)

MILITARY CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- 33 years of active service in the US Army
- Served in four combat tours:
 - Three as an airborne company commander: 82nd Airborne, 173d Airborne, 101st Airborne.
 - The fourth as Gen Schwarzkopf's Director for Intelligence, J-2 for Desert Shield/Desert Storm
- Battalion Commander, US Army Special Forces.

- G-2, 82nd Airborne Division
- Military Intelligence Group Commander
- Only US Graduate, Chinese Army Command & General Staff College
- Defense and Army Attaché to China (including during the Tian An Men incident)
- Director for Operations, Defense Intelligence Agency
- Combat Infantryman's Badge, Master Parachutist Badge, Special Forces Tab
- Inducted into the US Military Attaché Hall of Fame
- Inducted into the US Military Intelligence Hall of Fame
- Inducted into Intelligence Wall of Torch Bearers at Defense Intelligence Agency
- Graduate of Georgetown University, Syracuse University College of Law, Harvard University John F. Kennedy School

And, MG Leide was Company Commander of Charlie Company, 2/503d Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep), and to the "Sky Soldiers" with whom he served in Vietnam, he will always be "Cap".



Cap, in his hootch at Camp Zinn.

Most photos from Jack Leide collection. All captions, save one, by newsletter editor.





Provided

Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Lehr

Rockledge soldier takes Normandy by parachute

R. NORMAN MOODY

Florida Today, June 6, 2016

Rockledge native Army Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Lehr parachuted Sunday into Normandy near where Allied troops came ashore to liberate France during World War II.

It was 72 years ago, on June 6, 1944, that 160,000 U.S. and Allied troops waded ashore onto the beaches of northern France on D-Day, while others parachuted behind enemy lines as part of one of the most ambitious military actions in history. It was the start of months of fighting to liberate Europe from German Nazi occupation.

Today, some of the veterans of that historic day will gather on the windswept shores of Normandy, while others around the world will recall the events of the day. And, today, as the French are celebrating their freedom, Lehr is there to participate in the commemoration.

He is among about 400 U.S. soldiers from various units that are in northern France for D-Day Festival Normandy, an event held each year at communities

near the beaches where Allied troops came ashore. The festival features cultural events, military parades, reconstructions of military camps, picnics, exhibitions and parachute demonstrations.

"It's pretty exciting," his mother, Susan Kadlac, said. "I'm real proud of him."

Lehr, 32, a 2002 graduate of Cocoa Beach Jr./Sr. High, arrived in France days ago to prepare for a parachute jump.

Sunday, after marching in a parade through St. Marie Eglis, Lehr jumped with French paratroopers "using their chute and their plane, and their jumpmasters giving commands in French."

Kadlac said her son always wanted to be a soldier and that after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, he couldn't wait to turn 18 so he could join the Army. He is serving as an active reservist with the 346th Tactical PSYOP Company (Airborne). His father and grandfather also served in the military.

As a child, Lehr wore some of his grandfather G.M. Knight Jr.'s insignias sewn into a sweatshirt. He packed his grandfather's military ribbons and insignias to take on the jump in France. Knight served in the Marine Corps and was in France during World War II.

More than 5,000 ships and 13,000 aircraft supported the Normandy invasion. By the day's end, more than 100,000 soldiers had begun their push across Europe. By then, the early hours of intense and bloody fighting on the beach was mostly over, leaving a corpse-strewn shoreline but little resistance from the Germans. The battle on the 50-mile coast left more than 9,000 Allied troops dead or wounded.

The fight had started moving inland as Allied troops, U.S., British and Canadian, and a small French contingent, had begun heading into France.

After Lehr arrived to participate in the commemoration of D-Day, he wrote to his mother about his singing a paratroopers song.

"I just led the song *Blood on the Risers* with ... WWII veterans in the town square. It was the most amazing thing I've ever done in my career," he said.

Contact Moody at 321-242-3651 or

nmoody@floridatoday.com

Follow him on Twitter @RNormanMoody

[Reprinted here courtesy of Mr. Norman Moody and Florida Today]

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~ In Memory of Our 173d & 503d Buddies Who Took Their Final Jump ~



JOHN EDWARD BERNARD, 67, passed away May 16, 2016. He proudly served his country in the U.S. Army 173rd Airborne Brigade. John is survived by sisters, Gertrude and Maria; and brother, Gregory. He is predeceased by father, Edward; mother, Lucille; brothers, Robert and Jeffrey; and sister, Laurie.

EDDY E. BIRDWELL, 67, returned to his heavenly home on April 20, 2016. His devotion to his family and his firm belief in God supported him in his struggle and ultimately gave him peace. Eddy was born to the late Floyd and Lillie Mae Birdwell in Crockett, TX on November 17, 1948 and lived in Crockett then Angleton, Texas. He graduated from Texas Wesleyan University in 1975 with a degree in Business Administration. Eddy served in the Armed Forces with the 173rd Airborne, had a successful sales career, retiring from USAA Investment Services in 2006. Eddy is survived by his wife, Kathy; his daughters Maricia Meyer, husband Chad, and Kara Goode, husband Joey; and an extended family.



