



2/503d VIETNAM Newsletter

Contact: rto173d@cfl.rr.com

January 2010 / Issue 10

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



RARE VIEW

A rarely seen picture of the inside
of an actual Can-o-Whoopass

FRONT COVER WHOOPASS PHOTO

I assume you all saw this photo. I sent it to my son and he informed me that the Jumpmaster in the photo is **Tim Watson** who now works with my son at Blackhawk. He asked Tim about the picture and was informed that an imbedded reporter took the photo on a C-17 on the way to Northern Iraq. The troopers are 173d Airborne and were about to make the first Combat Jump of the war.

Jon Willette, 173d Engineers, VN



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Rule aims to ease PTSD claims

BY TOM PHILPOTT

Many veterans filing disability claims for post-traumatic stress disorder will have fewer hurdles to clear to show service connection and receive disability benefits, under a regulation change proposed by VA. Published Aug. 24 in the Federal Register, the draft regulation will reduce the evidence a veteran must present to VA if the claimed PTSD "stressor" is tied to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity. PTSD sufferers can have chronic anxiety, depression, nightmares or feelings of helplessness.

Affected veterans could include those who drove trucks in Iraq or Afghanistan, or those assigned for long periods to areas exposed to mortar fire, suicide bombers or improvised explosive devices, said Bradley B. Flohr, assistant director for policy, compensation and pension service for VA.

The proposed rule is not limited to veterans of current conflicts. "It can be any veterans of any period of service" who have been diagnosed with PTSD and "experienced, witnessed or was confronted with an event or circumstance that involved actual, or threat of, death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of the veteran," Flohr said.

Under current regulations, veterans who were not in actual combat must develop evidence, and submit considerable documentation, to show that fear of injury or death caused their chronic post-traumatic stress. The proposed rule would recognize that service members don't need to be in combat to experience intense fear and, depending on the individual, that fear may linger and become debilitating, even when individuals are removed from a threatening environment.

Today a non-combatant veteran diagnosed with PTSD must present VA with a description of the source of stress, document when and where it occurred, and

support the claim providing "buddy statements" and other evidence. VA also checks DoD records to verify a fearful event or stressful period of service. This review process can add an average of six to eight months to the claim process, Flohr said.

A discussion that VA Secretary Eric Shinseki had with his under secretary of benefits, Patrick W Dunne, sparked the proposed change to regulations, Flohr said. VA claims data showed that most noncombatants with PTSD are found to have service-connected stressors. So a lengthy claims development merely delays a favorable decision in most cases, adding to a VA claims backlog that is approaching the 1 million mark.

Under the proposed regulation, veterans diagnosed with PTSD merely will have to show they served in places where hostile military action or terrorist activity would have caused fear.

Rep. John Hall, D-N.Y., chairman of the House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance, hailed the plan to relax evidentiary rules for many PTSD claims as a "giant step in getting veterans the benefits they have earned faster and easier." Hall said he has pressed VA for two years to relax its requirements for showing service-connection in PTSD cases. He introduced the Combat PTSD Act (H.R. 952), a bill that would be even more aggressive in easing evidentiary rules for the anxiety disorder. Hall predicted the proposed regulation would allow "major progress" in easing the claims backlog.

Flohr said he expects a final rule before next April. It will apply to all pending claims, but not to claims that have been denied by the Board of Veterans Appeals or to claims on which the one-year appeal period for board review has expired.

Tom Philpott, a former Coast Guardsman, has written about veterans and military personnel issues for more than 30 years.

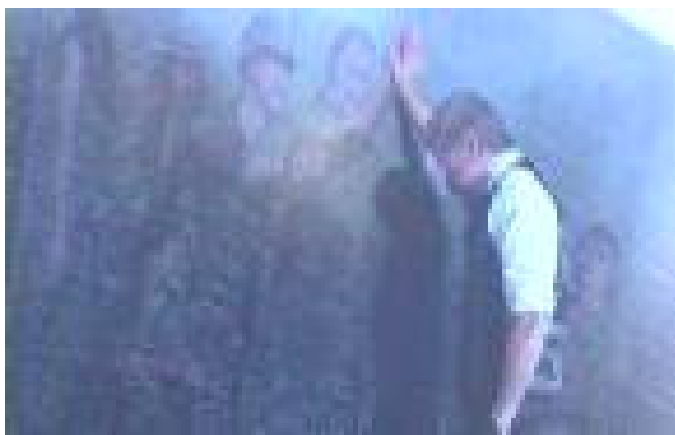


**AUSSIE
CAMMO
IS BEST**

G'Day Mate!



WELCOME HOME AMIGO



For 40 years after leaving VN, I was so full of guilt that I stayed in my bunker. I never talked about what I had done, and avoided answering any questions. However, in a small town everybody thinks they know all about you, but they didn't have a clue about the real feelings and torment I had. I never drank less than a 12 pack of beer each night just to get to sleep. I thought about my dead buddies a lot. I could not forgive myself for leaving them in the jungle (after he was severely wounded and evac'd. **Ed**). I worked enough time at my job in 23 years to retire with a 30 year pension. I was not really living, but just existing.

I think it was in 2006 my nephew, who was 2d Bat 173d in Iraq and Afghanistan, came down for a visit. He told me straight out that I had PTSD and explained the symptoms. Didn't help much at the time. It took me some time to remember PTSD. He told me about the 173d Association and a concert that was going to be held in Atlanta by **Big and Rich** to raise money for the 173d Memorial to be built at Ft. Benning.

I attended the concert and saw a sea of blue sweatshirts with 173d on the front and back. I was like a kid in a candy store. I can't explain the feeling I had that night. My nephew pulled

me around determined to find an old 173d trooper from VN that I might know. I didn't find anyone I served with, but he found some old crusty Sky Soldier with a beard who looked a little grumpy. That guy was **Larry Hampton, 1/503d**.



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We talked for a while and then they sang the **8th of November**. We both broke down and cried on each other's shoulders for some time. That was a life changing experience for me. Larry and I e-mailed back and forth for a while and then he told me of a group of 173d VN Vets who just vented and talked about anything. He got me into the group and I never looked back. I came back to living after a short time. I saw that we all had the same trouble dealing with the war. Just meeting and talking with this bunch of old warriors gave me back so much. One of our guys would expect nothing less than fighting back and being a part of the living again, not just for me, but all of the Amigos.

You see, I am just one of the lucky one's. I owe my return to the living to this Brotherhood.

B/2/503d Sky Soldier, '67

Note: This trooper is a good man, a good friend and a good brother; and, he was a courageous soldier who barely survived the hell which was Dak To. Like many of us, perhaps most of us, he simply buried his war experience in the recesses of his soul, trying not to revisit it, trying yet failing to not revisit it. We all revisit it. You will be pleased to know he is now receiving long overdue treatment for his PTSD. It's an honor to call him friend and brother. Ed.

INCOMING!

From a good buddy:

Smitty,

Your newsletter is too Good. I had to spend an hour reading it and 15 minutes to print it. You need to make it 2-3 pages. I know your PTSD is going wild. Keep it simple stupid for us stupid PTSD fuckers. OK?

Doc

Reply:

Doc:

3 pages only? Nah. It's getting bigger each month! We have a lot of shared history to capture before we sleep. I know, just *read* three pages! Luv ya too G.I.

Smitty Out



CITY SUPPORTS 173d Report from the 60's

Residents of the City of Rochester Minnesota, have been the 'Adoptive Parents' of men of the 173d Airborne Brigade in Vietnam for nearly two years.

In February 1966, the Rochester Jaycees initiated the adoption program to boost the morale of servicemen. Backing of the project came from civic, church, labor, business, veteran and student organizations.

Thousands of buttons, bumper stickers and window decals were sold to raise funds for gifts and supplies for the Paratroopers. Since the inception of the 173d project, tons of supplies have been shipped to Units in the Brigade.

In April 1966, Rochester played host to **First Sergeant J. R. Workman** of the 173d and his wife, who were guests of the city for a week. A number of men in the Rochester area have been with the 173d over the past two years.

Typical of the boost given by Rochester residents was a recent gift of \$100.00 by Students of Lourdes Catholic High School. Students raised the funds through a dance.

The idea for the Christmas letter writing project came from **Dr. Lonnie Hammargren**, who was a Medical Officer with the 173d before coming to Rochester earlier this year. Mr. Hammargren, a native of Rush City, Minnesota, is a resident in Neurosurgery in the Mayo Graduate School.



2/503d Bn Cmdr Col. George E. Dexter saluting his troops in Rochester, MN, 2000.



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Note: My first 173d reunion was in Rochester in 2000. The highlight of the week-long event was marching with my 2/503d brothers and other brothers of the brigade as **Colonel George Dexter** lead his and our battalion through the streets of the city with upwards of 10,000 locals applauding and cheering. I wasn't the only G.I. there with fog in his eyes. A young Sky Soldier sergeant from the Sand began calling cadence, but few of us could keep in step....we didn't understand the damn new cadence! It didn't take long for one of our VN vet sergeants to take over and begin speaking poorly of Jody and how cold parts of Eskimo women can sometimes be, and we were back in step! **Ed.**



Sky Soldiers ready to march in Rochester, 2000.
You had a good home but you left. You're right!

OUR NEWSLETTER

Please send all stories, opinions and other submissions, including photos (JPEG), to rto173d@cfl.rr.com. Our Newsletter is issued periodically. If you do not wish to receive notices of the Newsletter please send a note to the above address. Thanks to **Paul Dinardo**, 3/319th for posting all past and current issues of the 2/503d Vietnam Newsletter on his **Fire Base 319** web site: <http://www.173dabn.org/2bat/news.html>

It's the Veteran, not the reporter, who has given us the freedom of the press.

It's the Veteran, not the poet, who has given us the freedom of speech.

It's the Veteran, not the community organizer, who gives us the freedom to demonstrate.

It's the Military who salutes the flag, who serves beneath the flag, and whose coffin is draped by the flag, who allows the protester to burn the flag.

THE FOG OF TIME

Does this sound familiar? You'll hear a buddy tell a story or you'll read about a particular event during the war in which you participated or witnessed, and what you now hear or read just doesn't quite jive? Yeah, me too, it happens all the time, particularly as it relates to places, dates, names and even the actual event.



The fog of time does that. **I forgot why I came upstairs.** But, what we must

recognize is, to our buddy telling or writing that story, it *is* true, insofar as his 40+ year memory allows him to tell it. So, the next time I tell the story about a hooch buddy waking up screaming, causing us to think we were under attack, and relating the (now amusing but not then) tale of him being stung on the end of his dick by a scorpion who snuck under his mosquito net, and someone else tells you it was a rat, which is was...well, cut me some slack. Or the sad time the kid right behind me let go of the rope crossing a rushing stream and drowned, and you learn elsewhere he was bitten by a snake and died from that, which he was....well, cut me some more slack. And as you see our history unfold in the pages of our newsletter, and something just doesn't quite jive....cut the trooper some slack....his memory ain't no good no more; or worse, it could be *your* memory. **Ed.**

WHO KNEW?



In last month's issue we asked if anyone could identify these 2/503d troopers. As of the date of finalizing this newsletter, we had no takers. These Sky Soldiers, from left to right are: **SGT Green, SSG Richmond, and SSG Edwards.**



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WE'LL TRY IT AGAIN



Can anyone identify these 2/503d Sky Soldiers? First to identify them wins a dinner date with **Bill Vose**. I just made my own self laugh! We're gonna need help on this as I don't have names for them either. **Ed**

Some years ago Colonel Bob Sigholtz provided this statement to men of the 2/503d.

THE 2/503RD, 1966-1967

By Col. Robert Sigholtz

I am delighted to have this opportunity to write this statement about some of my experiences I remember when I served with the 173^d Airborne Brigade. Before I departed for Vietnam I was on Dept. of Army orders to command a battalion of the 101st Airborne Division.

However, upon my arrival in Saigon I was told at the Repl Depl someone else within the 101st was assigned to the slot intended for me. Upon learning of this news I was most disappointed since I had a strong desire to command a battalion. I was aware that **General Paul F. Smith** at that time commanded the 173^d Airborne Brigade. Since we had previously served together, I took the chance to call him to determine if he had a job for me. He said it was not a battalion, but he had another position for me now in the interim, it would be the Brigade Executive Officer.



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Colonel Sigholtz and his RTO

After arriving in Bien Hoa and being there a short time I learned that General Smith was most anxious to have another battalion sized maneuver element in his command. To provide this size force he organized **Task Force Sigholtz**. The Task Force included company D, 16th Armor, Troop E, 17th Cavalry Platoon, 173^d Engineers, Military Police Platoon, a detachment from the Support Battalion, Signal, company C of 319 Field Artillery, some of the Caspers, and on occasion for missions, a rifle company. The Task Force was assigned Infantry battalion type missions for approximately three months until I was given the assignment to command the 2nd Battalion. I will always be indebted to General Smith for accepting my assignment to the 173^d Abn Bde and later permitting me to command an Abn Bn.

