



# 2/503d VIETNAM Newsletter

February 2010 / Issue 11

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

To see all issues to date, call-up on the web: [www.firebase319.org/2bat/news.html](http://www.firebase319.org/2bat/news.html) Contact info: rto173d@cfl.rr.com

## 2/503d Photo of the Month

The next time civilians ask you what it was like being a 2/503d grunt during the Vietnam War, hand them this photo, and walk away.



The text which accompanied the photo: "An anonymous photo of typical 2<sup>d</sup> Battalion 173d Airborne grunts who had just slugged it out with the enemy in 67/68. This was a rare instance when men had a few moments in the field to sit together in a non threatening moment in what otherwise could only be called a brutal existence of continuous fear and anxiety."

*Photo submitted by Roger Dick, C/2/503d*



## DON'T HIRE A LAWYER TO HELP WITH VA CLAIMS

By Mathew B. Tully

**Q** I have seen ads for lawyers who want to help me with filing a claim for disability compensation from the Veterans Affairs Department. Do I need a lawyer to help me with a VA disability claim?

**A** No! In my experience as a disabled veteran and as an attorney, only in rare instances would you need a lawyer to help file a disability claim. And even if legal assistance is needed, many veterans service organizations (VSO's) will provide you with an attorney or assist you in obtaining someone like myself, who will help you for free.

I highly recommend you work with a VSO when you file a VA disability claim.

Groups like Disabled American Veterans, of which I am a life-time member, provide disability claims assistance to veterans for free, regardless of whether you are a DAV member.

Veterans generally are eligible for VA benefits for disabilities related to their military service. While the word "disability" sounds serious, minor injuries -- such as ringing in the ears and even acne -- often qualify as a disability.

Nearly every service member who has spent at least a few years in the military likely will qualify as having some type of "disability."

To file a successful claim, a veteran generally must demonstrate three things: 1) an injury or disease that began or was made worse during military service; 2) a current disability proven through medical documentation; and 3) evidence that the current disability is related to the injury, disease or event in military service, also proven by medical documentation.

**Q** If I am going to qualify for military retirement, why should I waste my time with a VA disability claim?

**A** First, because you're entitled to it. Disability compensation is an entitlement. Second, VA disability payments are tax-free.

Third, VA disability payments are nearly impossible for anyone else to touch because they are generally exempt from garnishment (several major exceptions apply, such as garnishment for child support).

Fourth, if your injury worsens over time, it's easier to increase your entitlement once you establish your basic eligibility for disability compensation.

Disabled veterans should not let anything stand in the way of receiving the benefits they are entitled to as a result of their military service.

**ASK THE  
LAWYER**

Though the process may seem daunting at first, VSO's are available to help answer any questions and provide the attention you deserve.

*Mathew B. Tully is an Iraq war veteran and founding partner of the law firm Tully Rinckey PLLC*

*([www.fedattorney.com](http://www.fedattorney.com)). E-mail questions to [askthelawyer@militarytime.com](mailto:askthelawyer@militarytime.com) The information in this column is not intended as legal advice.*

This report appeared in the December 28, 2009 edition of *ArmyTimes*.

**A critical point advanced by the author of this report is, your VA disability claim is *not* a hand out, nor does it take anything away from other veterans you may believe are "*more deserving*." It is an entitlement you have earned and is due you. Ed.**

## The Virtual Wall

The link below connects you to a virtual wall of all those lost during the Vietnam War with the names, bio's and other information on our lost comrades. It's a very interesting link and those who served in that time frame and lost friends or family can look them up on this site. Pass it on to other veterans who you think would like this. First click on a state.....then when it opens .....a name.....then it should show you a picture of the person (if available) or at least his bio and medals.