NELSON M. BISHOP, age 74 of Howell, passed away at his home Saturday evening, April 9, 2016. Born on January 26, 1942 in Wyandotte, Michigan, he was a 1960 graduate of Wyandotte's Roosevelt High School and was a U.S. Army veteran serving in Vietnam. Nelson was proud of the 40 years he had worked for Detroit Edison as a lineman and was a member of the American Legion Devereaux Post #141, Howell V.F.W. Post #3671, Vietnam Veterans Post #110, AmVets Post #362 and the International Society 173rd Airborne Brigade FOE Aerie 3607. Beloved husband of 35 years of Deborah A. (Milek) Bishop whom he married in West Palm Beach, Florida on August 29, 1980, and a loving father.



RICHARD BOOKER was born on November 16, 1943 and passed away on Friday, June 3, 2016. Richard was a resident of Fremont, California at the time of his passing. He graduated from Oakland Technical High School. In 1966 during the Vietnam War Richard was deployed as part of the U.S. Army's 173rd Airborne Infantry Combat Unit. He was married to Cheryl.

LLOYD EAR BURTON, III, age 66, of Helena, entered eternal life on February 10, 2016. Born in Laramie, Wyoming on January 9, 1950 to Bonnie and Lloyd Burton Jr., he served his country honorably in the United State Army 173rd Airborne during Vietnam and was a recipient of a Bronze Star. Lloyd was an artist, craftsman, musician, and worked as a Mechanical Engineer in Colorado. He retired to Montana with his wife Denise in 2000.



RUSSELL CLARK FAULKNER, III, 68, passed away at home the morning of April 23, 2016. An Arizona native, Russ was born in Florence, AZ on June 2, 1947 to Barbara and Russell Faulkner, Jr. He grew up in Coolidge, AZ, Austin, TX and Flagstaff, AZ. Russ served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam and was awarded a Purple Heart and Bronze Star. He treasured his fellowship with other Sky Soldiers serving a term as president of chapter 20, the Desert Chapter of the 173rd Airborne Society. He is survived by his wife of 30 years, Susan; daughter, Alisa Bower (Scott); and numerous extended family members.

ETON GILMORE, 67, of Kansas City, Missouri, passed away January 20, 2016. He was born on April 28, 1948. Mr. Gilmore joined the United States Army in June of 1968, and was a member of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. In December of 1969, during the Vietnam War, Mr. Gilmore was injured while on duty and later received a Purple Heart for his service. Mr. Gilmore is survived by his brother, Delton Gilmore, and a host of nieces, nephews and friends.



*“For in this life but few things matter
In this short time that we have here
Leaving nothing behind but our honor
The thing we hold most dear.”*

~ Unknown

(sadly continued....)



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.



STUART WAYNE HALE, SR., of Albany died on April 9, 2016, at the UVM Medical Center in Burlington at the age of 68. He was born in East Fairfield on July 17, 1947. He was the son of Burton and Caroline (Lawyer) Hale. Mr. Hale served in the U.S. Army as a part of the 173rd and 82nd Airborne (two tours of front line duty in Vietnam) and later worked in Germany as a cryptanalyst for the National Security Agency (NSA). He married the love of his life, his soulmate, Ruth Soule Hale in 1968. Mr. Hale is survived by his four children and an extended family. Mr. Hale was also presented with full military honors by the Vermont Army National Guard.



DONALD L. MCCRAY, of North Las Vegas, passed away May 28, 2016. He was born July 3, 1937, as the first born son of John Henry and Satis Victoria (nee Ballou) McCray in Charleston, S.C. Don was a decorated officer of the U.S. Army 82nd Airborne Division, serving two tours of duty during the Vietnam War in the 173rd Airborne Brigade. After retirement as a chief warrant officer 4 from the U.S. Armed Forces, Don later served with the State of Alaska Department of Corrections as a lieutenant. Upon relocation to Las Vegas, Don resumed the rank of lieutenant with the State of Nevada Department of Corrections. Don's was a life well-spent in the service of others, from his family to his beloved friends, church and neighbors. Don never met a stranger nor failed to offer his help to anyone in need. Don leaves behind to cherish his memory a devoted and loving wife, Cynthia J., and an extended family.



A young Don

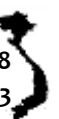
NORMAN "BUD" ROBERT LOUIS MCDANIEL, February 28, 1946 – April 25, 2016. Bud, age 70, passed away on April 25, 2016 in Oklahoma City after a battle with pancreatic cancer. He was born February 28th, 1946 at Capitol Hill Hospital in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma to Elvin and Frieda (Kiracofe) McDaniel. He was a graduate of Norman High School and he was active in sports where he participated in football and wrestling. He was Norman High's 1st State Wrestling Champion of the modern era. He graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a degree in Business Administration and he was a member of the University of Oklahoma wrestling team. While a student at the University he was a member of the Army ROTC. He was a Veteran of the United States Army serving with the 173rd Airborne "The Herd" and rose to the rank of 1st Lieutenant. He was a member of the US Army Wrestling team and spent several months traveling and wrestling with the team. He was an alternate on the Army's Team to the World Wrestling Games at Edmonton Canada in 1970. In the fall of 1970 he went to Vietnam. He is survived by his wife, Lora (Kates) McDaniel and son, Robert McDaniel and his companion Krisma McInroe.



JAMES PATRICK "PAT" MURPHY age 66, passed away on April 12, 2016. He was born in Gaston County on January 26, 1950, a son of the late Chester Arnold and Ruby Hawkins Murphy. Pat is survived by his loving wife of 33 years, Anne Stone Murphy; sons, Christopher Patrick Murphy and wife, Sophia of Pearland, TX, Timothy Patrick Murphy and wife April of Benton, KY; and many family members. Pat was a U.S. Army Veteran where he served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam as a Combat Medic. He enjoyed living on the lake and spending time with his family.