When I commanded the second battalion we were so fortunate to already have assigned a truly outstanding group of non-commissioned officers with an average length of service of fourteen years. The officers were also extremely well qualified in their positions. The proof of this is that several became part of the fifty General Officers that had previously been assigned to the 173^d Brigade. It was my privilege to have served with so many outstanding officers and NCO's.

However, one of these outstanding NCO's always made me feel so uncomfortable; his name was (the late) **Charlie Morris** from Galax, Virginia, who had been awarded the **Medal of Honor**. Each time I ever addressed him in the field, in base camp or at a social event after we both retired, he would come to attention. Charlie became so erect it appeared as if a steel rod had replaced his backbone. At more than once after we retired, I suggested when we were at social events he call me "Bob" because we didn't have any rank anymore. This was to no avail because, until the last time I had the pleasure of his company, he always snapped to a stiff attention when I tried to converse with him.

Another occurrence I recall near the end of 1966, is when the second battalion was in the field a large enemy force aggressively attacked our position one night. Fortunately for us we didn't receive any casualties primarily because we were well dug in. In the morning I checked the positions that were hit. When I came upon one position I saw this rather slightly built, small trooper who was visually shaken by his experiences of the previous night. In an effort to comfort and console him I said ***"We Try Harder, and attacks like last night do not worry us in the second battalion."*** That did not sway him but I learned during our conversation that he only joined the battalion the day before and arrived in the field on the late afternoon supply chopper. This was **Ebald's** first night he had been in combat. During our exchange I further learned that he came from Philadelphia, PA, which was where I entered the army.



The Colonel awarding Purple Heart to
Mike Sturges A/2/503d, 1966

Early in 1967, after the battalion returned to our base camp in Bien Hoa from an operation to reconstitute and rest, I was visiting "C" company's area and I saw Ebald again. They were enjoying a steak dinner. I sat down next to Ebald at the table where he was sitting and chatted with him about things in general and happenings in our hometown. When I was about to leave the table he stood up and followed me. He said to me ***"Colonel, I believe I am going to be KIA"***. I attempted to once again placate his fears by saying ***"You are a rough and tough paratrooper and you are now an experienced combat grunt."***

Ebald made a successful parachute jump as part of operation **Junction City** on February 22, 1967. Unfortunately, on March 3 1967, he was KIA with fifteen others including the platoon leader and a couple

extremely fine NCO's of "C" Company when they ran into an "L" shaped ambush. I often wondered if Ebald had a premonition he would be KIA.



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MICHAEL LEO EBALD



Bob Sigholtz and Bob Stokes.
Both have left us for that DZ in the sky.

The most moving and personal memorable experience I had while I served with the 2nd Battalion was when I joined a lead platoon of a company when their mission was to search and destroy an enemy base camp. I observed members of the platoon were a little apprehensive to enter the base camp. In an effort to attempt to stiffen their backs I decided to join them to enter the base camp. When we were moving into the base camp a PFC evidently was concerned about my well being, since I assumed I was a father image to him. He said, "Sir, get down and get back, you should not be here with us." That was a sincere expression of pure love, which I will always remember. However, tactically, he was right because normally a battalion commander should not try to become 11B (rifleman). However, in some circumstances the commander must lead by example in some situations where, in his judgment, it is necessary to accomplish the mission.

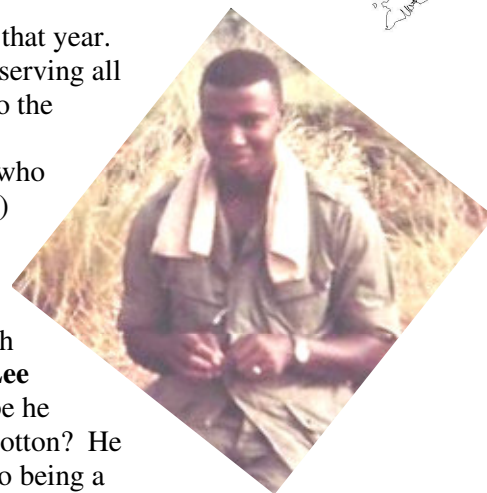
It was my greatest honor during my Army Service to command the 2nd Battalion, 173^d Airborne Brigade, and I continue to "Try Harder."

Colonel Robert Sigholtz (Ret)
CO, 2/503d, '66-'67

MY BEST DAY AT WAR. **OR, THANK YOU COLONEL SIGHOLTZ!**

From 12/65 to 12/66, I was assigned as one of the RTO's in the battalion command group, having the good and perhaps unique fortune of having served under all four battalion commanders, **Cols. Dexter, Carmichael,**

Walsh and Sigholtz, that year. Apparently, I wasn't serving all that well, or at least to the satisfaction of one 1st Sergeant we had (who can go nameless here) who didn't cotton much to this young kid from California. He didn't cotton much to my hooch buddy **Lee Braggs** either. Maybe he didn't know how to cotton? He seemed more suited to being a Drill Sergeant at Ft. Polk than leading men in war.



Good buddy Lee Braggs

Col. Sigholtz had recently taken command of the battalion, and we found ourselves humping through some thick jungle somewhere in late '66. It was one of those days we all remember; hot and sticky, with the thick terrain fighting us every step, and the warm canteen water not helping all that much, if you were fortunate enough to have any left. "*One step in front of the other G.I.*", I would often remind myself on such humps. I mean, it was one of those jungles you'd never dare take your eyes off the asshole in front of you for fear of getting lost!

It was a long, hard, sweltering hot hump, you know the kind. Even the bad guys were smart enough to stay indoors as we didn't see one the entire day.

While trying to balance my M-16 on an ammo pouch while holding the PRC-25 handset to my ear, all the while trudging through the jungle (did I mention it was thick shit out there?), a branch caught my hand and I dropped the radio handset. Most RTO's will identify with this. The 1st Sgt. jumped all over my ass for doing such an unsoldierly-like thing. Moments later, Lee dropped his handset. The Sgt. reminded the both of us a fate worse than death would be waiting for us if it happened again.

The day wore on as we dreamed of cold milk shakes and anything cold for that matter. *Inch-by-inch, step-by-step*, slowly we humped, with the wait-a-minute vines snapping at our feet and arms. Then, damn it, both Lee and I dropped our handsets AGAIN! Oh shit. As the 1st Sgt. chewed us both a new one, I swear I heard foreign language giggles coming from out in the jungle.



By late afternoon we had somehow reached our objective and everyone began digging foxholes and setting-up for the night before breaking out some of those yummy C-Rats. All, save the two RTO's who never mastered the handset-holding technique.

An aside: Some days or weeks earlier I had put in a transfer request to one of the line companies, just to separate myself from that mean, nasty old sergeant with a PRC-25 handset fixation. He refused the request, I'm sure to punish me. Today, I'd thank him for that.

"You two! Come over here and dig me a six-by," he invited these two, exhausted RTO's. He was right, death would have been better. While Lee and I hadn't yet eaten, we surely had the biggest foxhole in the entire battalion.

L-R: Original poor photo of Thomas, Scott & Smitty on convoy Sept. 1966. Finally figured out how to not drop the handset.



With the two of us about waist deep in this hole from hell, the 1st Sgt. stood over us railing about something Sigholtz did or didn't do that day and how **Col. Dexter** would have done it different or better, yadda yadda yadda. Lee and I looked up. There, standing behind the Sgt. was Bob Sigholtz, taking it all in. Lee and I looked at each other, a la the final scene in *Bonnie & Clyde* right before they were shot by the Feds. We couldn't believe it!



Thanks Colonel. What's that? Did we finish the six-by?

Note: 44 years later I concluded the Sgt. was right. After all, the radios were our lifelines.

"Sergeant!" Sigholtz yelled, *"You're fired!"* Pointing at Lee or me, or perhaps **Jerry Hassler**, Bob ordered, *"You. Call in a chopper!"* Soon a Huey arrived to escort the 1st Sgt. to his new home with the 1/503d, where, I believe, he became one of the **Best of the Best**.

Lee and I never did finish digging that six-by. Thank you Col. Sigholtz for my best day at war! Oh. And 1st Sgt, thank you too.

Smitty Out



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SOME OF OUR BEST HISTORY

Some of our best history is oft times lost to emails.... but not always.

About the Chinook and the flight out (escape?) of Marauder (Jan '66). Our hooch buddy (S-3 tent), **Hal Clem** (Jim would remember him, Smitty wouldn't), was on a Chinook out that got shot up thru the floors and Hal caught one in the butt that stopped in his abdomen; he was taken out to hospital and sent home, we never saw him again. **Wayne English**



Wayne Hoitt

was in the mortar platoon at the time (I think) and was on the Chinook and saw Hal get hit....he told me this years later. Do you remember Wayne English? He lives in Georgia now and runs a campground on his family's property. We can't get him to go to reunions, but I wish we could; he has the best recall of any GI I've met since and he helped fill in lots of stuff for me.

Wayne Hoitt HHC/2/503d, '65'-'66

Hal Clem...tall, blond, blue eyes, easy goin'. He had a Master's Degree in mathematics and his dad worked in the Pentagon...he could have been an officer but he chose to be with us. Early one evening we were digging foxholes/bunkers in the rubber trees when the guys in C Company (?) opened up on what turned out to be one of our own patrols. The guys in the patrol returned fire briefly and the whole thing finally got sorted out, but we could hear the bullets clipping the leaves in the trees overhead and Hal looks up at the trees and says *"Hey, those are real bullets!"* He was/is a good guy...level headed and a deep thinker for his age.



Jim Bethea

Jim Bethea HHC/2/503d, '65-'66

CLEM GREEN
A HECK OF A SOLDIER
Company A, 2nd Bn, 503rd Inf
By Jack Kelley



Jack Kelley, Camp Zinn 1966

I joined the company during **Operation Hardihood**. My first impression was good. I met the 1Sgt., **Tony Torres**, an exceptional soldier. We walked the perimeter of the company and checked each position -- things looked solid! Torres, and later his replacement, **MSG Louis Pigeon**, were to significantly impress and impact my life and that of the company. It would be the best assignment of my twenty years in the Army....the following are but a few of the "bullets" I remember...

- At the conclusion of Hardihood, we returned to Camp Alpha to stand down for a few days. **Captain Southerd**, the company XO, showed me the hooch that I would call home, then informed me that a previous company commander had restricted all the officers to their hooch any time they were in base camp. Southerd felt it would be a great gesture if I would lift the restriction... which was done. I'm thinking that **Lt. Bill Vose** felt that freeing the officers from their hooch was the best decision I made as commander.

- Most men I know that have been in combat, look back on one particular event that was the "memory" of their career. For me it was **Operation Yorktown**, June 29, 1966. We had made an unopposed airmobile assault, onto **Landing Zone Brazil**. Assembling, we then broke into three columns to search for the 308th Viet Cong Main Force Battalion. Our mission was for each platoon to begin



Capt. Bill Vose



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patrolling west approximately 1,000 meters apart. At 1035 hrs. the middle platoon, the 3rd Platoon, under **Platoon Sergeant Cooney**, made contact with an enemy force initially estimated to be 75-100 strong.....that turned out to be the 308th. The contact developed into horrendous battle and the 1st Platoon: **Lt. Vose**, 2d Platoon: **S/Sgt Brown**, and Weapons Platoon: **Lt. Vendetti**, moved to support the 3rd. At 1515 hrs. the battle was over. Tuff fight...a costly day...12 KIA, 21 WIA. Memories? Oh yeah.



Maj. Gus Vendetti

- S/Sgt Charlie Morris**, the point squad leader of the 3rd Platoon that hit the enemy battalion, was hit repeatedly. Some reports had him with 33 wounds. The witness statements listed his valor in eliminating a machine gun emplacement, becoming the medic when **Doc Berry** was killed, working with **Mike Thibault** on adjusting artillery fire, repeatedly moving out to assist wounded, and encouraging his men and those of the platoon. Words about his actions are many - each member of that platoon who survived and remained, 13 men, had a different story - each telling of *heroism, concern, encouragement and professionalism*. For one composite re-look of that day and what this soldier did, one needs only to read the citation for the decoration



SSGT Charlie Morris

Charlie Morris received... for **"conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty"...**the **Medal of Honor** (see MOH Citation in Issue 7, Page 7 of our newsletter).

- Another action that has impacted me to this day was when we swept through the 3rd platoon position and saw the enemy fall back as the 1st and 2d Platoons pushed them out. I passed right by Morris, thinking he was dead...he sure looked it. I went on to see about tying the platoons into a defensive perimeter. Hearing someone yell...**"Sergeant Morris is alive!"**, I returned to him and knelt down next to him. He looked up at me and said, **"Captain, don't let them evac me until all the others are out first. Promise...they go first"**. The words from the Book say it best...**"Greater love hath no man than this...."**



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**What was left of the 3rd Platoon, A Co. 2/503d
Operation Yorktown, 6/23/66 - 7/8/66, Xuan Loc Province**

- After the battle, we were trying to get our wounded out by Dust Off—and enemy small arms fire continued to delay the extraction of wounded. When all seemed to be at a standstill, our Chaplain, **Connie Walker**, moved past me and said, *"It's O.K. Captain, I'll get them out"*. He moved to a small cleared area where Dust Offs and other helicopters were trying to lower cables and wench out or just pull up the wounded (triple canopy of trees) and get them to a MASH Hospital. It seemed to me that for 30 minutes each time a helicopter was near, we'd pick up incoming fire. The Chaplain would say *"It's o.k., bring him here to me"*, and then he would tie the soldier onto the rope or harness, and out the wounded would go. Walker would receive the Silver Star for his actions that day. He was our *"Shepherd in the valley of death"*—he stood in the gap for us.