<http://www.virtualwall.org/iStates.htm>

## WHO ARE THESE GUYS?

In the January issue we asked for someone to identify these 2/503d troopers. **LTC Tony Esposito (Ret)**, XO of C Company, named the officer on the radio but not his RTO. While he didn't win the dinner date with **Bill Vose**, I understand they will do brunch together. **Ed.**



*"The guy on right in photo is **Captain Carmen Cavezza**, now LTG (Ret). Don't know his RTO's name."*

**LTC Tony Esposito, C/2/503d**

## ANOTHER PERIOD PHOTO

Can anyone identify this 2/503d trooper? He has been known to disguise himself as an old man. He owes me drinks and I'm trying to find him. **Ed.**



**Mike Sturges** said he owes him drinks too.

## FIRE BASE 319 NEW WEB SITE

The new web address for **Paul Dinardo's** site is:  
<http://www.firebase319.org>



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This story was sent in by **Maj. Ed Privette (Ret)**, CO, HHC/2/503, '67. By honoring this man, we honor all veterans. From *Khe Sanh Veteran's* message board:

### Ashes Found in Trash Led to Proper Burial

January 5, 2010, *St. Petersburg Times*

Mike Colt, 19, and his girlfriend, Carol Sturgell, 18, had driven more than an hour from their Tampa homes last month to be at Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell.

They weren't really sure why they had come. They just knew they had to be here.

*"It's kind of sad, huh?"* asked Sturgell, scanning the sea of white gravestones. Colt nodded. *"Yeah, but it feels kind of important."*

At 12:20 p.m., a Tampa police car pulled up, then a white Lincoln Town Car. Another police cruiser followed. Two officers stepped out.

*"Thank you for being here,"* Colt said, shaking both of their hands. *"No, thank you,"* said Officer Dan College. *"If it weren't for you guys, none of us would be here."*

More than a month ago, on the last Saturday of November, the young couple was hanging out at Sturgell's house when her brother rode up on his bike, all excited. He had found two fishing poles in this huge pile of trash. *"Come check it out,"* he said. So they did.

At the edge of the trash mound, sticking out from beneath a box, Sturgell spied a worn green folder. She pulled it out, brushed off the dust. Across the top, bold letters said, *"Department of Defense."* Inside, she found retirement papers from the U.S. Army; a citation for a Purple Heart issued in 1945, and a certificate for a Bronze Star medal *"for heroism in ground combat in the vicinity of Normandy, France ... June 1944."* In the center of the certificate there was a name: **Delbert E. Hahn.**

*"Why would anyone throw that away?"* Sturgell asked. And who is that guy? Colt wanted to know. *"Must be old, a World War II vet. Looks like he served at D-Day!"*

*(Continued...)*



That night, they took the paperwork back to Sturgell's house and searched Delbert E. Hahn on the computer. Nothing. (We also searched and found no photo. **Ed.**) They talked about who he might have been, the life he might have led.

The next morning, they went back to the trash heap and searched for more clues. They rummaged through boxes, overturned furniture, picked through piles of the past. Colt moved a ratty couch - and something fell out. A metal vase, or box, some kind of rectangular container about a foot tall. On the base was the name: *Delbert E. Hahn*.

*"It's him,"* Colt told his girlfriend. *"This must be him, in his urn."* Sturgell screamed. She didn't want to touch it.

It was kind of freaky, she said, discovering the remains of some dead guy.

*"He shouldn't be here,"* Colt said. *"No one should be thrown away like that, just left in a parking lot."*

The dead man wasn't alone. Under the couch, the couple found two more sets of remains: a cylinder-style container with Barbara Hahn printed on the bottom and another urn, which had no name.



#### **Ike with Screaming Eagles**

Tampa police Cpl. Edward Croissant had just reported for the night shift that Sunday when his officers showed him the urns. This kid and his girlfriend had found them and brought them to the station. Then an officer told Croissant about the Purple Heart. The Bronze Star. And the Normandy invasion.

The two teenagers got to the cemetery first. He wore his dark green dress uniform from the National Guard. She wore a long black dress. They stood on the edge of the road, across from rows of matching military headstones, waiting for the funeral of the man they had never met.



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And Croissant became irate. He had served eight years in the Navy. He's in the Coast Guard Reserve. *"I had three uncles in World War II. That was the greatest generation. If it wasn't for those men, we would have nothing,"* he said. *"That man saw combat. And someone just dumped him there? He deserves a better ending."*

Police called the Department of Veterans Affairs and learned Hahn had died in 1983, at the age of 62, and was a highly decorated war hero. The staff sergeant had served in the infantry and been honored with five Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts. Barbara Hahn, they learned, was the soldier's wife.

So how did their remains end up in that mound of garbage? Where was the rest of their family, or friends, anyone who would want their ashes? And who was in that third urn?