(sadly continued....)



JOSEPH JOHN OLIVERIO, 4/503, age 72, passes in Brandon, FL. My name is Desiree' and I am Joe Oliverio's daughter. My father passed away on May 6th from prostate cancer metastasized into bone cancer...from Agent Orange. I've been going through his emails and came across all of



you in his contacts and am hoping you can help me with some information from when he was with the 173rd. Do you have the dates or units within the 173rd that my father served with? My dad was such a brave and heroic man, this is great loss for our family. There were so many times during this battle when I thought we'd lose him, but he would not relent to the dreadful pain and disease. He was here at home with his family and like a true Army Ranger went on his own terms. I have faith that he's leading the way in heaven. God Bless you all. Mom and I were sorry to hear about Billy Smith.

FELIX AGUILAR PASCUA, JR., age 68, of Henderson, NV, passed away January 28, 2016 in Henderson, NV. Born August 10, 1947 in Dingras, Ilocos Norte, Philippines. A U.S. Army Vietnam War veteran, part of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, sky soldiers. Long time resident of Waipahu. He is survived by brothers, Roland A. (Edith) Pascua, Arsenio A. Pascua, Henry A. Pascua; sisters, Gloria P. (Artemio) Abad, Clarita P. Salvador, Imelda P. (Rudy) Duldulao, Marites P. (Brian) Javonillo.

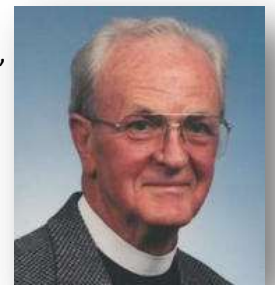
ROBERT KING RAYMOND, passed away at home in Wake Forest on May 18, 2016. He was born August 2, 1943 in St. Petersburg, FL, the youngest of Col. Allen and Mrs. Clara Raymond's eight children. He is survived by his loving wife of 52 years, Shirley, and an extended family. Bob graduated from Bishop Barry High School in St. Petersburg in 1961 and immediately joined the U.S. Army, serving in the 503rd Infantry 2nd Airborne Brigade until 1963. He worked his way through St. Petersburg Junior College and The University of South Florida as a milkman for Hood's Dairy from 1963-1972. Bob earned his MBA from Duke University in 1986.



VICTOR RIVERA, JR., 70, of Las Vegas, passed away peacefully March 14, 2016, after a brief illness. Victor served in the U.S. Army 173rd Air Borne Brigade in Vietnam. He is survived by his beloved wife, Irene and an extended family. Burial was held in April at Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery, in Boulder City.

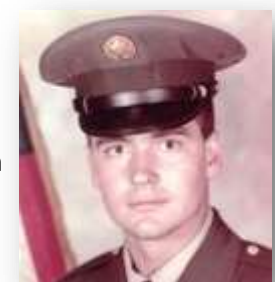


REVEREND BILLY THOMAS SMITH, Colonel retired, born December 11, 1929 passed away on June 17, 2016. He is survived by his wife Dolores Arlene Smith and three children Gary (Beverly), Greg and Melisa. Rev. Smith was a decorated war veteran and the recipient of two purple hearts. His funeral service was held on Wednesday, June 22, 2016, with Rev. Tim Ferrell and Brigadier General Wendell Gilbert officiating. He was inhumed in Kentucky Veterans Cemetery West with Full Military Honors rendered.



Rev. Smith conducting services in the boonies with men of 4/503. (Photo provided by Col. Jack Tarr, CO C/4/503)

MICHAEL EDWARD SPARKS, 66, of Grant, Florida passed away May 29, 2016. He was born in Buffalo, NY on April 13, 1950 to J Vincent and Julia Sparks. Michael served in the Army in the 173rd Airborne Brigade. He received the Purple Heart for injuries sustained in Vietnam. He also received the Nat. Def. Service medal and Vietnam Service & Vietnam Campaign Medals. He is survived by wife, Natalie and daughter, Isabella Lynn; 1st wife Shirley Anderson Bush and family.



(sadly continued....)



LEROY THOMPSON, SR.,
B/4/503, retired E-9/CSM, age
82, passed away January 7,
2016, at Gateway Medical
Center. Military Honors for
Leroy were held at Kentucky
Veterans West. He was born
May 21, 1933 in Canmer, KY.



He was a career military man. After serving 30 years, he retired in 1983 from the U.S. Army at Fort Campbell. He served three tours of duty in Vietnam and received numerous medals and letters of commendation/appreciation throughout his career. He is survived by his wife of 53 years, Ingrid Thompson, and family.

DONAVAN ELSWORTH WASSON, born November 3, 1921, a World War II veteran and retired foreman for Blaw Knox Co., died April 21 at home on Grand Island, he was 94. He was drafted and entered service in August of 1942, where he spent two years in the 772nd Tank Destroyer Battalion in Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri. He later volunteered to join the 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team. Mr. Wasson served in the Battle of Corregidor. His most prominent honors include the Good Conduct Medal, Distinguished Unit Badge, American Theater Service Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Theater Service Medal, and Philippine Liberation Ribbon with two Bronze Stars. He was also on guard when Gen. Douglas MacArthur returned to Corregidor to raise the American flag.