Lt. Pascarella (L) & Sp5 Bob "Doc" Beaton after battle

- Once the position was secure, I stopped to talk to the 13 men left in the 3rd platoon. I told them they had done a great job, tried to share with their grief...and then said that since there were only 13, I planned to have them become part of one of the other two platoons. At that time **PFC Freeman Oates** stepped up to me and said...*"Captain, there are only 13 of us, and we're all PFC's, but I'm the ranking PFC and we don't need to be put in other platoons. We're still a platoon and we need to stay that way."* Sounded good to me and I told Lt. Vendetti to take over the platoon and take **Sgt. Pitts** to be the Platoon Sergeant... along with... the help of PFC Oates.
- Sometimes, it seems the two most "forgotten" guys in the company were the medics and the RTO's. **Doc Beaton** and his medics were exceptional, professional and, if I had thought of it when I should have, I'd have told them... *"You're the best!"*

As for RTOs, my RTO, **PFC Johnson**, and I learned a very hard lesson together. The company had encountered some light small arms fire as we hit a small enemy camp. I was trying to get a handle on what was happening when Johnson told me that **Col. Sigholtz** (the Battalion Commander) wanted to speak to me. Determining that the firefight was more important, I told Johnson to tell the Colonel that I would get back to him, but we were in *contact*. Immediately, Johnson grabbed my arm and said the Colonel wanted to speak to me *now* on the radio...still it seemed the firefight was the higher priority and I told Johnson to tell the Colonel I'd call him in just a minute...one more time Johnson grabbed me. I stopped, I turned to face him, somewhat ticked off—and Johnson said, *"Sir, Colonel Sigholtz has relieved me as your RTO, and, Sir, he wants you to carry the radio, and, Sir, he wants you to call him the minute you get the radio on your back"*. Johnson and I learned a great lesson that day.... *"When the voice from above says 'now'!... it's time to obey"*.

- Who were the key guys? Can't say for sure...we called each member of A Company **"Clem Green"**—Clem was the best. We needed to look after Clem, and we'd never leave Clem behind. And yet, names do come to mind every once in a while...**Lt Vendetti** and **Sgt Morris** - the two bravest soldiers I ever served with...**S/Sgt Nat Brown**, perhaps the most professional soldier I ever met; **Shasteen, Berry, Oates, Ferguson, Healy, Vose, Taylor, Lucas, Kirn, Thibault**, and a host of others....and, of course, **Clem Green**. Clem Green... I remember him, respect him, and feel privileged to have had the opportunity to serve with him... he was "the best!" A heck of a soldier!

Jack Kelley,
Company Commander
A/2/503d,
May 66-Dec 66



SITUATION NORMAL....A DAY IN THE LIFE OF RECON PLATOON

By Jerry Hassler



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When I arrived at Camp Zinn, one of the Zulu-Zulu guys from Operation Silver City told me they knew the VC/NVA were out there because they could hear them moving around during the night. How long was this battle? Did it begin at dawn?



Jerry Hassler, Recon

With **Recon** one time, we were resting and having lunch inside an abandoned village when three VC simply walked straight into the midst of us. Needless to say, they didn't walk out. That was the way it was with many small engagements. Surprise, surprise on both sides. One of the three had documents showing he had just graduated medical training a few days before.

Another time, Recon crossed a Y-shaped trail and observed beaucoup tracks and found some shitholes near a ravine leading off the stem. We were going to set-up an ambush near the ravine but ran into a couple VC who shot at us and we shot at them and they ran away. At the time, we didn't know it but they were an LP.

We set-up an ambush on the upper fork of the Y and during the night, the two came down the trail and tripped a Claymore. The Claymore got the first, and the second guy would have made it had he kept running through the kill zone but he ran forward, then stooped beside the trail in the darkness of the jungle. **Spagnola** saw him but didn't know for sure it wasn't one of ours until he saw the outline of the AK-47. He shot him at very close range. The next morning, three VC popped out of the jungle onto the trail. They had come to check out the firing during the previous night. We opened up and killed two and one got away. During the exchange, one of our guys was wounded so we called for a medevac.

You would have thought us all being experienced soldiers we would have put two and two together and figured out more than what we knew. A company-size base camp was only several hundred yards away. The dustoff had to hover and lower a basket. During the time from the last engagement until the chopper arrived the VC had returned and were encircling our position, unknown to us. The chopper presented too big an opportunity of course and they opened up prematurely before completely encircling us. The Huey took off upon being fired on and radioed back we had beaucoup VC all around.

Fighting lasted several hours, on and off, and Alpha Company, under **Capt. Carns**, was dispatched to our assistance. Fire would be heavy, then stop, then start up again. A couple of times we heard yelling, "*Yankee, die!*" which I guess was the extent of their English.

The jungle was too dense for grenades to be effective on either side. We called in Puff as well as Whiskey Papa and Hotel Echo. Some bamboo caught fire from all the tracers and it sounded just like gunfire with its snap-crackle-pop! **Jo-Jo White** (now a reverend in Louisiana) dropped one VC with his M-60 and when a comrade came back to check on him, he dropped him across the body of the first. During the fighting, I stayed calm and excited but did have one moment when an image of a bullet hitting me square in the nose popped up and I started digging to China. The image went away but was there for a brief moment.



Alpha arrived and we counted seven VC body count, and as Alpha searched the area they discovered the VC encampment. We had five wounded. The picture posted on the 173d site of the Recon Platoon (above) was taken the day after as we were inventorying the captured weapons and gear.

Marcus Powell was on leave and joined us the day after. He is in the picture up front. **Lt. Stickler** was in charge but had badly sprained his ankle the night before the fight and wasn't very mobile. You can see **Sgt.**

Major Profitt way in the back talking to **Capt. Carns**. **Mike Hargadon** had moved to the S-2/S-3 tent and was no longer with Recon. **Jim Skidmore** (shoulder) was one of the wounded four, along with **Sgt. Voyles** (twice in the back and once in the arm), **Roehl** (jaw by grenade fragment), and **Shinkleberger** (arm and leg).

Believe I had stated 5 but only 4.

They were evacuated after Alpha arrived. **Jim Skidmore***



Looking back, so much was just plain dumb luck! Two days later we ran into a VC squad which got the better of us and killed **Kranshan** and paralyzed **Hurd**, an RTO. We had again stopped to rest and while resting, I offered to monitor Hurd's radio as well as mine. A trip flare went off and when no firing was heard, Hurd went to investigate and that was when the firing occurred. If he had been monitoring my radio, I would have been the one to go. I was lucky.

Jerry Hassler
Recon, 2/503d, '66/'67

* We lost Jim to an auto accident years ago. A good man.

JIM STEPHENS' 3/319th HOOCH

I know, this is a 2/503d newsletter. But Jim promised to buy me a drink at the Cocoa Beach VFW if I published this photo of his hooch. I'm thinking the photo of him might be worth *two* drinks! *The horror. The horror.* Ed.



This was my home (hooch) in Vietnam. I had to tear it down a hundred times and rebuild it on a hundred different hill tops. Richard and I worked together, he held the sand bags for me to build my hooch and I held



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them for him. I don't know where Richard is today, haven't seen him since Ft. Bragg 1969. He was 3/319 B, 4th Batt., class of 67- 68. Sure would like to know what happened to him, and the pipe smoker from Philadelphia, the surfer from California, the card player from Chicago, the hillbilly from Tennessee who's Saturday nights were to get together with friends, drink beer, **Drink buyer Jim** grease a pig and see who could catch him.



When I first met them they were waiting for a fire mission; there were hundreds of canisters from the 105MM shooting high angle at **Hill 875**, November 1967. Richard said to me, "*Welcome to Vietnam, Cheery!*" After seeing what was in store for my tour I did what my DI told me to do...I stuck my head between my legs and kissed my ass good-bye! I'm thinking that that was the prayer that saved me.

Jim Stephens, B/3/319

THE TOP TEN REASONS MEN PREFER GUNS OVER WOMEN

Any Sky Soldierettes who might read this should direct their comments to Harry Cleland B/2/503d, who is solely responsible for its content. The editor in no way is to be yelled at, hit along side the head or refused his quarterly 5 minutes of sex, which includes the 3 minutes undressing part.

- #10. You can trade an old 44 for a new 22.
- #9. You can keep one gun at home and have another for when you're on the road.
- #8. If you admire a friend's gun and tell him so, he'll probably let you try it out a few times.
- #7. Your primary gun doesn't mind if you keep another gun for backup.
- #6. Your gun will stay with you when you are out of ammo.
- #5. A gun doesn't take-up a lot of closet space.
- #4. Guns function normally every day of the month.
- #3. A gun won't ask, "*Do these grips make me look fat?*"
- #2. A gun doesn't mind if you go to sleep after you use it.

And the number one reason a gun is favored over a women:

#1. YOU CAN BUY A SILENCER FOR A GUN!

Run, Harry! Run brother!!!

The Lone Ranger:

By Dave Linkenhoker

Sometime in April or May of 1970, while doing search & destroy in the mountains north of LZ English, B Company, 2nd Battalion received orders to split into 3 platoons, each one working their way up a different section of a "high ground" hill known to have an abandoned arty site on top.

Scuttlebutt was that there was a large enemy unit dug in "somewhere" on the mountain, and B Co. got the task of flushing them out for what we assumed would be a larger battalion assault.

Best I can recall it took two days for a small group from my 1st platoon to make it to the top, secure the site, and call in re-supply. With the rest of the platoons slowly collapsing into the position, choppers started to arrive.

Oh, did I mention no enemy forces were found? Either not there, or hiding real good. Thank God the enemy never appeared. We were so exhausted I'm not sure we could have put up a decent fight.

The full-gear climb up was hell for everyone. Low on chow and water when we first started the ascent, all up hill drudgery, troopers collapsing from heat exhaustion like flies after a "Raid" attack. But, what will stay in the memory of all my buddies was that while choppers were dropping off food and water, those of us who had secured the site were required to stand-down for a service by a Chaplain. We were all drooling over the food not far away, only having been given enough time to get into the water. If not for that we may have collapsed during the sermon.

Once re-supplied, the entire company prepared to do a second sweep back down the hill, when an emergency call came in to prepare one platoon for immediate airlift. Maybe just because we were 1st platoon, we got picked 1st, and away we flew. At that point most of us had no idea what mission we were facing. But, what was really different on this CA was the duration of flight. Best I can recall nearly an hour went by, and we appeared to be flying west.



Dave catching some rays in Vietnam, Republic of



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Arriving at the edge of a hill with heavy jungle growth, lined by what seemed like miles of elephant grass, I still had not been briefed on the mission. And, I was 1st squad RTO at that time. The reason may have been security, as the rest of the story may suggest.

The Huey's couldn't land at the edge of the jungle-covered hill because of the incredibly high elephant grass, and the slope of the hill. Eight of us troopers packed in on our slick, 4 on each side with our legs hanging over the edge of the chopper floor when the left door gunner smacks me on the shoulder and said: "Jump!" I said: "Are you crazy!"

We were still at least 15' above the ground, but the gunner yelled again for me to jump. So, what the hell, we were paratroopers! But, with full, just re-supplied rucksacks? They had to weigh 100+lbs. Out on the struts I go, proper parachuting form, bent knees together, and out into space. Unbelievably, the elephant grass was so thick I literally sunk down to the ground with little impact. Rolling over like a turtle stuck on his back I could see I had jumped on the "low" side of the hill while unlucky others were getting at least an extra 5 feet from the right side of the chopper.

Total chaos. Troopers yelling in pain, calls for medics along the line of off-loading choppers from broken legs and ankles. Six or seven of us manage to find each other, one of whom was my **Platoon Sergeant, SSgt. Sanchez**, who seemed to have some idea of what we were doing. He yells that we cannot wait for the rest, that they can follow us after the injured are secured. Turning toward the hill, we encounter an amazing site. Tunnels actually woven into tall elephant grass, big enough to go through bent over, even with the heavy rucksack.

As we emerged from the elephant grass tunnels, reduced to just over half a squad, we maintained steady progress into the heavy jungle growth. Most of us still having no idea of the nature of our mission, we didn't have to be bright or informed to be at psycho level alert. We wouldn't be in such a hurry, jumping out of choppers from a ridiculous height, injuring God knew how many of our buddies at that point in the mission, if it wasn't pretty important. And, if you were the "one" guy we found after emerging from the elephant grass tunnels you would agree.

