



2/503d VIETNAM Newsletter

June 2009, Issue 1

Troopers:

This newsletter is created specifically for the men who served with the 2^d Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep), during the Vietnam War. Information submitted for inclusion in the Newsletter will be reproduced at the sole discretion of the producer and subject to edit for purposes of brevity. The producer accepts no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for the accuracy of the content of information presented herein.

All submissions, including photos, are requested to be sent via email to rto173d@cfl.rr.com This Newsletter will be issued periodically. Initial circulation will be to over 300 troopers of the 2d Bat who served in Vietnam.

If you do not wish to receive the Newsletter please send a note to the above email address. *Airborne!*

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

Prostate Cancer among Vietnam Veterans

It is critical all Vietnam War era vets undergo an annual exam for prostate cancer

173d Annual Reunion

This year's annual reunion of the 173d Airborne Brigade will be held July 29 thru August 3, in Daytona Beach, Florida, at the Plaza Resort & Spa, 600 N. Atlantic Avenue. For complete reunion agenda and registration form, logon to the web site www.skysoldiers.com or call Jim Bradley 1-727-376-2576 after 4:30 p.m. EST.

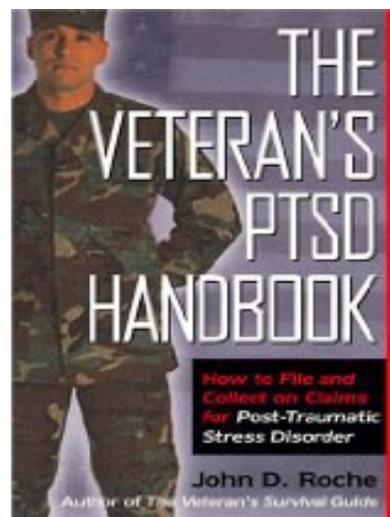
Welcome Home Airborne Brothers:

As individuals from the Vietnam era returned from the combat zone, some turned to drugs, some turned to alcohol or multiple relationships, but a larger number turned to work and keeping busy to avoid the emotion related to their experiences. As they age and slow down or retire, this tsunami wave of emotion eventually catches up with them. It hits you like a huge wave and at times you may feel that it is taking you under.

With all of the service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, you might be surprised to know that the greatest number of disability requests for PTSD are currently coming from Vietnam veterans.

A new and very helpful resource in the process is available at Amazon.com, *The Veteran's PTSD Handbook* authored by John D. Roche.

Scott Fairchild, Ph.D
Doctor of Psychology
LTC 82nd Airborne (Ret)
Veterans Helping Veterans
Baytree Behavioral Health
Melbourne, FL





Helmet Bath

1966 opened for 2/503 with *Operation Marauder*, a brigade operation that was a real change from what we had been used to. Previously we had operated mostly in the jungle. But Marauder was in the northern Mekong Delta – flat rice paddies and sugar cane fields, barren of trees except along the dikes which separated the fields. Irrigation canals crisscrossed the area carrying water to the rice fields, and though no crops had been planted for several years, the rice fields were still muddy from rain which had ceased a few weeks earlier.

On January 2d we had fought a day long battle, ending with our seizure of a dike line where the VC had been holding us up all day. That night the VC withdrew from the area. The next day, January 3d, we were given the mission to push on to the Vam Co Dong River, a few kilometers to the Southwest. We arrived at our objective in late afternoon, after crossing muddy fields and numerous canals up to our waists in muddy water. As we closed in on our objective, the companies were deployed into a perimeter and started to dig in. We set up the Battalion CP on a dike next to an abandoned sugar cane field, and I called for the company commanders to come to the CP for a meeting later in the afternoon.