Neighbors filled in some of the story: Barbara Hahn had been a widow forever, they told police. For years, her mother had lived with her. Her mother's name was Barbara, too. The elder Barbara had lived to be more than 100. They thought she died around 2000. That third urn, neighbors told police, must be her.

The younger Barbara, the soldier's wife, got sick in 2003. A couple came to care for her, and she wound up willing them her mobile home. When she died, the couple moved in, took out a mortgage, then didn't make payments. The bank foreclosed on the trailer late last year.

#### ***The Greatest Generation***



In November, officials sent a maintenance company to clear it out. The workers must have just dumped everything behind the vacant building on Busch Boulevard, neighbors told police. Including the remains of three people.

*(Continued...)*

Just before 1 p.m. Dec. 16, the two teenagers led the car line through Florida National Cemetery. Police followed, then the funeral director who had the urns. Outside a wooden gazebo, two rows of National Guardsmen stood at attention.

The funeral director handed the first soldier a flag, the next one the cylinder with Barbara Hahn's remains, the third one the brass urn with Delbert Hahn. (Barbara's mother's remains are still in the evidence room of the police station. Since she wasn't a veteran or married to one, she wasn't entitled to be buried in the military cemetery).

"Let us open the gates of the Lord," said a military chaplain, who led the procession of strangers into the gazebo. "Let us remember," said the chaplain, "none of us lives only unto himself."

The teenagers sat on the front bench. Three officials from Veterans Affairs sat behind them. They had spent weeks searching for the Hahns' relatives, any distant kin or friend, someone who might want their ashes - or at least want to come to their burial. They couldn't find anyone. Even the couple whom Barbara Hahn had willed her home to didn't show.

By the time the chaplain lifted his head from the Lord's Prayer, a long line of men had wrapped around the gazebo. Wearing blue denim shirts and work boots, they clasped hands and bowed their heads. Dozens of groundskeepers from the cemetery had left their Christmas party to come pay respects to the man who, in death, had been so disrespected.

A bugler played taps. The riflemen fired three shots. And 56 people watched the honor guard fold a flag over the urns of the man and woman they never knew.



**New Albin native, wife finally laid to rest ...** The remains of Staff Sgt. Delbert E. Hahn and his wife, Barbara, were laid to rest Wednesday (December 16) at the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell. (New Albin native) Delbert Hahn received the Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts for accomplishments during his military career.

Photo by *The Tampa Tribune*.



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Entrance to C Company, 2/503d, Camp Zinn  
Photo by LTG Jack Leide (Ret), CO C/2/503d, '66-'67

### CORRECTION



Bill Mailander

Dave Linkenhoker

In the January issue of our newsletter, on Page 13, in **Dave Linkenhoker's** story, *The Lone Ranger*, Dave was incorrectly named as the 2/503d trooper standing with the M-16 catching some rays. That Sky Soldier was **Bill Mailander**. Dave is shown here in the hammock. Dave: Sorry about that G.I...I'm up to 3 on those 20 pushups you ordered me to do. **Ed.**

### OUR NEWSLETTER

Please send all stories, opinions and other submissions, including photos (JPEG), to [rto173d@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rto173d@cfl.rr.com). Our Newsletter is issued periodically. If you do not wish to receive 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: [www.firebase319.org/2bat/news.html](http://www.firebase319.org/2bat/news.html)



## SKY SOLDIER SNIPETS ~ Hooking-Up Years Later ~

In May of '67, I spent two days in Oakland as the Army prepared all of us for travel to RVN. The one night there they put me on KP. After DRO-ing and cleaning up the place, five of us stayed behind to sit around a mess hall table and talk about our upcoming adventure. We talked about our fears and our excitement, and shared all the bullshit stories we heard about what it would be like over there. It was a memorable night of talking. During the conversations we all agreed that when it was all over and we returned to the "World," we would look each other up and have a drink, and laugh about how we got through it. Unfortunately, three of our five were KIA.

When I came out of the field in May '68 to be processed for departure home, I got placed on tower guard duty; the Greenline. Of course I was livid, fit to be tied and too short for this shit. As it turned out, just before getting assigned to a tower, the Sgt. in charge, **Louie Zucco**, showed up and suggested that I not sweat the small shit and that we would go to the same tower for the night. I am not sure if we spoke about the promise we made back in Oakland a year prior. But, 40 years later when I ran into him, I said we should meet and have that drink. 2nd Bat was doing a Cocoa Beach party and that seemed like the time and place to hook up.