Moving fast, down low, weaving around the heavy jungle growth, we hear a rather high-pitched, really stressed voice saying: "GD, I'm glad to see you guys!" One lone, skinny, young Ranger hunkered down next to a large tree. What the hell? At that moment we caught a glimpse of what turned out to be the rest of this guys' team being swept away on an extraction ladder just above the top of the jungle. In a few moments we finally had a pretty clear picture of the situation.

This Ranger Team had been inserted into the area based on intelligence of some level of enemy concentration. They were not long into their recon when they literally fell out of triple canopy jungle into a fully functioning VC training camp. The camp was complete with bleachers made out of bamboo, chalk boards for instruction, and various jungle hooch's for cooking, sleeping etc. What was worse for the Rangers was the class was still in session. OUCH!

With thirty or more enemy soldiers turning around from their class on "How To Kill The American Imperialist Pigs," the Pigs were standing in their class, mouths dropped to their knees, and both groups momentarily too stunned to do anything other than stare at each other. The Rangers recovered first, and let loose with everything, no aiming required. Not being able to think fast enough to think, the Rangers let loose heavy fire, tossing grenades, some with the pins still inserted, and yelling like Attila the Hun's angry wives.

Charlie must have figured it was a full scale attack on their compound, didn't even try to engage, but just hauled ass as fast as they could. We found no bodies, so were not sure if Charlie took his wounded and dead with them after the Rangers withdrew, or our freaked-out Ranger brethren just missed everybody. And, as thoughtful, sensitive paratroopers, we figured it was better not to bring up the subject with our rescued comrade. We did however, with an understanding grin, lift a questioning eyebrow as we returned some of the grenades, with pins "still" inserted, back to the Lone Ranger.

Now, why was our buddy by himself? Well, the Rangers knew they were in a world of hurt. Five of them against who knew how many VC, who were going to figure out pretty quick they had the advantage. The Rangers called in an emergency EVAC, but as the Huey dropped down to lower the extraction ladder it's tail rudder struck a tree, bringing the chopper down on the Team.

Miraculously, only one serious injury among the team and chopper crew occurred. Additional response Huey's got the first crew out, and were lifting the team out, D-ringed to the extraction ladder just as we had arrived. This, minus our new buddy, however, who had been left



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to wait for us, and blow the chopper in place if necessary. Totally in the dark as we were mission wise, to the rescue we came nevertheless.

Scuttlebutt at that point was that we had actually crossed the line into a place we weren't politically supposed to be. Laos? I never did know for sure, but the higher-ups did not want the enemy to get that downed chopper, and like I stated earlier, we had flown nearly an hour from our mountain top arty site. We set up a perimeter around the grounded chopper that night with what was left of our platoon, charges having been set, and orders given to blow it into little pieces if we could not hold the position until a heavy lift chopper could come in to pull it out the next morning.

Let me tell you guys, that was one intense, butt tightened night. Expecting the worst at any moment, and nothing. Not a probe, not one round of enemy fire, RPG, or mortar. Just a very quiet night assumedly surrounded by the enemy, with reinforcements for us unlikely due to the terrain. But, at first light, the Chinook arrived, lifts the damaged Huey out, with Cobra's swarming around our position for cover. Again, no response from the enemy. They must have really believed (thank God) there was a full-scale operation in effect.

**Bravo
Bulls or
Laos
invaders?
Probably
both!**



A two
kilometer
forced
march to
a jungle

clearing located on the Rangers' map (we didn't have one for "that" area :>), and by early afternoon we were back with our company, in "Vietnam." Anyway friends, even if you know more accurate details about this incident than me, please don't let on if this all didn't happen across the border in Laos. I've told the story to too many people over the years, and don't want to eat a lot of crow! :>) God Bless, and Airborne!

**Jonathan (Dave) Linkenhoker (Link)
1st Platoon, B Co., 2nd Bn,
503rd Inf, 173d Abn Bde, SEP 2/70 -- 12/70
Stag Team 2, 6/70 -- 12/70, Cacong Village.**

ARMY AIRBORNE

An overview



At Fort Benning in 1940, the Army organized a test platoon to find out and demonstrate how to use the parachute most effectively as a combat instrument. From the efforts of this group of volunteers was established the first mass jump, the first parachute battalion, and the airborne concept for World War II and beyond.



The sobriquet of "*The Father of the American Airborne*" is rightly rendered unto **William C. Lee** because of his dedication to making the U.S. Army into a dramatic new tactical and strategic military weapon in the period before World War II. His resolve during the late 1930s and early 1940 made it possible to create a new, modern fighting force of specially trained infantry — paratroopers, as they were quickly called. Platoon-size units grew to company, battalion, regiment, and division strengths, later consolidated into corps and armies.



Lee grasped the worth of swift striking airborne forces and enthusiastically and persistently presented his ideas. By early 1940 military **President Roosevelt** ordered high-priority development of a large airborne force. Major Lee was given that assignment and wasted no time. In July 1940, he directed formation of a Parachute Test Platoon to test equipment, training methods, and tactics for parachute troops. In three fast-paced months it was possible to activate the **501st Parachute Infantry Battalion**.



In World War II, the Allies jumped into North Africa, Sicily, New Guinea, Burma, Normandy, Southern France, Holland, and Luzon. Compared to ground attacks of the same scope, airborne attacks were remarkably successful. These combat jumps, especially the Normandy jumps by the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions, became legendary. In January 1945, Company C and elements of Company F of the 6th Ranger Battalion executed a tactical operation to liberate



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American POWs from the Japanese at Cabantuen, Philippines. The two parachute operations of the Korean War by the 187th Airborne RCT were likewise spectacular.



During the Vietnam era, airmobile operations overshadowed airborne operations due to the nature of the conflict and its terrain. The only American mass parachute combat jumps during the Vietnam war and the war in Iraq were conducted by men of the **2/503d, 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep)** with attachments. In the 1980s, restructuring followed the initiatives and guidelines of the Army of Excellence. TRADOC shaped the airborne division into the light infantry division mold, with major exceptions. For example, the battalions of the 82d Airborne Division had 697 men in comparison to the 559 men of the light infantry division battalions. Nonetheless, airborne units only have equipment that is needed for airborne assaults or air-land operations; if the airborne division must conduct sustained combat operations, then it would probably need additional medium artillery, air defense, and transportation.



The 82d has also kept a greater number of vehicles than its light infantry division counterparts. As always, the airborne units of today have an impressive advantage in mobility during the initial stages of an operation, but they are limited in their mobility after landing. For subsequent operations, an airborne operation must be followed by time-consuming re-groupment, planning, and staging.



Airborne and ranger units are organized and equipped to conduct parachute assaults to close with the enemy to kill him, to destroy his equipment, and to shatter his will to resist. This close personal fight requires combat-ready units composed of skilled soldiers and resourceful leaders. These units are the result of a tough, thorough, and demanding training program conducted by leaders who understand the effective employment of airborne forces, the combined arms team, and joint operations.





Paratroopers must be experts in marksmanship, close combat, individual parachute techniques, and field-craft.

They should be proficient with their assigned weapons and other weapons in the unit. They should also be familiar with foreign-made weapons that the enemy will use. In the close fight, paratroopers must be skilled in employing all weapons to include the rifle, the bayonet the AT4, grenades, mines, and bare hands. They must be confident in their ability to fight with these weapons.



They must be highly skilled in land navigation, camouflage, and tracking and stalking techniques. Paratroopers must be able to move undetected close to enemy soldiers. Stealth is required for reconnaissance, infiltration, and achieving surprise.



Paratroopers must have the skill and the will to dominate the close fight.

Infantry leaders must be the most capable soldiers in their unit and be tactically and technically proficient. The quality of the leadership determines the unit's success or failure in battle. Leaders must be proficient in land navigation and have an appreciation for terrain and parachute assault techniques. For a foot soldier, the terrain is both protector and ally. When properly exploited, it can increase the combat potential of the unit and support the achievement of surprise. All leaders must also be resourceful, tenacious, and decisive warriors. They are the combined arms integrators closest to the fight. They must be highly skilled in the employment of all the weapons and assets in the combined arms team. Leaders must be innovative and flexible when employing their units. They must have the mental agility to quickly grasp the situation and



the initiative to take independent action, based on the situation and the commander's intent. Above all, they must personally lead their unit to success in close combat.

The strength of airborne forces comes from the skill, courage, and discipline of the individual paratrooper. The paratrooper's abilities are enhanced by the teamwork and cohesion that develop in squads and platoons. This teamwork and cohesion is essential to the survival and success of airborne forces in close combat. Cohesion enhances the paratrooper's will and determination to persevere, to accept the hardships, and to refuse to accept defeat. In the close fight, these are the factors that decide the victor. It is at the small-unit level (squad and platoon) that cohesion and teamwork provide the greatest



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benefits to the combat effectiveness of the unit. Paratroopers must have complete trust and confidence in their leaders. Leaders earn this trust and confidence by sharing the hardships and by displaying leadership.



The fighting teeth of the airborne division is its infantry. The modern airborne rifle company consists of a headquarters section, three rifle platoons, and a 60-mm mortar section.

Airborne forces can vary in size from an airborne company team to a division. Their size depends on the mission to be accomplished and the time, soldiers, and aircraft available. Usually only the assault echelon and its immediate follow-up are delivered into the objective area by parachute. Tactical airhead



operations often involve the air landing of heavy equipment, supplies, and supporting and reinforcing units to consolidate and exploit the initial lodgment.



Airborne! All the way!!



2/503d combat jump in Vietnam.



Medal of Honor



Michael R. Blanchfield



Specialist Fourth Class

**U.S. Army, Company A, 4th Battalion,
503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade**

Place and date: Binh Dinh Province

Republic of Vietnam, 3 July 1969

Entered service at: Chicago, Illinois

Born: 4 January 1950, Minneapolis, Minnesota



Citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. SP-4 Blanchfield distinguished himself while serving as a rifleman in Company A on a combat patrol. The patrol surrounded a group of houses to search for suspects. During the search of 1 of the huts, a man suddenly ran out toward a nearby tree line. SP-4 Blanchfield, who was on guard outside the hut, saw the man, shouted for him to halt, and began firing at him as the man ignored the warning and continued to run. The suspect suddenly threw a grenade toward the hut and its occupants. Although the exploding grenade severely wounded S-4 Blanchfield and several others, he regained his feet to continue the pursuit of the enemy. The fleeing enemy threw a second grenade which landed near SP-4 Blanchfield and several members of his patrol. Instantly realizing the danger, he shouted a warning to his comrades. SP-4 Blanchfield unhesitatingly and with complete disregard for his safety, threw himself on the grenade, absorbing the full and fatal impact of the explosion. By his gallant action and self sacrifice, he was able to save the lives and prevent injury to 4 members of the patrol and several Vietnamese civilians in the immediate area. SP-4 Blanchfield's extraordinary courage and gallantry at the cost of his life above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

The Passing Of More Than Just A Friend

I was recently notified of **Kipling Johnson's** untimely death. I met Kip on-line in 2002.

While visiting the Herd's official website for the first time I came across the name of Kip's father,

Richard Johnson. I contacted Kip and learned she was on a quest to obtain medals she'd discovered her father earned yet hadn't been officially awarded. She was seeking members of Alpha 2nd Battalion that served with her dad. Richard was KIA June 22, 1967 during the **Battle of The Slopes**. As one of the few who made it off that hill, I was all too happy to assist in her pursuit to make her and her family's life whole.



Wambi Cook

We started off via cyberspace which evolved into telephonic exchanges. Kip and her two brothers were adolescents at the time of their dad's demise, and Kip being the youngest recalled very little of him. I was able to share with her some scant memories of Sgt. Johnson.

He'd been in country before I had arrived that February. He was platoon Sgt, but we had little interaction. I wondered if she'd made other contacts from A Company. Kip had been on this, her journey, for several years and indeed had made contact with over a half-dozen Alpha Bros. She gladly shared the names and contact info with me. Through her data base I was able to reconnect with several Bros. that I had not even thought about in years; **Rick Patterson**, medic, who survived six gunshot wounds on 6/22/67. Hill 875 machine gunners **Les Fuller**, **Joe Gray**, **FO's Bill Nicholls** and **Bill Reynolds** who were members along me and several others in a newly formed "Recon Squad" following the *Slopes*.

For years I resisted any and all entreaties to involve myself with any Vet and especially 173d sponsored events for reasons many of you will readily understand. However, through Kip's charming insistence, I finally reunited with my comrades in October 2002 at my first 2nd Battalion mini- reunion in Cocoa Beach, Florida. Without equivocation, those couple days commiserating

with my brethren did more for my emotional well being than any psychiatrist could ever accomplish.

With some trepidation, I attended the Reno reunion that following year where I had an opportunity to meet and share with Kip's mom, Marjorie, some remembrances of her husband. According to Kip, Marjorie chose to say

little about her dad's Viet Nam experiences. Our meeting was the first time she heard a personal account surrounding her husband's final hours. We took several photos that weekend that I'll forever cherish. I saw Marjorie and Kip's brother Rodney at the 2004 Daytona Reunion; Kip couldn't make it. Regrettably, I was to never again see Kip.