The Passing of Cis Sigholtz

This is a short interim follow-up concerning the passing of Roberta C. (Cis) Sigholtz. Cis passed away quietly on Friday, 29 April. She was 91. The family is honoring Cis' wishes that there be no formal funeral service, and that burial be a private family-only event.



Cis was the first wife of COL Robert H. Sigholtz, commander of 2-503 at the time of the Vietnam combat jump. She was the Gold Star Mother of CPT Robert H. Sigholtz, Jr. (D/2-503, KIA 26 May 1969). Her son Bob Jr. is the charter namesake of Chapter 1 (Sigholtz Capital Chapter).

Cis remained a steadfast, loyal supporter of the 173d throughout her life. In 2013, she was honored as Chapter 1's Founding Mother in a public ceremony at the Sunrise Assisted Living facility in McLean, VA.

Rest in Peace, Cis.

Michael Montie, C/4/503

Excerpt, from June 1, 2016...



VA Secretary Provides Relief for Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injuries

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert McDonald has granted equitable relief to more than 24,000 Veterans following a national review of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) medical examinations conducted in connection with disability compensation claims processed between 2007 and 2015.

This action by the Secretary allows the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to offer new TBI examinations to Veterans whose initial examination for TBI was not conducted by one of four designated medical specialists and provides them with the opportunity to have their claims reprocessed. Equitable relief is a unique legal remedy that allows the Secretary to correct an injustice to a claimant where VA is not otherwise authorized to do so within the scope of the law.

“Traumatic Brain Injury is a signature injury in Veterans returning from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and VA is proud to be an organization that sets the bar high for supporting these, and all, Veterans,” said Secretary McDonald. *“Providing support for Veterans suffering from a TBI is a priority and a privilege, and we must make certain they receive a just and fair rating for their disabilities.”*

To ensure that TBI is properly evaluated for disability compensation purposes, VA developed a policy in 2007 requiring that one of four specialists – a psychiatrist, physiatrist, neurosurgeon or neurologist – complete TBI exams when VA does not have a prior diagnosis. Since 2007, medicine around TBI has been a rapidly evolving science. VA designated particular specialists to conduct initial TBI exams because they have the most experience with the symptoms and effects of TBI. As more research became available, VA issued a number of guidance documents that may have created confusion regarding the policy. VA has confirmed that its TBI policy guidance is now clear and being followed.

“We let these Veterans down,” Secretary McDonald said. *“That is why we are taking every step necessary to grant equitable relief to those affected to ensure they receive the full benefits to which they are entitled.”* If additional benefits are due, VA will award an effective date as early as the date of the initial TBI claim.

Visit va.org on the net for complete report.



Out of Our Third Point of Contact

A Marine recon platoon was on patrol when the Lt. noticed a lone Paratrooper standing on a hilltop in their area. The Lt. told two of his men to go take out that man. They promptly ran as fast as they could toward the Paratrooper. Just before they got to the top, the Paratrooper ran over the other side of the hill. The two Marines followed.

For the next few minutes there were bloody screams and dust flying in the air. Then as quick as it had started, it stopped and the Paratrooper came up on the hilltop. He brushed off his BDU's, straightened his beret, crossed his arms and stood there looking at the Marines.

The Lt., pissed, called for a squad to go get that Paratrooper. They promptly ran as fast as they could toward the Paratrooper. Just before they got to the top, the Paratrooper ran over the other side of the hill. The Marine squad followed.

For the next few minutes there were bloody screams and dust flying in the air. Then as quick as it had started, it stopped and the Paratrooper came up on the hilltop. He brushed off his BDU's, straightened his beret, crossed his arms and stood there looking at the Marines.

The Lt. was really hot now. He ordered the rest of his platoon to attack the Paratrooper. Determined that the Marines were far superior to the one Paratrooper they had blood in their eyes as they ran up the hill. Just before they got to the top, the Paratrooper ran over the other side of the hill. The Marine's followed. For many minutes there were bloody screams and dust flying in the air. It continued and continued.

Finally there was one lone Marine crawling back to the Lt., all bloody and beat about the head and shoulders. His BDU's were torn, cuts were all over his body. The Lt. asked for a sit-rep. The lone Marine, bloody and beaten replied in a forceful and fearful voice:
"Sir, run, it's a trick! There are TWO of them!!"

We love the Marines! Semper Fi brothers!!



**Maurice "Sleepy" Linton
503rd PRCT WWII**

Maybe one of the two paratroopers?

Bravo Bull



Golden Knight



Here is one Golden Knight photo that I found. I was a real good skydiver before the Army, and joined the Army specifically to get on the team (after an abysmal effort attempting to be a college student)...thinking that it was a stabilized three year tour (it was if you'd already been overseas), and then I could get out after only three years unscathed. The Army had different ideas, and sent my ass to 'Nam after only a year and a half on the GK's.

Sergeant Young, a demonstration jumper for the Golden Knights, entered the Army in December of 1968. Previous to that he attended Parsons College in Fairfield, Iowa for a year and Montgomery Junior College in Rockville, Maryland for one semester. Sergeant Young, who started parachuting as a freshman at Parsons, came into the Army with nearly 500 jumps and was assigned to the Golden Knights after completion of basic and advanced individual training and jump school.