So, Oct 2006, we kept the promise in sunny Florida. I flew over Cocoa Beach, jumped out of a perfectly good Cessna from 3,000' with a bottle of Maker's Mark under my shirt. After landing in the sand, Lou came over, we shook hands and hugged it up as we finished the pact made 40 years ago.

**Skip Kniley, 3/319<sup>th</sup>**



**Louie and Skip ready to keep a promise.**



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### ~ Good Thinking G.I. ~



After the **Battle of the Slopes**, 22 June 67, we of C/2/503d searched the area for mass graves, weapons and any sign of which way the NVA went after the Battle.

**Wild Bill** Sometime during all this **Roger Dick** comes to me and says he is going to a newly formed Recon Squad that will bust point every day, do clearing patrols, etc.

*"The perk is we don't have to pull guard duty on the perimeter at night,"* said Roger. I replied, *"Let me get this straight. You are going to carry a radio on point every day, and do all clearing patrols?"* Roger said, *"That's right."* I questioned him, *"I never figured you for suicide."* Roger said, *"What?"* I answered, *"That's some good thinking GI."*

**Walter Bills, C/2/503d**

### ~ A Pain in the Azimuth ~



The two G.I.'s on the left had to call in S-2 to figure out how to work the highly technical cell phone. L-R at Cocoa Beach reunion in '06 are A/2/503d troopers Andy Russel and Dale Olson, with Ray Russel helping the two lost souls.

## THE LAST DOUGHBOY

America's last surviving World War I veteran, **Frank Buckles** turned 109 years old on February 1, 2010.  
*FloridaToday*

## ~ Song Be River Crossing ~

Don't know if you can use this news clipping or not. Tried looking for the photo on the net and found it. In the foreground is me, behind me is **SSgt Vincent Card** (out of Montana I think) and behind him I don't know (I'm terrible with names, wouldn't know my own if it wasn't on the front of my work shirt to remind me). Song Be was billed as the "*Largest River Crossing/ Assault Since WWII.*" Airborne!

Alton Turner, A/2/503d



**Caption:** "Paratroopers of A Co., 2d Bn., 503d Inf. of the 173d Airborne Brigade leave their mark on War Zone D in Vietnam as they finish patrolling the remains of a Viet Cong harbor on the Song Be River. The paratroopers made an amphibious assault on the VC port and after overrunning the position made a three-day push deep into the zone. The paratroopers left the patch and markings on the VC tree as a reminder that the victors were of the 173d. (USA Photo by PFC L. Paul Epley)."

## INCOMING!!

First time I received your newsletter though I was not in the 2/503d. I really enjoyed it and saw some names I remember. We Support Battalion guys got to know troopers in all units.

Pages 15 and 16 (December newsletter) shoulder sleeve insignias of airborne units needs to have the "**Golden Talon**" added. It's the patch of the 17<sup>th</sup> Airborne Div. that saw combat in WWII, also, the First Airborne Army patch, also WWII. **Steve Skolochenko, 173d Spt Bn**

Someone once told us, Sky Soldiers of the 2d Bn try **harder**, so here you go brother. Thanks Steve! Ed.



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## 17<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division (United States)



By William Tom

The motto of the 17th Airborne Division is "**THUNDER FROM HEAVEN**". It was activated 15 April 1943, and deactivated in 16 Sept 1945. It had participated in 65 days of combat at the Battle of the Bulge and in Operation Varsity, the two major battles towards the end of the war in Europe. The Division suffered 6,292 casualties which equated to 65 per day of combat, which was double the casualty rates suffered by the other airborne divisions that were in combat for longer periods. Our Commanding General was **Major General William M. Miley**, a pioneer paratrooper, who assumed command of the 17th Airborne from activation until deactivation. It left for overseas duty on 17 August 1944, arriving in England 26 Aug 1944, and entering combat on Christmas Day 1944, in what was to be the most severe winter on the European Continent.