Over the year's Kip and I kept in contact via phone calls and the internet. I knew of her darling only child, daughter Sydney's school matriculations as well as her social avocations. I was apprised of her own academic prowess while she trained as a medical lab technician, and upon graduation securing her first permanent job with a local noted Birmingham, Alabama hospital. It wasn't unusual to not hear from one another for months. I was pleased when she accepted my invitation to Facebook in early August of this year. I now could keep timely accounts of her successes. I was not prepared when her mother notified me via Kip's Facebook that she'd died in late August. I called Marjorie and we exchanged fond memories of her only daughter. Soon after, I contacted Sydney to extend my condolences. She was quick to tell me how her mother had nothing but warm memories of me. I was one her dearest friends.

Thanks to Kipling Johnson, I have maintained close relationships with A Company's *Band of Brothers*. Her efforts made it possible in my reconnecting with a past I thought I spent years trying to repress. Moreover, were it not for her browbeating me about seeking VA benefits, I probably would still be working, and not been retired with a 100% rating for these past three years.

What her spirit did for me, and I'm certain for many others is immeasurable. I began missing Kip moments after her Mother's notification. She and her family will remain in my daily thoughts and in my heart and mind forever. Your soulfulness will never be forgotten, Kipling Johnson.

Wambi Cook, A/2/503d



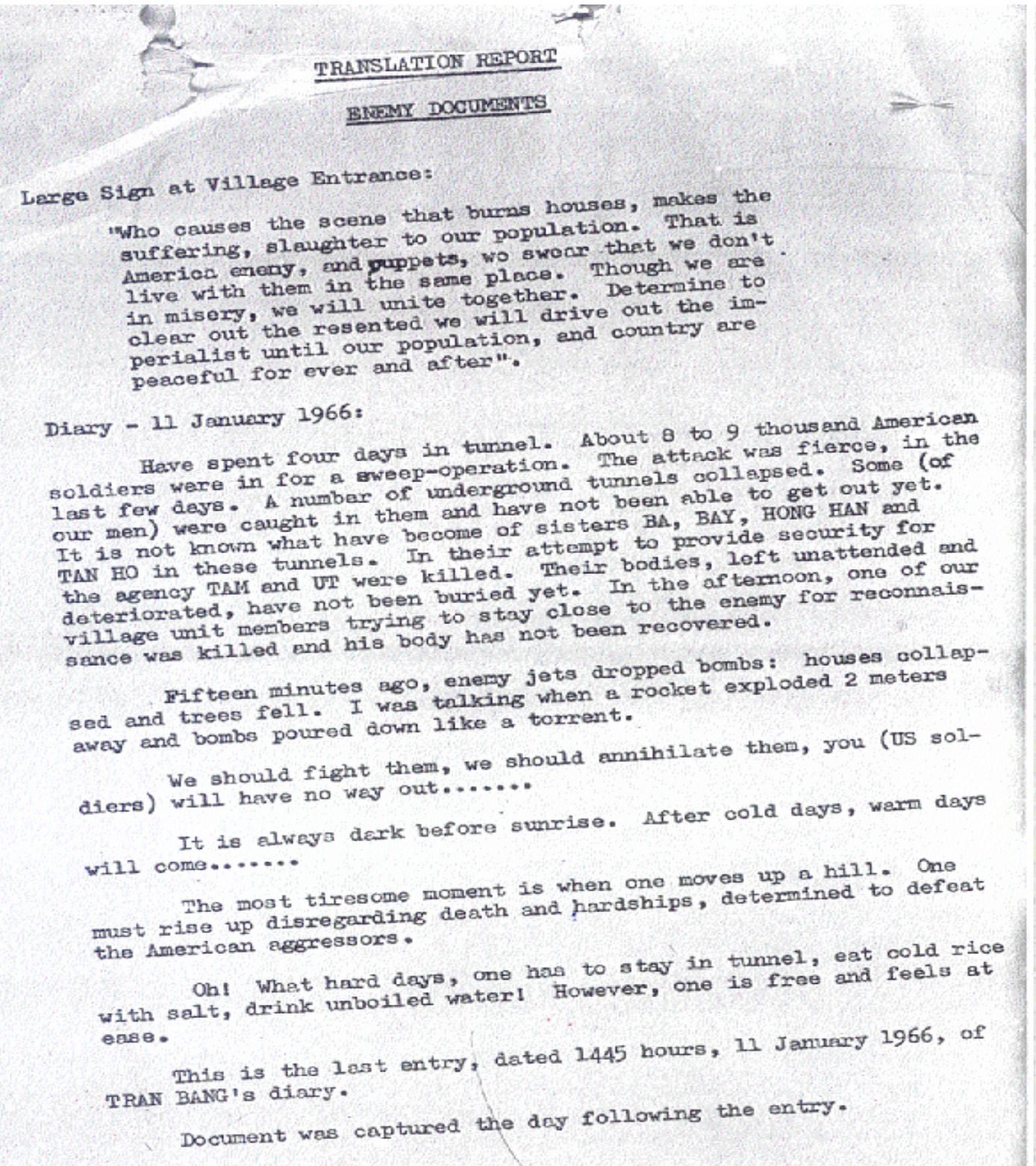
TRANSLATION OF CAPTURED ENEMY DOCUMENT

Operation Crimp, 11 January 1966 ~ Interesting



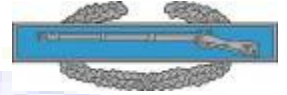
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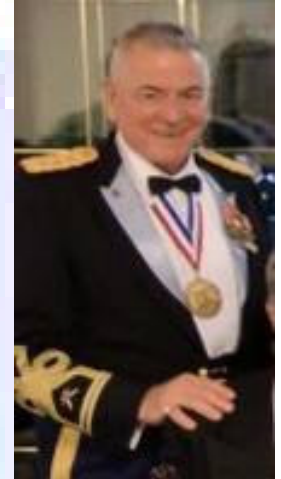
~ ~ SKY SOLDIER EXTRAORDINAIRE ~ ~



It is our honor to recognize 2/503rd trooper Lt. Colonel Roy Lombardo, Jr. “BDQ Roy”



Lt. Colonel Roy Lombardo, Jr., is fondly known by men of the Bravo Bulls as “Ranger Roy” or “BDQ Roy,” an acronym for Biet Dong Quan (Ranger), which Viet Rangers sometimes called him. He was the commanding officer of Bravo Company, 2/503rd, 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep), from 1964 in Okinawa where he took his paratroopers through combat training, to 1965 when he lead his men in battle during the Vietnam War. The Colonel is a native of southern Louisiana and New Orleans. After having accepted a regular army commission from ROTC at Tulane University, he served his country for more than 21 years, first as a company commander and Ranger advisor in Vietnam, and later as the commanding officer of two



battalions, a rare achievement. In recognition of his honorable and distinguished military service, Ranger Roy was one of the first to be inducted into the *Ranger Hall of Fame*, and he is proud, rightly so, to wear the awarded Ranger Medallion at military functions he attends. Additionally, he is the recipient of the Combat Infantryman’s Badge and numerous other combat and military service awards and citations he was awarded over his illustrious army career, including the Master Parachutist Badge. BDQ Roy is a Distinguished Member of the 503rd Airborne Infantry Regiment (DMOR). According to men of the Bravo Bulls, Colonel Lombardo led by example, expecting and receiving much from his men, never asking of them what he himself wasn’t prepared to do. Roy and his lovely bride, Carol, recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. They are the proud parents of Lance, a retired LTC who was graduated West Point, Kevin, an E-7 currently on active duty with the Special Forces in Afghanistan, and daughters Erin and Wendy, and a squad of grand children.



Bravo Company



Roy and Carol Lombardo

Ranger Roy: Your Bulls said to tell you to.....Take two salt tablets & drive on Sir!!



L-R: Roy Lombardo, Bill Olds, & Ron Zinn (KIA)



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STORIES OF THE LOMBARDO KIND

Some of the Bravo Bulls got wind of our plans to honor Lt. Col. Roy Lombardo in this issue as *Sky Soldier Extraordinaire* and sent in a couple of their memories involving Ranger Roy. They're here for your, but perhaps not his, reading pleasure. Ed

Where The Fukawee?

I got out of the Army in Nov 66. In the early 80's I happened to be reading a friend's copy of *The Army Times* and came across an article about a Ranger who was going to rappel from the rafters of the New Orleans Super Dome at half time of a football game. The Ranger's name was **LTC Lombardo** of the New Orleans recruiting district. It had to be HIM! I contacted him by phone at his office and we had a telephonic reunion. We met at the 1985 Brigade reunion in DC, and have had a great relationship ever since.

Here is my favorite story about Ranger Roy. It explains why we Bulls always tease him about his land navigation skills, or lack thereof?

The Company was on a training test on Okinawa (Northern Training Area) in '64. The mission was to go cross-country from the east side to the west. I believe the total distance was 18 kilometers starting around 0700 and ending around 16-1700, to be trucked back to garrison. Late that afternoon we were so f@#*ing lost, Roy told his Exec Officer to climb to the top of a big-ass tree to see if he could get some bearings. Up the tree goes **Capt Henschell**. (We had 3 Captains in the Co at one time. They must have been cheap in those days). After a minute or two Roy hollers "Well, Fred. What can you tell me?" The reply comes back: "Sir, I know one thing. We're still on Okinawa!" If Roy had live ammo with him Henschell would never have gotten out of that tree alive!

Jack Schimpf, B/2/503



Rubber tree plantation. First home in VN to the 2/503d.

Take Two Salt Tablets & Drive On!

I arrived in the rubber-trees several days after the company got there. I wandered in, looking for the B company commander, so as to report to him. I found a bunch of men surrounding a square, with a pair of exhausted troopers standing with their tongues hanging out and their boxing gloved hands at their sides. If you have never boxed you have no idea how heavy these gloves can get after a round or so. I spotted this Captain grabbing both of them behind the neck and shoving them together yelling "You wanted to fight, now fight!" As he turned I saw his name tag, LOMBARDO, and thought, what have I gotten myself into? After I located my recon Sergeant, **Sgt. Sutton**, and introduced myself to him, I found **Cpt. Lombardo** at his CP and reported to to him, telling him I was his new FO. He informed me that "**Sgt. Sutton is my FO and you better damn well take care of him!**" After this warm greeting I beat a hasty retreat.

The officers in the company were Roy, **Jim Bennett**, **Dick Eckert**, **Bill Olds**, **Ron Zinn** and myself, although I was only "attached." Roy had already received his nickname, "Ranger Roy", which he is justifiably proud of, but in '65 "Ranger Roy" was only spoken behind his back. Some of you might never have noticed, but Roy was perhaps the most hard-headed bastard in the 173d.

His great redeeming quality (if he has one) was, he would never ask anyone to do what he would not. He was driven that B company must be the firstest with the mostest in every activity.

During the train up to deploy, he drove everyone mercilessly, which paid dividends when the company went to Vietnam. He even erected a pull-up bar at the chow line in the rubber trees. *No ten pull-ups, no chow.* His medical knowledge and compassion can be summed up with one of his often heard quotes, *"Take 2 salt tablets and drive on!"* Although only Dick and Bill are now alive, I believe they would tell you that they attempted to model themselves after Roy.

His pre-operation briefings were by the book and he expected his platoon leaders to be as thorough. He made every attempt to have us have as much knowledge of where we were going and what we could expect as he had. His job was difficult, as there was no learning curve. We had not fired a shot in anger for over ten years, so there were no company grade officers with any combat leadership experience. There were a few in the army that had seen combat in enlisted ranks, but it is a different deal being responsible for 180+ youngsters. Roy's departure was due to one of the many idiot policies in the army at that time, namely: to replace a company commander just as he is hitting his stride, and is about as stupid as you can get. This is not done in the new army.

Roy is both profane and very religious, as was Patton. He cherishes his family, both close and extended, above all else. My life is better for having served with and having known him. **Jim Robinson, FO, B/2/503d**

On Leadership of Men In Combat

I once asked Ranger Roy what he viewed to be his leadership qualities. The Ranger replied: Ed.

"Lead by example.

Don't let any man's ghost be able to accuse me of not knowing my job and/or doing it to the best of my ability.

Have high standards, train to those standards, and reward those who meet the standards. Fire those that can't satisfactorily meet the standards. Evaluate and upgrade the standards, as necessary.

Listen to your sergeants and soldiers, then decide. You don't have to do what they suggest, but you should listen if there is time.

NEVER QUIT! Do everything the most correct but difficult way and the enemy will never anticipate your moves." **LTC Roy Lombardo, B/2/503d**



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NATIONAL VETERANS GOLDEN AGE GAMES (Or? Let's go kick some old Leg's ass!)

Life begins at 55, at least it does for more than 600 veterans competing in this national event, the premier senior adaptive rehabilitation program in the United States. It is the only national multi-event and recreational seniors' competition program designed to improve the quality of life for all older veterans, including those with a wide range of abilities and disabilities. It is one of the most progressive and adaptive rehabilitative senior sports programs in the world, offering 14 different sports and recreational activities.