IHC troops watch air strike from paddy dike, 2 Jan 66.
Photo by George Dexter

Since I had about an hour before the meeting, I decided that this would be a good time to take a bath. I was filthy from having lain in muddy water for several hours during the battle the day before, from struggling through the mucky fields all day

and crossing the muddy canals. The cane field beside the CP had not been used for years, but there were still enough dead stalks standing that I felt I could find some privacy there. So I filled my helmet with water, got a bar of soap and a clean set of jungle fatigues, under shorts and socks from my rucksack, and went out into the cane field. There I stripped, carefully laid my clean and dirty clothes around me, and started to lather up.



Jan 66, near Van Co Dong River, 2/503d troops crossing canal during Operation Marauder. SGM Mish in foreground. Photo by: George Dexter

What I did not know, and should have, was that the battalion helipad had been laid out right beside the cane field. All of a sudden a chopper came right over my head – not ten feet up – blew down all the cane stalks, picked up my clothes – dirty and clean – and threw them all over the place. So here was the battalion commander running around all over the field buck naked trying to gather up his clothes. Not exactly a picture of dignity.

As it turned out, the chopper was full of correspondents. One of them, a reporter from a Los Angeles newspaper, wrote a story about this man running around naked in a field looking for his clothes. Luckily, he didn't use my name!

**Col. George E. Dexter, US Army, Retired
Commander
2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment
173d Airborne Brigade (Sep)
August 1964 to February 1966**



2/503d COMBAT SERVICE CITATION

Four former commanders of the battalion, Cols. Dexter, Carmichael, Walsh and Sigholtz, have issued the *2/503d Combat Service Citation (CSC)* to all men who served with the battalion during any year of the Vietnam War. The award “*is in recognition of their exemplary performance during combat operations*”. If you have not yet received your personalized Citation, email your physical mail address and your name as you wish it to appear on the award to rto173d@cfl.rr.com and it will be mailed to you.

A POEM FOR THOSE AUSSIES

(2005 173d Reunion in Australia)

You said, “Come down to OZ and meet your brothers of the war.

You’re getting old you septic tanks, and we want to see you just once more.

So our duffle bags we packed-up tight, and on the big bird we took-off high.

We flew to the bottom of the earth to tell you Diggers one last goodbye.

For it has ere been many years since last we shared a brew.

Since last we fought the Viet Cong, and in Bien Hoa we’d then fight you.

You were young and tough and full of piss in those funny hats you wore.

We really didn’t like you much, but, there were times we liked you more.

Such as Marauder in the rice fields, to Crimp’s rubber trees with pride, we’d battle those bastards face-to-face with you Aussies right by our side.

And we liked you at Silver City when our Bat was nearly overrun.

We were glad you Cobbers had our flank and could join in on the fun.

So we tip a schooner to you boys, although boys you ain’t no more.

We all may be old and slow of foot, but we’re brothers of the war.

THE HEART OF A SKY SOLDIER

From Jim Simpson’s web site:

I served with "C" 2/503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Bde. (SEP) in 1967 through 1968. Sky Soldiers, as we were called, were great warriors in battle. As we went into Dak To, it was then that we were up against large North Vietnamese Army regiments – NVA. And, we were accustomed to fighting the Viet Cong in the Southern regions. According to historical accounts, we were in two of the bloodiest battles of the Vietnam war.

On June 22, 1967, "A" Company got ambushed and "C" Company went to their rescue ... only to arrive a bit too late. In November, following the hills, all around Dak To were covered with NVA - and Hill 875 was the most infamous of them all.

In my writings on the connecting pages, I've tried to express the thoughts and feelings that I've had to deal with over the years - in particular, my struggle with P.T.S.D. (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder).

All units had their battles, and, I know that all of them were horrific and took their toll. It is my hope that all who visit these pages can somehow relate to my feelings concerning the war; what we experienced and the toll it is still taking on us today. We Vietnam Vets need to become one to remain strong!

Welcome home, my Brothers and Sisters.
We served our time in hell over there.
Let us be as one here - Helping one another.
Back to back, as the saying goes, we survive.

And, let us never forget the P.O.W.'s and M. I. A.'s. For we know that we have not received a satisfactory answer. I know that I will not rest until all are at home and accounted for.