MG Miley



17<sup>th</sup> Airborne in the Ardennes





The lightly armed airborne troops were pitted against several Panzer Armies, fighting with great valor and success under abominable conditions of snow, ice and fog, freezing winds, with poor intelligence, no air cover and insufficient artillery support against tanks. The component units were the 513th PIR, 193rd GIR, 194th GIR, 507th PIR, 680th & 681st GFA, 464th & 466th PFA, 139th Engr, 155th AA, 224th Med, 517th Sig, 717th Ord, 411 QM, 17th PM & HQ Spec. troops, with 517th PIR attached. The 17th Airborne was awarded four Congressional Medals of Honor, more than any other airborne division in WW2. We honor **S/Sgt Isadore S. Jachman** (513th), **T/Sgt Clinton M. Hedrick**, (194th), **Pvt George J. Peters** (507th) and **Pvt Stuart S. Stryker** (513th). All were awarded posthumously.

Our Division was attached to **General Patton's** Third Army in the attack against the German Panzers to help relieve the beleaguered 101st Airborne trapped in Bastogne. The Germans were driven back to the Our River before the 17th Airborne was relieved to regroup for the upcoming Operation Varsity on 24 March 1945. In a joint operation by the First Airborne Army, the 17th Airborne and the British 6th Airborne Divisions, with a combined force of 17,000 men, were dropped into Germany across the Rhine River near Wesel. The Germans had 85,000 SS and Paratroops to defend the drop and landing zones. The stream of drop planes and double-towed gliders extended from horizon to horizon, requiring over two hours to pass one point. The first day casualty rate at Operation Varsity was 1070 British and US troopers, exceeding the first day casualties at Normandy and Arnheim. The airborne troops quickly encircled the industrial Ruhr to hasten the war's end on VE-Day in 8 May 1945. The 17th Airborne was disbanded with many of its members going to the 82nd Airborne for Occupation duties in Berlin and some to the 101st Airborne slated for the Pacific War for the invasion of Japan.

***Airborne Brothers!***

### **Update on 173d Memorial** **From 1<sup>st</sup> Bat Guy Craig Ford, 1/503d**

Just got these pictures of the site work being done on the memorial. Thought you would like to see them. Share them with everyone. Many years in the making and it is finally happening. Below is a list of what the pictures are:



**1<sup>st</sup> Bat Guy**

TL: Drainage pipe being installed at Memorial Site

TR: Site with survey makers and Drainage pipe



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BL: Memorial site looking toward NIF

BR: Construction gate and road to Memorial Site off Fort Benning Boulevard

(Note: On a return trip to Vietnam in 2001, Craig joined 6 Sky Soldiers of the 2/503d during that reinvansion. They fondly nicknamed him *1<sup>st</sup> Bat Guy*, and he's proudly used the name ever since. Yes, Craig, my donation is coming. Ed).



**Our Memorial at Fort Benning, GA**



Help us build the memorial to all who have served in the 173d Airborne Brigade. Please make your tax deductible donation check payable to **173d Airborne Brigade Memorial**, and mail to:

**Col. Ken Smith (Ret)**  
**1160 Laked Royal, Louisburg, NC 27549**



OUR MISSION -- FACILITATE THE  
TRANSPORTATION OF SKY  
SOLDIERS TO THE MEMORIAL  
DEDICATION & SUPPORT THE MOST  
MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE POSSIBLE  
FOR OUR SKY SOLDIERS!!

By Terry Mogdlin, 4/503d

The **Country Inn and Suites**, 1720 Fountain Court, Columbus, GA 31904, will be the Rally Point for those members of the **2/503d** who wish to stay at the same hotel with their battalion buddies for the Dedication of the **173d National Memorial** at 10 AM June 1, 2010. The room rates are \$88. for single or double, and \$90. for a suite (of which there are just 5) plus tax. These rates are good for just the 31st of May and 1st of June. There is a big soccer tournament just before our contingent arrives and a smaller one just after so it is highly unlikely rooms will be available on these shoulder nights.

This is definitely a nice hotel, recently renovated. The 3d and 4<sup>th</sup> Battalions will be staying at hotels within the same zip code. There is no obligation for attendees to book rooms at any particular hotel. The Country Inn will provide free transportation to and back from the Memorial Dedication for guests booking 30 days in advance.



The hotel's phone number is **706-660-1880**. Their email is [cx\\_clbs@countryinns.com](mailto:cx_clbs@countryinns.com). If you call in the reservation, just indicate you are part of the **173d Airborne Group**. If you register through the Internet, go to <http://www.countryinns.com/hotels/gacolumb> and after you select your dates to stay, in finding your rate you will see a link for "More Rates." Go there and put in the Promotional ID **173AIR**.