The 24th National Veterans Golden Age Games will be held May 27-31, 2010, in Des Moines, Iowa. The games are organized by the Department of Veterans Affairs and competition is open to all veterans 55 and older who are registered for care at any Veterans Affairs medical facility.

The competitive events will be held at venues throughout the community, including the Iowa Events Center, Blank Golf Course, Drake University, AMF Bowling Center, Florer Park, South East Polk High School, Big Dog's Billiards and Gray's Lake Beach.

Events include swimming, bicycling, croquet, discus, shot put, table tennis, air rifle, nine-ball, bowling, horseshoe, shuffleboard, checkers and dominoes. (Fortunately, there's no knitting contest...yet. **Ed**) Veterans compete in ambulatory, wheelchair and visually impaired divisions in specific age groups.

The event is the nation's largest annual senior sports event for military veterans 55 and older in the world, and began as a way of providing therapeutic recreation to older veterans. Now the games are serious sports events for those aspiring to a higher level of competition.

About 700 competitors are expected to participate. Some 1,000 volunteers are needed for the games. In addition to the requirement that competitors be registered for care with the VA, participants have to pay for most of their expenses to attend the games.

To register for the Games, call 1-877-806-8424, or email NVGAG.2010@va.gov, or visit www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov to learn more.

Note: Most of this report was taken from an article in *Florida Today* newspaper by Norman Moody. **Ed**

BIG ED

By Jim Robinson

For those of you who might not recall Big Ed, **Sergeant Ed Sutton**, I hope to tell you a little about him. I cannot promise that everything I'll be telling you is 100% correct; it is, to the best of my recollection.

While you might not remember him, Eddie, Big Ed or Handsome Ed, called in more artillery around you than anyone else. Additionally, he could and would direct mortars, air strikes and gun ships. Vietnam was not Big Ed's first rodeo. He had been a recon sergeant in Korea. In that capacity he never had a Lieutenant last a full day. FO's in Korea had a life expectancy of 30 seconds once the shooting started. Big Ed would move his dead Lieutenant out of the way, take over the radio, and rain down death and destruction on the Chinese or North Koreans, whichever was foolish enough to attack his section.



Our FO party was comprised of **PFC Ernesto Corrinea**, RTO, **Sgt. Sutton**, recon sergeant, and myself, the FO. When I reported to **Roy Lombardo** in the rubber trees, telling him I was his FO, he said, "*Sgt. Sutton is my FO and you better take good care of him.*" With that warm welcome, I departed and found Big Ed.



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We both agreed that the company could be best served with 3 FO's, so we began to train Corrinea. We rarely operated together. Usually I would send Big Ed with one of the platoon sergeants and I would stick with the company commander and take turns monitoring the radio and calling in fire around our position (you did not know where all that noise came from, did you?).

Big Ed was a gentle giant. He brought a 50 lb. dumbbell with him to Vietnam (No, Roy, I weighed 150 lbs. when I arrived). Big Ed would read those little paperbacks, we called them *Hong Kong fuck books*, with one hand and curl the dumbbell with the other; every two pages he would switch hands. He was immensely strong. I'll tell you a couple stories about that strength....

Once, we had a flat on the left rear tire of the M-151. We could not find the jack but we did find the lug wrench. I removed the lugs. Ernesto had the spare tire. Big Ed yanked up the corner of the jeep while I pulled the flat off, and Ernesto slapped the spare on! On another occasion we had landed on a flooded rice paddy. There was 5-6 inches of water on the paddy and we were running for the tree line with Corrinea beside me and Big Ed following. 2.60mm mortar rounds landed in the mud at our feet, blowing Corrinea and me face forward in to the mud. Big Ed slung his rifle and picked us up by our belts like suitcases and double-timed to the tree line. This was before ruck sacks and we still had "web gear."

Sgt. Sutton was a kind and quiet man, never one to run his mouth. I believe he was rather shy. He was able to party though. Some genius decided that our FO party ought to go on one of the first R&R's to Hong Kong.

If you recall, this was before military script and we were paid in greenbacks. Additionally, for R&R, you could draw an extra \$200. each. At the last minute an operation

developed, and I decided to stay with the company and send Ernesto and Big Ed. I gave them my \$200. and an extra \$100. They departed for Hong Kong with close to \$1000. between them.



Only photo we could find of Big Ed.
Photoshop no help.

Four days later, two wrecks fell off of the back of a deuce and a half, each clutching a plastic bag with a new suit in it. It seems that they got to Hong Kong, settled in to a suite, and had the concierge send over 4 or 5 girls for the duration. They stocked the bar and went crazy! Eventually, they came up for air and had a tailor come over and measure them for suits, then right back to the girls and booze.

As I recall, according to them, the hotel had to send over some fresh girls as the original bunch were getting wore out! I hauled these two slugs down to the battalion aid station and got them both overdosed on penicillin. Later, after I loaned them each 30 bucks (both of them were penniless), I asked them if it was worth it? They both smiled and said "AIRBORNE SIR!" I had nothing to say.

I believe Big Ed stayed with the company the full 12 months. After Vietnam he was sent to the Ranger school and taught Close-In-Fire Support for 3 years. At the conclusion of his assignment at the Ranger school, he retired and lived out the rest of his life in the Ft. Campbell area. My last few conversations with him were strained. Employment apparently was difficult. That last conversation I had with him, he was doing some kind of night watchman job. He had been married but was estranged from his family. It was not a great ending for a great soldier. Big Ed died a couple years ago.

Jim Robinson, FO, B/2/503d



VETERAN'S REPORT

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- **Headline Military News**

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http://www.military.com/NL_MR/1,14852,7639,00.html

MY WIFE

by a combat soldier



Woody Davis, 1966, Camp Zinn, Bien Hoa, Vietnam

*As I sit and ponder, which I often do
Of terrible things, like the horrors of war
I break away from the fear, sweat and waterless tears
By thinking of you, My Wife*

*As I sit and wonder what tomorrow might bring
With fears of the worst that might happen
I ease my mind of those terrible things
By thinking of you, My Wife*

*As I sit in anger of the many thoughts in my mind
Confused as to how to put them in order
I relax and adjust to the tension
By thinking of you, My Wife*

*So you see dear, As I sit here and smile, I realize
You are the guide of my direction
My straightness in a crooked road
You are my love, my friend, My Wife.*

**Terrence (Woody) Davis,
A/2/503d, 1966**





VN Sky Soldiers at 2/503d reunion in Cocoa Beach, FL following their jump onto the beach.

L-R: Skip Kniley & Mike Johnston

A Leg nearby was heard to say:

"Damn paratroopers get all the good toys."



SOLDIER

I was that which others did not want to be.

I went where others failed to go and did what others failed to do.

I asked nothing from those who gave nothing and reluctantly accepted the thought of eternal loneliness.... should I fail.

I have seen the face of terror, felt the stinging cold of fear, and enjoyed the sweet taste of a moment's love.

I have cried, pained, and hoped...but most of all, I have lived times others would say were best forgotten.

At least someday I will be able to say that I was proud of what I was... a soldier.

George L. Skypeck



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1967

It was the 29th of July 1967, the 2/503 Abn Inf was in the hills above **Dak To** searching for the NVA. I was on point that day. I had a dog and dog handler with me. I believe **Dave Bunker** was my compass man. We had started up an incline when the dog went on alert. I stopped the column, and brought up **Lt. Bodine**, the platoon leader of 2nd platoon, and told him about the dog. We decided to bring the first two squads on line, with the rest in reserve, and recon by fire.

We took up positions just below the crest of the hill, and began a recon by fire. Almost immediately, what turned out to be a reinforced NVA company, returned fire. A very intense fire fight began. Two of our M60's were at the bottom of the hill. **Jerry Wiles** was one of the two gunners. His crew began to try and get up the hill to provide us with heavy weapon's fire. As they got about half way up the hill, an RPG came out of the wood line, striking right in front of them, blowing them off their feet. I looked back at the sound of the explosion, and saw Jerry and his crew struggling to their feet, picking up their weapons, and starting back up the hill. A second RPG came screaming out of the wood line. I looked back just in time to see the RPG hit right in front of Jerry and his crew, once again blowing them all over the trail. After about a minute, I saw them struggle to their feet, pick up their weapons, and start back up the hill. And, for a third time, an

RPG came out of the wood line and headed right for Jerry and his crew. And, for a third time, it struck right in front of them, blowing them all down. I looked back again, but could see that this time they would not be able to get up. All of them were suffering from multiple wounds, and just couldn't get the energy to try again. But it was one of the most impressive displays of determination, or just plain hard-headedness I ever had the honor to witness.



George "Scotty" Colson served two tours with the 2/503d in Vietnam and is the recipient of the Purple Heart & Bronze Star w/V.

Meanwhile, we were locked in to a fierce firefight. After about 20-30 minutes, I looked to my right, and saw one of the guy's fixing bayonets. Without thinking, I fixed mine. Looking down the line, I saw that everyone had bayonets fixed. Without a command we all began a bayonet assault. Giving out a Rebel yell, we ran straight at the NVA.

I can't speak to what went on in their minds, but I do know the enemy broke and ran like rabbits. We chased them off the top of the hill, and could see them running down the back side of the hill. We chased them half way down the back side of the hill before our officers could stop and regroup us. **George Colson, MSGT,
HHC/2/503d, 1965-1966
B/2/503d, 1966-1967**

This tribute to Vietnam veterans was originally written in 2001 by Marine Corps Major Brian Bresnahan while stationed in Iraq. It was resubmitted on his blog and appears on the High Plains Patriot website. Bresnahan is now a farmer living in Nebraska. This report appeared in the December 2009 newsletter of Vietnam and All Veterans of Brevard, Inc.

LEGACY

A guy gets time to think over here (in Iraq) and I was thinking about all the support we get from home. Sometimes it's overwhelming. We get care packages at times faster than we can use them. There are boxes and boxes of toiletries and snacks lining the center of every tent; the generosity has been amazing. So, I was pondering the question: "Why do we have so much support?"

In my opinion, it came down to one thing: I think we learned a lesson, as a nation, that no matter what, you have to support the troopers who are on the line, who are risking everything. We treated them so poorly back then. When they returned it was even worse. The stories are nightmarish of what our returning warriors were subjected to. It is a national scar, a blemish on our country, an embarrassment to all of us.

After, it had time to sink in. The guilt in our collective consciousness grew. It shamed us.

However, we learned from our mistake. Somewhere during the late 1970's and into the 80's we realized that we can't treat our warriors that way. So, starting during the Gulf War, when the first real opportunity arose to stand up and support the troops, we did. We did it to support our friends and family going off to war. But we also did it to right the wrongs from the era. We treated our troops like the heroes they were, acknowledged and celebrated their sacrifice, and rejoiced at their homecoming instead of spitting on them.



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And that support continues today for those of us in Iraq. Our country knows that it must support us and it does. The lesson was learned and we are better because of it.

Everyone who has gone before us is a hero. They are celebrated in my heart. I think admirably of all those who have gone before me. From those who fought to establish this country in the late 1770's to those I serve with here. They have all sacrificed to ensure our freedom.

But when I get back, I'm going to make it a personal mission to specifically thank every Vietnam Vet I encounter for their sacrifice. Because if nothing else good came from that terrible war, one thing did. It was the lesson learned on how we treat our warriors. We as a country learned from our mistake and now treat our warriors as heroes, as we should. I am the beneficiary of their sacrifice. Not only for the freedom they, like veterans from other wars, ensured, but for how well our country now treats my fellow Marines and I. We are the beneficiaries of their sacrifice. **Brian Bresnahan**

GENERATIONS OF VALOR



Semper Fi Brother



2/503d troopers prepare to load cattle cars at Camp Zinn 1 Jan 66 for ride to Bien Hoa Air Base to start Operation Marauder.

January 1, 2010, marks the 44 year anniversary since the 2/503d embarked on Operation Marauder in the rice paddies of the Mekong Delta. For many of our troopers this would be their final battle. Ed.

OPERATION MARAUDER: ALLIED OFFENSIVE IN THE MEKONG DELTA

**On New Year's Day 1966,
with Australian and
New Zealand forces
attached, the
173^d Airborne Brigade
struck VC positions**

**By: Colonel Thomas E Faley
U.S. Army (Ret)**

(This article originally appeared in the February 1999 issue of *Vietnam* magazine. Photos added).

The 173d Airborne Brigade started out the new year on January 1, 1966, with a major strike into the Mekong Delta. Operation Marauder, as the mission was dubbed, soon found its quarry, the VC 267th Main Force Battalion, and a three-day battle ensued. An article in the January 14, 1966, issue of *Time* magazine aptly summarized the significance of Marauder: *'Members of the 173d Airborne swept out in Operation Marauder into the Plain of Reeds to the Mekong Delta. Penetrating an area so thoroughly held by the VC that government troops had not ventured in for six months, they killed 114 VC in their major contact, rooting the enemy out of beehive bunkers built into the ground along the canals.'*

During its first year in Vietnam, the 173d Airborne Brigade was a tri-national brigade. Its major subordinate combat units included two U.S. infantry battalions (the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 503rd Infantry), one artillery battalion (the 3rd Battalion, 319th Artillery), an Australian infantry battalion (the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment) and artillery battery (the Royal Australian Artillery), and a New Zealand artillery battery (the 161st Gun Battery of the Royal New Zealand Army). Armor and cavalry included two American units, Troop E of the 17th Cavalry and D Company, 16th Armor, and an Australian unit, the Prince of Wales Light Horse Troop.