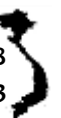
It must have been my MOS-combat engineer- because I came down on orders for Korea first, the team got me off to compete in the US National Championships, and then right after I came down on orders for 'Nam. The team said make the US National Team or you're gone -- couldn't get me off twice unless there's a real good reason (like representing the US and the Army in world competition). I finished ninth - they take the top five, so off I go to the 'Nam.

I'll give this some thought about submitting a story, because there are probably six GK's that were in the Herd. One was killed at Uplift in '68 - SFC Leo Kryske.

Of our GK group there were LRRP's, and some really exceptional soldiers that served with the Herd, and other SF and Abn units. They were my heroes. When it was my turn, I was determined to carry-on the tradition, and let no one down. Foremost my Dad, who was an attack bomber pilot (A-20's) in New Guinea during WWII. Talk about a tough job...unreal...but that's another story.

More later,

**Rick Young
B/2/503, 173d Engineers**



"Dear Mother and Dad"

Richard J. Adams



"The second group of troopers from New York."

March 11th, 1945

Dear Mother and Dad,

One night on Corregidor I was talking about school and I mentioned I was from N.Y.M.A. The Lt said there was a Lt in I Co, from N.Y.M.A. I met him today, DeRond, knew him quite well. He is going home on furlough in a few days and so I am going to ask to take this with him. We left San Francisco on Oct 27th arrived at Oro Bay about twenty miles south of Buna (New Guinea), we stayed there in a replacement depot, had details loading boats, moving supplies etc., on Dec 31 we loaded on board ship on the way to 11/A/B, from Oro Bay we went to Finchman, N.G., then over to Manus Island in the Admiralty Islands. We spent a few days there and then over to Hollandia N.G. we stayed aboard ship all the time, I did get a chance to get off at Manus, got some ice cream. From Hollandia we went up to Leyte around the east side of Mindanao. We disembarked on the beach at Leyte on about the 29th of Jan.

It took us about three days to get to Mindoro where we joined the 503rd. The boys who were originally supposed to go to 503rd went to 11 A/B and we to the 503rd.

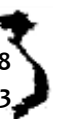
Pat and I am in a 81 M/M Mortar Squad we sorta like it, I believe we could get into communications, we may not try. On the 15th of Feb I received about 10 letters, it took me till 2 A. M. to read them all, we had been breaking camp all day.

We had to get up at 4. A.M. Feb 16th, had chow although no one ate too much, all the tents had been taken down the day before, duffel bags put away at R.S.O. we were sleeping on cots in the open ready to go. The cots were stacked up in the Co street, and then we got into our equipment, fatigues work clothes, boots, steel helmets, musette bag, carbine, two canteens, jungle kit (first aid) 7 clips of ammunition, two grenades, change of socks, toilet articles, Trench Knife, Knife Dad gave me, Mae West, then our chutes. Amen.

We loaded on trucks -- I was in truck number 27, it would go to C-47 number 27. From there to the air strip, it was just like it would be in pictures, dark, just the faintest gleam of light, you could see the rows of dark planes against the skyline. Some P-38 and a few A-20 were taking off. As we passed the M.P. gate on to the strip someone yelled -- "Good Luck---Give em hell."-- I forgot we didn't put our chutes on till we were alongside of the ship.

About 7:40 we took off, it took us a little over an hour to reach the target, we were to jump at 8:30. They had been dive-bombing and had Navy big guns firing at the Island and they had started fires in the jump zone. We Jumped about 9:20. Funny I didn't sweat it out a bit, in fact I sweated out the fact I wasn't sweating it out.

(continued....)



The day before the jump we had been briefed quite thoroughly, maps, air photos and then a scale model so we knew what it would look like...Each plane made three passes at the field, (What field) 8 men on each pass, I was about 5th man in the third stick.

The 3rd Bn was the first wave--we jumped--I didn't count--when the chute opened I never checked it, I was watching the ground--I was right over the field (we jumped at about 600 feet) we learned later there was about a 23 mile an hour ground wind--I climbed the risers and tried to hit the field but the wind was too strong it took me right over the Cliff.



In this web photo you can see chutes drifting down over the cliffs.

As I got close to the ground I took a look--nothing but cliffs, rocks and blown off trees, I looked at the skyline and waited--My thoughts? -- "*Oh My Aching Back*" — just as I hit I hung up, that saved me from going over a steep embankment. I had a hard time getting out of my harness because I couldn't get the tension off of it, It seemed like it took five minutes to get out chute. All the while I could hear the snap of bullets, I knew weren't M1's but I didn't know whether they were our carbines or Nip 25's...Finally I got out of the chute and met some of our platoon coming up the cliff, we had about 250 feet to go up from where I was. It was some climb, the Navy was still firing at Malinta Hill and A-20's were straffing.

The second Bn came in about 14:30. The first Bn was not allowed to jump, too many jump casualties. I banged my leg, that all O.K. now. The first Bn came in by boat, at about the same time the 34th were making a beach landing.

We were on the Island for 21 days and took it from tip to tip, we were only supposed to take from Malinta

Hill south, or rather west, (half the island) but in the end we went the whole way. That stuff about relief is a lot of bull, 151st Inf came in after it was just about over and relieved the 34th.