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If this hotel is filled (as I expect it will be), we have other hotels in that area for more 2d Bat Sky Soldiers.

There will likely be a tour of Fort Benning on June 1, after the Dedication. Details will appear in a future issue of this newsletter.



In the interest of transparency, as I have indicated throughout, I am receiving no money whatsoever from this initiative, but my travel planner colleague, Mark Zeller, is receiving 10% commission on the hotel room nights taken. We have already spent a lot of time on this and Mark will likely spend really significant time on this over the next four months because it has so many moving parts. Believe me, the money will be hard-earned and will help offset some of his out-of-pocket expenses.

We are not part of the Memorial Foundation or the Association, but we have received the goodwill and cooperation of both. Mistakes made, if any, are ours alone....the *Transportation Memorial Dedication Group*.

If you have any questions, or guys with other battalions needing hotel information, please email me at [Terry.Modglin@Gmail.com](mailto:Terry.Modglin@Gmail.com) or call me at **202-270-3083**.

*Airborne!* Terry Modglin, 4/503d

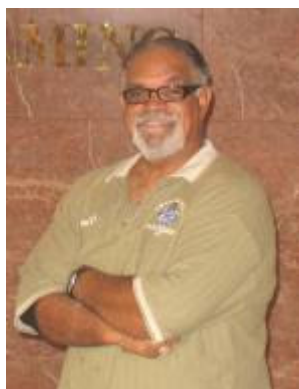
(This notice appears in our newsletter as a courtesy to those working in support of the *173d National Memorial*. This newsletter is not affiliated with the *National Memorial*, the *Transportation Group* or the *173d Association* in any way. In fact, we ain't affiliated with nobody! Ed).

# YOU CAN RETURN

By Wambi Cook, A/2/503d

It's been one year since we returned from our 10-day Vietnam tour. The genesis took shape at the Rochester reunion. At first it looked as if we'd have at least a 10 person group. Alas, hopefuls dropped-out for various and sundry reasons ever so slowly. So I, **Les Fuller**, who served with me in A Company (2/27-2/68), his beautiful wife **Billie**, and **Hiram Diaz**

(3rd Batt, 68-69) made up the final contingent. I think Les put it best: This would be the in-country R&R we only dreamed about 41 years ago.



**Wambi**



**Les**

We booked our tour through a stateside travel agency who coordinated the final details in Vietnam with a local tour entity. Our itinerary was developed by the three of us. We chose specific venues where we wanted to visit in country and we left it up the agencies to enhance our trip as they saw fit. We flew Singapore Airlines, which is perennially rated the number one international carrier in the world. The flight to **Ho Chi Minh City** was via Singapore and Taipei, China (one hour layovers). Actual flight time was almost 23 hours. The in-flight services throughout the flight were superior. The in-flight menu was par excellent which included an unlimited selection of beverage options both *soft* and *hard*. Additional amenities included first rate video/audio selections which made the long flight time almost inconsequential.



**Wambi, Les & Hiram in front of U.S. Consulate, in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City)**



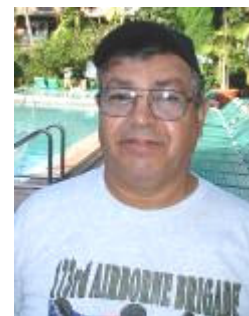
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We were met at the *new* Tan Son Nhut airport by our guides. Their English skills were commendable. Our mode of travel was a Mercedes van that seated all of us comfortably. The air conditioning never let us down, thank goodness. Monsoon season had yet to set in, but the temps remained in the 90s and the humidity could only be described as tolerable.

A brief overview of our itinerary: Ho Chi Minh City (we still referred to it as Saigon as do many of the citizenry). Our hotel accommodations were four star or higher throughout. The Duxton Hotel was our Saigon laager site. Only breakfast was included in our package. This allowed us to venture out and seek a wide variety of indigenous cuisine. We'd spent 12 months eating C-rations and LRRP meals 40+ year ago --- most of us line grunts had little opportunity to partake of the native fare, and this time around we took full advantage. Suffice it to say, we tried any and everything, and in some cases, dishes that in hindsight are still a mystery to this day. However, I can guaranty you that no meal consisted of canine. We did make certain that bottled water was always available. I'm pleased to report; none of us suffered any type of Asian "revenge."