Col. Tom Faley



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**The 'Snake Pit' at Bien Hoa Air Base, 1 Jan 66.
L-R: C Company CO Capt. Fred Henschell,
HHC Commo Officer, Capt. Tom Goodwin.**

The U.S. paratroopers in the brigade referred to themselves as '**Sky Soldiers**,' a nickname given to them a year earlier by the people of Taiwan. The Australians and New Zealanders used their traditional nicknames -- they were known respectively as 'Diggers' and 'Kiwis.'

In 1965-66 the 173d Brigade's base camp was located adjacent to the Bien Hoa Air Force Base. Ironically, the Vietnamese translation of Bien Hoa was '*land of peaceful frontiers*.' The brigade's initial mission was to secure, patrol and neutralize any threat to the air base, but within months that mission was expanded into conducting multi-battalion strikes on major VC targets of opportunity through central South Vietnam.



**L-R: Bn CO's RTO PFC Connelly, along with PFC Love,
Sp4 April and Capt. Goodbold get ready to load chopper
on 1 Jan '66 at Bien Hoa Air Base.**

In late December 1965 the 173d Airborne was ordered to locate and destroy the 506th VC Local (Province Mobile) Force Battalion, reported by intelligence sources to be near Bao Trai in the Mekong Delta. The 506th Battalion had been operating with relative impunity in the area for a year or more. In addition, units of the 267th VC Main Force Battalion of the Dong Thap Regiment were said to be passing through the area.

The brigade commander, **Brig. Gen. Ellis Williamson**, planned to launch Operation Marauder on New Year's Day 1966. His plan called for the establishment of a brigade command post and fire support base near the Bao Trai airfield in Hau Nghia province, 35 miles west of Saigon. On the same day, the U.S. Army 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry (1/503), would be helilifted



Brig. Gen. Williamson

into an LZ west of the Vam Co Dong river with instructions to conduct search-and-destroy operation to the west. Shortly afterward, the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1/RAR), would be helilifted into an LZ east of the river with orders to perform search-and-destroy operations to the northeast sector.

The 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry (2/503), would then be moved to the brigade base at Bao Trai, with a first-day mission of being prepared to reinforce either the 1/503 or the 1/RAR if either of those units made significant contact with the enemy. If no significant contact was

made the first day, the 2/503 would be helilifted the following day into the LZ southeast of the river, with the instructions to search and destroy in that sector and eventually link up with the Australians to the north.

On New Year's Day the forward brigade command post was established at Bao Trai without incident. Then the 1/503 commander, **Lt. Col. John Tyler**, airlifted his unit to LZ Whiskey at the



LTC John Tyler

brigade base and waited until the brigade's artillery established its fire support base at Bao Trai.

Shortly after noon, the 1/503 was helilifted into LZ Vodka, near Tra Cu on the west side of the Vam Co Dong river. Initially the 1/503 encountered only light enemy resistance, but two hours after beginning its sweep, B Company found between 50 and 60 VC with some automatic weapons in small bunkers near the river.



2d Battalion lining-up in sticks at Bien Hoa Air Base.

A short firefight ensued, with B Company sustaining three wounded. Artillery fire and airstrikes were called in on the enemy positions, and approximately an hour later the VC broke contact with the Americans and escaped to the south.

On the same day, the 1/RAR battalion commander, **Lt. Col. Alex Preece**, also helilifted his unit into LZ Whiskey. When the choppers returned from inserting the 1/503 during the late afternoon, the Australians were helilifted into LZ Scotch, on the east side of the Vam Co Dong near the village of Can Thuy. The Australians encountered little opposition but reported finding many unoccupied enemy bunkers.

All the units involved in the operation reported mobility problems because many of the rice paddies and sugar cane fields there were flooded. Crisscrossing the area were numerous streams and canals, which were 5 to 15 feet wide and 3 to 5 feet deep, with a lot of silt on the bottoms. The banks of the canals were formed by dikes, which rose about 3 feet above the paddies and had trees and other vegetation planted along them.

Many unoccupied enemy bunkers were discovered in the dikes bordering the canals and paddies. The bunkers possessed good fields of fire, since elevations in the area were less than 5 meters. An article on Operation Marauder in the January 5, 1966, issue of *The New York Times* provided a good description of the setting and gave some idea of how difficult search-and-destroy operations were in that area: *'The gloomy and dismal Plain of Reeds is full of chest-deep canals, standing water, and fetid, nauseating, smelly mud.'* Small forested patches and villages were interspersed among the canals and watery fields.

Up to that point, neither the Americans nor the Australian battalion had made enemy contact significant enough to warrant the insertion of brigade reserve, the 2/503.



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The events of the first day of the operation were summarized by **Tom Reedy** in an *Associated Press* release: *'Although the enemy offered some brisk skirmishes and steady sniper fire at the start of Operation Marauder New Year's Day, the Viet Cong withdrew into the marshes of the Plain of Reeds. By late afternoon there was only occasional contact with the guerrillas.'* As a result, the 2/503 remained at Bao Trai overnight.

The next morning, January 2, the 2/503 commander, **Lt. Col. George Dexter**, planned an air assault into LZ Wine in the southeast sector. After landing, Dexter wanted to move his B and A companies abreast southwest of the river and then northwest to eventually link up with the Australians. Dexter's reserve was a one platoon of C Company. The two remaining C Company platoons had been temporarily attached to the brigade's D Company, 16th Armor (D/16), which became the brigade reserve at Bao Trai. Brigade headquarters planned to move the mechanized force to Dexter if any significant enemy contact was made by the 2/503d.



Col. George Dexter



2/503d depart Bao Trai for assault on LZ Wine, 2 Jan 66.

Prior to the air assault on LZ Wine at 0800 hours, Colonel Dexter sent in airstrikes, artillery fire and helicopter gunships in an attempt to clear the area. As the helicopter gunships were departing the LZ, they encountered heavy ground fire, a sure sign that a large enemy force was somewhere nearby. Consequently, Dexter decided at the last-minute to land his battalion 500 meters northwest of LZ Wine. It proved to be a wise decision.

B Company landed first and moved through a cane field southwest of the landing site while receiving sporadic fire to the front and left flank. By the time the next company -- A Company -- landed, the enemy fire had increased. Two helicopters took many hits -- one door gunner was killed and some troopers were wounded as they exited the helicopters.



Maj. Bob Carmichael & RTO Smith.

Insert: In this army photo are Battalion XO, **LTC Bob Carmichael** (then Major) and his RTO, **Lew Smith**, at Bao Trai airfield on the morning of 2 January 1966. There's was one of two helicopters hit by incoming fire during the heliborne assault into LZ Wine. It was Smith's first combat mission in Vietnam and he must have looked terrified. Over the roar of the chopper blades Carmichael leaned over and yelled, *"Don't worry, Smitty, this LZ is secure!"* He barely got the words out of his mouth when the roof above their heads was torn apart by incoming rounds. Carmichael knew the armored unit had been deployed to secure the LZ, he didn't know they would become bogged down in mud and never arrived the landing zone, and they were instead now heading into a hot LZ. **Ed**

After landing, A Company attempted to move south to go on B Company's left flank. As it did so, both companies became pinned down by heavy fire from numerous bunkers 100 to 300 meters to the southwest. The 2/503 had found the 267th VC Main Force Battalion. An enemy machine gun, located in a concrete bunker at the point where B and A companies had intended to link up, was pouring enfilade fire into B

Company and inflicting heavy casualties on its left flank platoon. The B Company commander, **Captain Les**



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Brownlee, had only been in command for two weeks. One of the supporting aircraft dropped a bomb on B Company, killing four troopers and wounding six. [Years following the war, Brownlee would become Acting Secretary of the Army].



A Company continued its attempt to swing the hinge and come abreast of B Company, but a large volume of fire precluded any significant movement, and A Company remained mired in the paddy marsh and mud, seeking whatever cover was available. The A Company commander, **Captain (later Lt. Gen.) Carmen Cavezza**, recalled being upset about not getting the artillery support he needed at that point. Because of the close proximity of all battalion units, battalion headquarters retained control of artillery fire at that stage in the battle. The situation changed several hours later, however, when each company was provided an artillery battery for direct support. Cavezza also found the use of his mortars limited because his mortar men were vulnerable to enemy fire in the open paddies.

In an unusual twist of fate, an Air Force FAC who was piloting his Cessna O-1 'Bird Dog' at low level along the line of contact accidentally flew into a volley of outgoing friendly artillery fire. There was a loud 'pop,' and the troopers looked up to see an artillery round strike the tail of the little aircraft. The Bird Dog dove into the ground, killing the pilot instantly.



Similar to the FAC shot down at LZ Wine.

Insert: It was later reported by **Steve Haber**, he and other members of C Company were among the first to reach the downed aircraft, only to find inside the be-headed pilot. **Ed.**



LTC Dexter and RTO Connelly at LZ Wine.

At 1030, Colonel Dexter had brigade headquarters release to him the two C Company platoons and the D/16 Armor. Dexter planned to have this mechanized force move southwest around A Company and outflank the VC positions. However, around noon the armored vehicles bogged down in the mud in the vicinity of Ap Tho, two kilometers away from the 2/503.



2/503d trooper works his way through the muck.



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The two C Company platoons slogged through the mire. They did not reach the area near the firefight until late afternoon. One of the troopers, **Specialist Jim Morton**, later remembered that the approach took hours because of *'the tough going in the muck and water from dike to dike.'* As Morton's unit neared the battle area, he remembered receiving lots of small-arms fire and seeing the downed spotter aircraft.



Members of Bn Command Group watch airstrike along tree line during Marauder.

Meanwhile, A Company's Captain Cavezza was eagerly awaiting the C Company reinforcements to come up on his flank. Years later he recalled, *'It seemed like it was taking forever.'* The January 3, 1966, *New York Times* summarized this phase of the battle: *'For eight hours the Americans crouched in the muck, behind paddy dikes and watched bombs, napalm, artillery, and mortar shells hit the enemy.'*

Around 1600, the two platoons linked up with the 2/503, and Dexter ordered all three companies to attack to the southwest. A massive firefight ensued, but the

battalion was still progressing slowly, with A Company obtaining the best results. The key event occurred an hour into the attack, when five men of A Company's 2nd Platoon managed to overrun a position on the enemy line adjacent to the concrete bunker and then move along the dike, clearing enemy positions one at a time. That enabled A Company to fully penetrate the 267th Battalion's defense.



Attack at dike line.



A Company RTO on PRC-25 as troopers hunker down, 2 Jan 66.

Captain Cavezza was shot in the stomach and had to turn his company over to his executive officer, **Lieutenant Linn Lancaster**. Cavezza's last words to Lancaster before lapsing into unconsciousness were, *'Win this battle first, then evacuate the casualties.'*

Dexter was a highly respected, courageous leader, and one of his greatest assets was his ability to analyze situations. When he later reflected on the battle, he wondered what the outcome would have been had he ordered the night attack, since the enemy was in disarray at that point and the moon was full -- providing plenty of light for a nighttime move. In a monograph he prepared for the Infantry School in 1968, Dexter summarized the factors weighing against the night attack, including the following:



Bn Command Group in rice paddies 2 Jan 66.

- He had fought off one enemy battalion (267th Main Force), but he had no idea where the remainder of the other (506th Local Force) was.
- He knew that he had already expended his reserve that afternoon, and he knew that he had sustained almost complete turnover of key leadership personnel since he last conducted a night attack. For example, two of the three line company commanders that night had been in command for less than two weeks.
- His troops were exhausted.



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While the 2/503 was battling the 267th Main Force Battalion, the 1/503 encountered little enemy opposition in its operating area. The troops had discovered an extensive tunnel system, but no VC remained in the tunnels.

The 1/RAR also had experienced little enemy contact. Small groups of VC harassed the Diggers but were driven off by small-arms fire. An unusual incident was later reported by Australian author **Colonel Bob Breen** in his book *First to Fight*: One of the harassing VC was nicknamed **'H&I'** (Harassment and Interdiction fire)

'Charlie' because of his ability to pin down members of the Digger battalion headquarters, located on a small section of dry ground surrounded by a flooded area. According to Breen, this lone VC *'kept popping up from the surrounding waters and spraying the area with rounds from a Thompson submachine gun.'* He



Bn scout and interpreter Phuc would be wounded again, this time during Operation Marauder. In 1967, he would be KIA at the Battle of the Slopes.

would pop up, fire, disappear under water and reappear later in a different place.

Eventually, **Captain Bob Hill** solved the problem when he directed one of the Prince of Wales Light Horse Troop's armored personnel carriers to drive out in the water and wait. Shortly afterward, when H&I Charlie popped out of the water, he was killed by the carrier's machine-gunner.