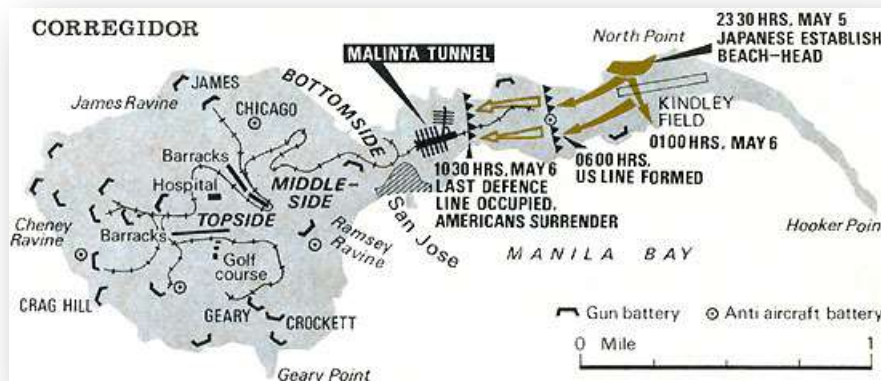
Mrs Dunning says Bob has seen some sights, he should have been with us. But somehow they don't bother you, no dreams, in fact on Corregidor I dreamed about, Nuns--Ann--and you Folks. That Blast you heard about was an awful thing, killed a lot of our boys and blew up about 27 nips -- we were told there were about 850 to 1500 nips on the Island. We took 22 prisoners and killed 5200. They did their fighting from caves,

there are hundreds of caves on that Island. Pat got a headache that pounded up the back of his neck, they evacuated him. They have put in for a patch for the 503rd, hope we get it.

We are back on Mindoro now near where the original landings were made, south-west end. If you want to have me tell you something I can't write, put it in the form of a statement and number it, example 1, you are in New Guinea, 2 Leyte, 3

Mindoro. I answer that third statement in your letter of Feb, is a good idea or is correct. They do not censor your letters (Air Mail). This should bring you up to date. Your letters have been arriving O.K. all of them, but no packages as yet. Dad, if you could get me a .45 pistol it would come in very handy, also a shoulder holster. If you do pack it in a tin box good so it will look like anything but a pistol. The boxes take an awful beating and arrive in awful condition.

(web image)



(continued....)



In reference to the clipping, (A) is cliff I went over, landed about 250 feet down it, came back up picked up ammunition and started to go around the edge of the field, drew too much fire, went back and crossed jump field, our Bn command post was lighthouse - (C) I was up there watched bombing and strafing from there, at (B) Pat and I spent three or four nights in the corner room. (D) is old tank we found some water in. I was on top of that. At (E) we spent two nights on perimeter guard watching the path between the tanks. Those buildings were officer quarters in the old days. (F) is where Pat landed, that white line into the corner is a concrete trench up to a large gun position Japs were in there.

On about the fourth day Pat and I were getting a chute to sleep in, they were working on hill on left side of picture (Just outside) Navy was firing from along the shore, at (G) we got pinned down, it was really hot, too damn close. Think I have told you everything. It is most possible I'm in that picture.

With reference to map picture. While we were at (5) there was a large explosion in the main tunnel, smoke and flame shot up into the air 75 to 100 feet high, and noise — we thought we were going to have Malinta Hill on our heads. Main caves in Malinta Hill are marked (====(==) ===) at (3) there was Regt Hdq and hospital (no I wasn't in the hospital). That bad blast was at Monkey Point. Bataan is just above Battery Point.

Battalion Hdq found a very impressive looking Nip sign and hung it over the door. They found out later it read -- OFFICERS LATRINE ONLY.

Keep well so we can raise h--- when I get back, it sure will be grand to be home.

I was working on a platoon Bazooka team for a while, went on mission with the team. Thinking it over I have the following ribbons (1) American Theatre of War, (I think, do you know?) (2) Pacific Theater of War, (3) Philippine Liberation, (1) Bronze Star 60 days in combat zone, initial landing, (1) Arrowhead initial Parachute lump, Overseas Stripe. We hope the 503rd will get Presidential Citation for the Corregidor Jump, Plus that New Patch.

Lt. DeRonde has been with the 503rd since it was formed, left N.Y.M.A. to the Paratroops, he has been overseas 29 months, that's a hell of a long time.

Am trying to get some pictures of Corregidor to send along with DeRonde ---That Coconut I sent you from New Guinea, there is a coconut inside that husk, full of milk and meat. I tried to seal the ends with wax because if you get a break in it, it will either go rotten or sprout shoots and you'll have a tree instead of a nut, think you should shellac it.

They are taking group pictures of all the boys who jumped on the Rock', by states, I'll have mine taken with N.Y. it will go to Long Island paper, watch for it.

In one of the envelopes there is a training memorandum, I was going to send it to Mrs Wood, it just might be her husband's handwriting on the top, but it is quite good, typical "Old Army" and I thought you might read it or perhaps copy parts, then if you will have Mother send it on to Mrs Wood, I found it on March 6th.

I've been adding to this letter for three days, DeRondo leaves on the 16th or thereabouts. We've been doing just about nothing since we got back from the Rock. Don't know how long this will last. We get up at 0700 eat chow, we've been taking an hour hike in the mornings, no equipment, spend most of the day reading or writing, go down to the stream about 1430 stream is so fast that you can't stand up, we get ice cold coke at the Red Cross at 1600, then chow 1700 after that we go to the field where they have a show (movie) we get there early to get a seat, bring a book or some writing along. A few nights a week Father Powers has Mass at 1800 across the street, we get someone to save our seats and go over to Mass. After the show we usually have a billie coffee, or tea, sometimes corn on the cob from the fields, make our own fires.