Our first couple days took us first to Tay Ninh province where we visited the Black Virgin Mt. in Nui Ba Den. A modern popular cable car takes you over a mile two hours to walk to the top where one can visit several Buddhist shrines. Had we been more adventurous (read stupid), we could have descended via a bobsled-type vehicle. Afterward, we were welcomed by members of the Cao Dai (multi denominational) religious order in their world famous Holy City compound. Next we visited Long Binh, Bien Hoa, Thu Duc and Di An. None of these venues were recognizable especially Bien Hoa, where our old base camp is now off-limits to civilians and we were forbidden to even take photos of the exterior.



**Hiram**

We flew north to the Central Highlands out of *old* Tan Son Nhut Airport. The hour plus flight by prop was uneventful until the year's first hellacious storm hit just before landing.

(Continued...)





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**Wambi, Hiram & Les standing on what years before had been the airstrip at Dak To**

I was compelled to personally thank the entire flight crew for the smooth landing. Our new guides drove us from Pleiku Airport to Buon Ma Thout (pronounced Boo ma To). We set in for two days at Lak Lake Resort where from this base we began this juncture of our trip by first visiting the ethnic minority Mnong Village who oversaw our half mile elephant ride across Lak Lake to another indigenous ethnic village. We accepted an offer to indulge ourselves of their local homemade rice wine--an acquired taste, for most outsiders. FYI; there are over 53 ethnic minorities in Vietnam. There is some commonality in their foods and religious practices, however, most speak their own dialects, and do not read/write the national language. They staunchly retain other unique cultural practices e.g., matriarchal hierarchy. Yes, the females run the show. The majority of these villages looked as they did back in the 60s, so it took us aback when we would come across a family size *long house* with an attached satellite dish yet no inside plumbing.

### **Today Uncle Ho stands guard over Ho Chi Minh City.**

From Buon Ma Thout, we drove six hours to Kon Tum Province along Highway 14. Our Highlands stops included the Jarai and Bahnar villages, Bien Ho (Sea Lake) which sits on top of a dormant volcano, Minh Thanh Pagoda and a large tea plantation. Phu Cuong Waterfalls was a delight. Both Billie and Les maneuvered down a 70



degree mud-trail to the bottom. Hiram and I thought the wiser, and chose to photograph them from atop. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that Billie was the perfect travel companion. Not once did I hear a complaint or criticism from Billie about "untenable" conditions. She did as we did, and in some cases, better. I only bring this up because if you're better half is interested in accompanying you on a future visit, let Billie be your example.



**Rubber tree plantation in Vietnam.**

Several personal highlights of the trip: Standing on the Dak To airstrips (there were two) with my comrades brought on a rush of emotions for all of us. Shrapnel fragments were still plentiful. Viewing the sight where the **Battle of the Slopes** took place was unnerving, to say the least. At another elevation, we could easily identify the Cambodian mountain skyline. As a survivor of that event, I realized, only then, how close our lines on the airstrips were to the actual battle site. On a sandbank at the foot of the Poko River, one can see the *Slopes* quite clearly. Evidence of the barrage of air and artillery that day 41 years earlier has left the Slopes barren and easily identifiable. I recall vividly every aspect of that fateful day. Not a day passes without some thoughts of 6/22/67 invading my inner soul. I also can only imagine how our sister elements (Bravo & Charlie companies) must have felt when their efforts to come to our aid were stymied by a determined crack NVA regiment. Perhaps I'll share more on this event in a later issue, perhaps.

Deforestation is a fact of life countrywide. Logging trucks clog the roads from Saigon to Hanoi, our guides informed us. The sounds of power saws fill the air in the remotest of jungle regions. Nonetheless, VN is the world's number 2 exporter of rice (Thailand No.1).



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### The spoils of war at the Saigon War Remnants Museum

We also happened upon an American economic fact-finding contingent of representatives from the US Embassy, Hanoi and the US Consulate, Saigon. We billeted in the same Kon Tum and Pleiku hotels. If you can believe it, we met them only hours after they'd returned from the day's journey to none other than the site of **Hill 875**. Their Vietnamese escorts insisted on them visiting this battlefield. They admitted to their ignorance surrounding this plot of land so near the Cambodian border. They (Americans) didn't realize the significance of the day's events until we gave them a short synopsis on how important it remains within the Brigade's legacy. Les and I both were but a couple dozen from Alpha who escaped this horrendous encounter November 1967. Had we met them sooner, there was a decent chance that we could have accompanied them that day. I made sure to get their emails and was also introduced to their guide who they were certain, if anyone, might get an outsider on to Hill 875 with expediency.