After midnight on January 3, Dexter sent orders to his 2/503 companies to continue the attack to the southwest at daybreak. Just after daylight, the battalion started to move out as planned. Then, suddenly, tragedy struck C Company. The company's artillery forward observer, **Sergeant Jerry Morton**, had called in marker white phosphorous rounds ahead of the company from the support New Zealand gun battery and then called for *'fire for effect'* on a suspected enemy position in front of the company.



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Blast at LZ Wine, 2 Jan 66.

The rounds were passing over the heads of the members of C Company, and Morton, apparently sensing trouble, yelled into his radio handset, *'Cease fire, cease fire!'*

Morton, medic **Jerry Levy**, **Pfc George Geoghagan** and **Sergeant Johnny Graham** were crouched near each other behind a paddy dike. Levy, Geoghagan and Graham were making small talk, and Graham had just tossed Geoghagan a pack of cigarettes. Suddenly, Graham heard a loud *'Woomp'* and was thrown into the rice paddy. Two short artillery rounds had landed in the midst of C Company. When Graham looked up, he saw Morton apparently dead from the concussion and Geoghagan dead from head wounds.

Geoghagan had just joined the unit the day before as a new replacement. Graham remembered that Geoghagan had said that he was married and was from Georgia. Levy was bleeding profusely in the groin area and had part of one leg blown off. Seven other troopers in the company were also wounded, including the company commander, **Captain Fred Henschell**, Graham himself and **Specialist Reid**.

Vester Reid recalled that the impact of the rounds sent him flying through the air, and he landed 20 feet away with stomach wounds. **Tom Tiede**, a special correspondent, reported in a subsequent press release: *'After the initial explosion Levy crawled to the aid of a wounded soldier. Even though ripped open by the blast, Levy continued to administer to the soldier. Then Jerry looked down at his own body and fell over mortally wounded.'*

C Company's movement ceased. The brigade staff journal indicates that the Kiwi gun battery commander, **Major Don Kenning**, immediately rechecked the data on the guns and found it to be correct. It appeared that the short rounds were due to damp powder.

The 2/503 Command Group was approximately 600 meters northeast of C Company when word of the short-round incident and casualties were radioed back to the battalion commander. Dexter immediately turned to me, his S-3 air operations officer, and told me that Captain Henschell had been wounded and that I was now the C Company commander. Dexter also told me to evacuate the casualties, reorganize as needed and quickly get the attack moving again. **Major Dick Terry**, the S-3 battalion operations officer, reiterated the details of the attack plan for the day.

I started moving unaccompanied toward C Company, but I found that movement was extremely difficult because I kept getting bogged down in the mud. Bullets often struck in the water around me as I went, and I can remember hearing an occasional *'crack'* as bullets passed overhead. When I looked to my left, in the direction the gunfire was coming from, I realized that several VC had apparently moved around the southern flank of C Company. I thought, *'either these guys are toying with me or they are terrible shots.'* In any case, the gunfire provided the impetus to find C Company as soon as possible.



Dustoff during battle on 2 Jan 66.

Shortly afterward, I reached what was left of C Company's command group and was able to talk with Henschell about the company situation for a few minutes while he was being treated by medics. In addition, I looked over the other casualties, telling the medics to evacuate the most seriously wounded first. I saw Levy, who was mortally wounded, being treated by the 1st Platoon medic, **Specialist Andrew 'Doc' Brown**. I noted the severity of Levy's injuries and asked, *'Can you do something for him?'* Brown sadly shook his head.

The enemy gunfire that concentrated on C Company continued as the medevacs began arriving. As **Sergeant Emilio Solis** and **James Nabors** carried Reid, suffering stomach shrapnel wounds, on a stretcher toward the helicopters, Reid was shot in the leg, breaking both bones below the knee.



2/503d troopers capture VC fortifications and headquarters during Operation Marauder.

I quickly reorganized the command group and radioed the platoon to echelon to the southwest so that the VC on C Company's southern flank would be engaged. That tactic worked, and the survivors of C Company soon caught up with A and B Companies. The battalion attack then proceeded as planned.

The 2nd Battalion has pushed what appeared to be an enemy stay-behind force to the west when in mid-afternoon the enemy stopped firing and retreated to the south. As a result, the 2nd closed in on the banks of the Van Co Dong and formed a perimeter for the evening of the 3rd. That evening the battalion restocked its ammunition and rechecked its casualty statistics for the past 36 hours -- 16 killed and 67 wounded.

Jack Foisie of the *Los Angeles Times* joined the 2/503 that evening and later reported that his 'neighbor for the night' was **Specialist Ron Robinson**, whose C Company resting place oozed with water. Robinson grumbled, 'This has been just one bad thing after



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another,' referring to the deadly short artillery rounds. But as Foisie noted: 'Robinson was soon sleeping. He was a soldier, and neither sadness nor hardship would get him down for long.'

On January 4, the 2/503 sent out platoon-size patrols throughout its sector, and they returned to the battalion perimeter in early evening with few reports of significant enemy contacts. The same mission was conducted the next day. Early on the 5th, the troops got a lucky break. Before the patrol departures, **Staff Sgt. Leroy Davis**, a squad leader with C Company's 2nd Platoon, while digging a better night-defensive position in a dike, had uncovered a Browning Automatic Rifle, ammunition, data books and the international Communist flag, red with a white crossed hammer and sickle in the middle. All the items had been carefully wrapped in waterproof blue plastic. When the find was reported to battalion, Colonel Dexter requested mine detectors from brigade, and soon other buried weapons and munitions were discovered within the perimeter.

On January 6, the 2/503 patrols struck a 'mother lode' in the vicinity of Ap Xuan Khanh when they discovered the abandoned headquarters area of the 506th Local Force Battalion. The area was heavily mined and booby-trapped, and a special brigade mine detection and demolition team was helilifted in to deal with the situation. After a careful search, six automatic weapons, 400 grenades and a large amount of ammunition were discovered, including 57mm recoilless rifle rounds.



L-R: Sgt. Brinkle, LTC Dexter & Capt. Faley display captured communist flag.



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C Company commander Capt. Tom Faley (L), along with Capt. Bencer and Sgt. Belcher and men study materiel captured from Viet Cong on 2 Jan 66.

Most important, they found more than 7,000 documents, including personnel rosters down to squad level, lists of Communist party members, training documents, maps and even blank letters of commendation.



2/503d grunts during Operation Marauder.

Between January 2 and January 6, the 1/503 patrolled in sector and apprehended numerous VC suspects. They also questioned residents of the area, who indicated that the 506th Local Battalion had long been operating throughout the brigade sector. They noted, however, that in the past several days they had seen elements of the 506th breaking down into small groups and infiltrating out of the area.

The Australians also were engaged in extensive patrolling activity during the January 2-6 period. They, for the most part, had made small, sporadic contact with the enemy in their sector, killing two VC. However, the Diggers also found an ammunition cache and several large rice caches. On January 5, a Digger patrol made contact with a VC platoon in the vicinity of Hoa Khanh, but the enemy soon broke contact and fled to the southwest.



CSM Mish and Bn Command Group cross stream during continuation of Operation Marauder, 3 Jan 66.

On January 8, 1966, the 173d Airborne Brigade terminated Operation Marauder and initiated **Operation Crimp**, displacing all its combat elements to a new area of operations in the Ho Bo Woods and Binh Duong province. The brigade report later forwarded to MACV commander summarized the results of Marauder as follows: *'The Viet Cong 267th Main Force Battalion was engaged, outfought and routed from its positions with over 100 VC killed by body count. This Battalion will not be an effective fighting unit again until extensive recruiting and mending is accomplished. In addition, much of the headquarters of the 506th Battalion was destroyed. Intelligence indicates that the bulk of the Viet Cong forces have withdrawn south of the Brigade area of operation.'*

During his several tours in Vietnam, Colonel Thomas Faley served as a reconnaissance platoon leader in the 101st Airborne Division, a rifle company commander in the 173d Airborne Brigade, and a senior adviser to a South Vietnamese airborne battalion.

Most photos herein were provided by Tom Goodwin, Tom Faley and George Dexter.



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resources available to help themselves and, in turn, help those they love that went to war.

We live in a rather remote area of Northern British Columbia Canada where we moved in 1974. This has made finding help for myself or my husband, Wayne, very hard to come by. I was lucky to meet some wonderful wives who had support and knew the system. They were support for me when I didn't have anyone or anything to rely on. There were some very bewildering times.

Even though I was raised by a wonderful World War II vet that suffered from the nightmares and other symptoms of PTSD and thought some of the behavior was normal, I also knew that something needed to be done to help those who were hurting so bad.



LZ Wine in 2005. The FAC was shot down near that tree line. Today the area is beautiful, peaceful, and quiet.

SKY SOLDIERETTE CORNER



Iva & Wayne Tuttle (C/2/503d) always working to help Vets and their spouses.

Some of you may be familiar with us from a newsletter we sent to members of Charlie Company for a few years. Sorry guys, it just got too expensive. My main purpose is to encourage the spouses and friends of the men who have served in the best unit in Vietnam to use the

I was on the mailing list for a long time of Patience Mason. She authored a very good book called *"Recovering From The War"* and had a PTSD newsletter for many years. Some of you may be familiar with the book or the one by her husband *"ChickenHawk"*. It is very down to earth and right to the point.

This book is one of a handful of books that are available in everyday language to help you understand what is going on in your lives. I will try to get through all of them in the near future and use them as the basis of this column. There are numerous clinical books, but who wants the \$10,000 words when you can relate to the author because you've been in the same place?

If you are close to a Vet Center, please take the time to visit a group. If you've already been in one and feel comfortable, please get out there and help the spouses of the ones who are serving today. We all are in this together – regardless of the generation or war. And if we don't help each other, no one will know the way. Just take another's hand. See you in the next edition! **Iva Tuttle**

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER



I never really expected to see the year 2010. I was in Viet Nam New Year's Day of 1970 and the idea of being around forty years later never crossed my mind. Where has the time gone?

New Year's Day 1970 began with volleys of red tracers across the midnight skies of Binh Dinh Province. Soon, the navy off the South China Sea joined us with volumes of larger caliber fire into the sky. Our enemy must surely have been taken back by this American celebration.

Our battalion was spread over the Province in small groups of ten to fifteen men involved in pacification. The end of the war had been announced and we were down to fighting for each other. It was as though the rest of the world had forgotten about us. Yet, watching the chorus of tracers gave me a sense of belonging. We were few, but we were Americans and we were connected to each other.

Now forty years later, I am connected to more of my 173d brothers than I was in 1970. I still feel that sense of "belonging" when I think of my 173d family back in Viet Nam. I also think of our younger brothers and sisters in the current conflicts "carrying on" in the face of the same political uncertainty we faced. They are not alone; we are with them in spirit and in the hope that one of these days all war will end.

Make a New Year's promise to yourself to take better care of yourself. Too many of us have died earlier than we should have. We are never too old to drop bad habits, exercise more and renew our faith in a loving God and fellow humanity. My wish for all of you is that this coming year will be the best yet. You have earned it brothers.



Rev. Mike "Mac" McMillan
173d Sniper, 4/503d

MORE INCOMING!

I'd like to tell members of the 2nd Bat that one of our own has just written a book specifically about Co. C 2/503rd. The name of the Book is *Digger Dogface Brownjob Grunt*, and it is written by Gary Prisk. Some of the 2nd Bat guys will remember him as Capt. Gary Prisk, who commanded Charley Company 2/503rd. Capt. Prisk took command of Charley Company 2/503rd shortly after the battle of HILL 875 and for the following year. Capt. Prisk is one of the few CO's to serve a full year in combat.



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I've read the book and it is fantastic. Even though it is a work of fiction, some of the guys will see themselves in the story. Some real names and a lot of real nicknames are used as well. Combat scenes described are authentic. This book is written with a lot of feeling.

The guys can purchase this book on AMAZON.COM. Would like to hear some feedback.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all.

John J. Kirk, 2/503d
rangerjkkirk@yahoo.com

BATTLE OF THE BULGE MEMORIES STILL STRONG

It was Dec. 24, 1944. We were fighting the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium.

That afternoon we were continually bombarded by their artillery fire. When the artillery subsided, the Germans attacked our positions. We were able to repel them but suffered many killed and wounded.

As evening approached the shooting stopped. In the darkness we could hear people singing. It was the German soldiers singing "Silent Night." Some of our soldiers starting singing the same song.

Even in the darkness we could see the shadows of men coming toward us. One of our soldiers stood up and started advancing toward these shadows. It was the German soldiers. The rest of us started toward them.

In the middle of the battleground we wished each other a "Merry Christmas." We shared some of our cigarettes and rations with them. One German broke out his canteen, which contained some schnapps and shared it with us.

We mingled for about 20 minutes and then each side returned to their original position. For the rest of the night, there was no shooting or artillery fire.

War is strange. In the middle of fighting, each side was reminded of the Christmas spirit. Let us pray that our troops stay safe and that our Christmas spirit will prevail throughout the world.

John Gaynor, President
Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge
Palm Bay, FL