(Sketch from the web)

(continued....)



Here is a Poem one of the boys in my platoon wrote,

“CORREGIDOR”

I

**Bunker Hill is still historic,
So's the charge of the Light Brigade.
And theres lots of famous others,
Here's the latest yet been made.**

II

**From the planes they went aleapin,
Never pauseing in the door.
As they hit the Famous Pock pile,
Called Mac's Corregidor:**

III

**I know they are remembered,
Deep in American hearts.
The 503rd Paratroops,
I am proud to be a part.**

IV

**They floated down on bunkers,
Others hit the shell torn trees.
And they knew just what awaited them.
Were the grinning Japanese.**

V

**Landing out behind defenses,
Of the dirty Rising Sun.
But on top their shining helmets,
Just to grin and watch em run.**

VI

**You'll remember all these troopers
From their grim and fierce looks.
Don't forget to mention “Airborne”
As you write those history books.**

VII

**I know it will be famous,
As the ones of years before.
The 503rd Paratroops.
Jumping on Corregidor.**

(Bert Hardy)

**503rd Parachute Rgt
March 15, 1945**

(Do not rewrite as, Paratroopers).

Dad, no changes – It is his as is.

Miss you all. Almost forgot had a picture taken with the N.Y. group Its a group picture by states of the boys who jumped on Corregidor. It will be sent to hometown paper.

On the "Flick" we had 186 killed 757 wounded, 2200 of us jumped. 1st Bn 503rd came in on beach about 900 makes 3100 503rd men on the island. In the N.Y. picture I am in the first row about 5th from your right,

(what no glasses) DeRonde is last man in 3rd row on right. In first row near center is Joe Gardner, was in 20th A with us at Camp Campbell

On the Rock one night he and his buddy saw Japs creeping in front of where they were lying down, Joe's carbine jammed when he tried to fire, other boy couldn't find his, they were going to let the Jap go by (two Japs) but they saw Joe. When he saw he had been discovered he dove for the first Jap, other Jap grabbed the other boy, Jap got Joe's buddy down and was banging a grenade on his head, (Jap grenades you pull pin - thump on a rock to set up powder train then it goes off the next time it hits) — Joe killed his Jap with his fists and rocks then rushed over to his buddy and banged the Jap on the head with a rock...He is getting Bronze Star.

I'm going to have DeRonde put his name on this so you won't think I'm in the states when you see envelope.

Have a small Pilot Chute, goes on reserve to help pull it out of pack, Think I'll send one to Frankie. I'll have to stop soon or this won't fit into envelope...Your boxes are so late because we have moved around so much.

Dad, if you could I wish you would send me a 45 Pistol and a shoulder holster (45 Automatic). It comes in very handy when you get hung up and can't get to your carbine and its handy to have around at night. Originally all troopers were issued .45's but they aren't able to do that now.

I doubt if cookies would reach here in good condition but they would be nice. How about a fruit cake, a small box seems to arrive in best condition, its the corners that break first. We could use some Tea and can you get any of those canned hot dogs? Now don't use up all your points. Remember that can of Ginger Bread had nuts in it? That would be swell—wonder if some cream cheese would make it through the heat,— a few oranges now and then would be nice, but perhaps they would spoil...Bad weather over Leyte had held up our mail for the last few days. We have little rain here but when it does it makes up for lost time. Its quite hot here now.

They had a short at the show the other night, silent pictures, cowboy was shooting it out with Indians— Then you heard Bar's, M1's, Machine Guns and bombs -- some battle the boys really got a kick out of it. Also we had a Military Band before the show, really wonderful, tomorrow there will be a dance band before the show.

(continued....)



Memorial Day Ceremony For Chaplain Charles J. Watters

Haven't heard from Pat as yet. That pocket chess game is a grand idea. I thought I might send a panel of a white chute to Ann.

Have a piece of my chute from the jump on the Rock, note bullet holes near the top. There were more up higher but the chute was in a tree and I couldn't reach any higher.

Don't be frightened if there happens to be a little hair between my nose and my upper lip, it started on the Rock, its something to do. I just wanted to see what it would look like, forgive me. I know that there are parts of this letter that you will never be able to read, but I hope it you will be able to read enough to find it interesting.

On our mission there were miracles by the score — I saw one boy with a streamer (Chute that doesn't open) —fall like a rock with his cute streaming after him — —he fell out of sight behind some tress and with his feet within inches of the ground the reserve popped open (you come to a dead stop when your chute opens) and he landed O.K.Another boy had his static line break so his main chute never came out of his pack. He pulled his reserve and it was a streamer, but it caught on a tree and he was O.K. — —God sure jumped with us that day.

The only two reporters who really know about the 503rd are Smith of the Chicago Sun and Wells of the Chicago Times, (hell) as you were, its the other way around Smith of the Times and Wells of the Sun...They Jump right with us and you can believe what they say...if they claim it was rough, it was rough.

If you could send some photographic paper I could use it....Were you ever able to get a telescope. Don't lose that data on page 13-14 I'll make a record of it too.

Page 34, go ahead I dare you to say something about my not telling you much, Now.

This is very disconnected I know, but I've been writing things down as I think of them.
Adios

Love, Richard

Pvt Richard J. Adams, Jr. #33745957
Hdq. Co. 3rd Bn,, 503rd Prcht Inf. R.C.T.
A.P.O. 321, % Postmastr,
San Francisco, Cal



Reprinted courtesy of Paul Whitman with the
503rd PRCT Heritage Battalion website

On Saturday, May 28, 2016, at the American Last Patrol Ranch in Benavides, Texas, several Sky Soldiers from San Antonio and the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas participated in the placing of a Commemorative Brick and the laying of a wreath in honoring Chaplain Charles J. Watters, recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor (Posthumously) followed by a 21 gun salute and then taps were played.

Chaplain Watters lost his life during the Battle of Dak To (Hill 875). For his heroic actions on November 19, 1967 during the Battle of Dak To, Chaplain Watters was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor (Posthumously).

The ceremony was organized by Samuel Espinosa of Austin, Texas and his wife. Also in attendance were Sky Soldiers Tom Murray, Leo Martinez and Manny Mermea, all from San Antonio, and Reyes Rios and his wife Naomi from Harlingen, and Santiago Krummel from Progreso, Texas.

After the ceremony, all in attendance were treated to a delicious meal by the members of the American Last Patrol.



Source: 173d Texas Chapter 13 Newsletter





BACK TO THE BEGINNING

173d Airborne Brigade Reunion, Ft. Benning, GA, June 7-11, 2016



2/503 Recon "Wildcats"
~ Then ~



~ Wildcats Now ~



(continued...)





No DEROS Alpha

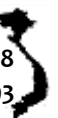
(continued...)





Thanks to these Sky Soldiers for sharing some of their reunion photos with us:

Craig Murphy, E-Troop; Pat Sirmeyer, E-Troop; Jim "Top" Dresser, A/HHC/2/503; Bob Beemer, B/2/503, Ray Berain, E/2/503; Richard Rocha, 2/503; William Terry, A/3/319; Lynn Lail, A/2/503.



Silver Star for Vietnam Veteran

Thursday, April 14, 2016

timesunion



U.S. Rep. Chris Gibson presents the Silver Star medal to Vietnam veteran Stan DeRuggiero, Jr. of Austerlitz, right, on Thursday, April 14, 2016, in Washington, D.C.

(Provided by Rep. Gibson)

Washington, D.C. A Vietnam veteran from Austerlitz was decorated on Capitol Hill Thursday with the Silver Star.

Stanley DeRuggiero Jr. was awarded the military's third-highest medal for valor by Congressman Chris Gibson (R-Kinderhook) during a ceremony. DeRuggiero, who served with the Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade, rescued three badly wounded paratroopers while exchanging fire with the enemy near Bao Loc, Vietnam on June 17, 1968, according to a statement from Gibson's office. He previously received the Bronze Star with V Device for his actions on that day, but due to the level of gallantry he exhibited, his former company commander successfully petitioned the military to upgrade the award to Silver Star.

"As a fellow combat veteran, I am especially proud to have the opportunity to present the Silver Star to Stanley DeRuggiero, who put his life on the line to safeguard his troopers in the most dangerous conditions imaginable," Gibson said. "We are forever in his debt, and I am delighted that Stan and members of his family were able to be with us in Washington today to celebrate this momentous occasion. I also want to thank his fellow veterans from the 173rd Airborne for joining us and for their efforts to see that Stan's valor and selfless service to our country are properly recognized."

DeRuggiero, who grew up in Yonkers, is a retired carpenter. He lives in Austerlitz with his 90-year-old father, Stanley DeRuggiero, Sr., who served in the Marine Corps during World War II.

The Silver Star citation reads as follows:

"For Gallantry in Action: On 17 June 1968, while serving as Fire Team Leader, 3rd Squad, 3rd Platoon, C Company, 4th Battalion, 503rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade, is awarded the Silver Star for personal heroism during intense close combat near Bao Loc, Vietnam. Directed to withdraw after C Company violently assaulted a Viet Cong Main Force Battalion Basecamp, the wounded Fire Team Leader elected to collect, administer first aid, personally guard and evacuate three badly wounded paratroopers from no man's land between the lines of combat. With total disregard for his own life for more than five hours, Specialist Four DeRuggiero positioned himself in front of three wounded, fought off several Viet Cong flanking attacks with hand grenades and well-aimed M-16 fire, provided care and assurance to the wounded and then shielded another Soldier who came out to help drag them to safety one by one. Specialist Four DeRuggiero maintained this guard position alone. Only when the third wounded paratrooper was safely inside the Platoon perimeter did Specialist Four DeRuggiero withdraw to safety. Specialist Four DeRuggiero's personal bravery and exceptional Gallantry in Action under intense enemy fire reflect great credit upon himself, his Airborne Unit and the United States Army."



Vietnam veteran Stan DeRuggiero, Jr. of Austerlitz, speaks after being presented with the Silver Star medal by U.S. Rep. Chris Gibson on Thursday, April 14, 2016, in Washington, D.C.

(Provided by Rep. Gibson)

###

Congratulations to our Geronimo Battalion brother, from men of the 2/503d. All The Way, Stan!



173d Airborne Association Membership Application Form

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Chapter Affiliated to: (4, 18, At Large): _____ Send Magazine: [] U.S Mail or [] Via Email

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My Email address: _____

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