We were *advised* by several frequent post-war Nam vet trekkers that we should make ourselves as inconspicuous (Americans) as humanly possible i.e. don't present ourselves as typical "ugly Americans." Moreover, by no means wear any clothing that identifies us as former "GIs." (Caps, t-shirts etc.). We didn't follow this particular admonition. We dressed comfortably and several items in our wardrobes were proudly adorned with Herd logos/colors.

One caveat we did follow; be diligent in crossing Saigon's streets. Ten million people and two million motor bikes. Need I say more. Over 75% of VN population was born after the war. The Vietnamese government may profess to follow strong socialist/communist doctrines, but for all intents and purposes, the influence of a USA-modeled capitalistic society permeates all aspects of this country's very existence. The Vietnamese people, for the most part, were warm and inviting to all visitors regardless of their race, religion or ideologies, and from all outside appearances, seem to harbor no ill-will towards foreigners, particularly Americans. Of course when a large portion of their GNP is based on tourism dollars, the bottom line is always the *Almighty* \$\$ supersedes most prejudices.

While visiting the Saigon War Remnants Museum, I was shocked beyond belief when I discovered my photo among several displayed from Hill 875. The photo depicts three of us ascending the Hill of which I have no recollection. I was speechless. Thanks only to both Les and Hiram do I have a photo from that day. This photo can be found on **The Virtual Wall CMH/Hill 875** website. I have since been in contact with the French photo journalist's estate that captured this image. **Gilles Caron** was MIA in Cambodia in 1970. The executor of his foundation flew to my home in California last August to ask if I would take part in a documentary on Mr. Caron's life. The filmed interview is tentatively scheduled for early April.

There have been dozens of Herd bros. who ventured back to Vietnam long before us. When I informed family and friends about our trip the response was unequivocally supportive, however, I heard it more than once from more than a few VN vets that they would never set foot in Nam regardless of how things have changed.

It has taken me a great while, but I finally came to terms with that segment of my life. Most of my demons have long since been exorcised. How fortunate I am to have had the opportunity to reflect on the place and time of my *utmost discontent*, and emerge a better person in spite of it. I dedicate these musing to the Bros. of the 173d Airborne Brigade who paid the ultimate price in order that I and so many others might RETURN.

Wambi Cook, A/2/503d, 2/67-2/68

[Wambicook@aol.com](mailto:Wambicook@aol.com)





## WHY WE JUMP?



Herman the Paratrooper at 2/503d reunion in Cocoa Beach, FL, loaned to us by Jeff Mazer. Poor Herman, his pack was really a plastic ashtray, but the girls loved him.

**RECENTLY A VIDEO CIRCULATED ON THE NET OF A JUMP.** Of course, I had to needle our favorite jump-master (**LTC Roy Lombardo**). Perhaps I should have said, why *did* we jump? For some, it had to be for the thrill, kind of like skydiving or bungee jumping. For some, perhaps it was money. Back when a private made \$68.00 a month, \$55.00 a month to jump was a huge percentage. This also existed with officers. In 1965, base pay for a second lieutenant was \$222.00 per month and jump pay was \$110.00. Over 50 % ! For some of us it was a desire to be associated with the best practitioners of the profession. I fell into the latter group. Once I decided to be a soldier, I wanted to part of the best organization available. I knew that the USA would get more involved in Vietnam and it was obvious that the 173d would be the first to enter combat. The unit was virtually unknown outside of airborne circles. I was on orders for Korea and wrote OPO begging to have my orders changed to the 173d. I figured, that between the experienced NCOs and the pick of the litter officers, my chances for survival were at their best. Little did I know that I would be joining the most highly decorated unit of the Vietnam war. *Why did you volunteer?* My most common response, that I polished while attending the Roy Lombardo school of



Jim



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grace, good manners and tact, when asked by some asshole who usually gives a wink and nod to his buddies is, *"It has been my experience that folks that ask that question usually lack the intellect to grasp the tactical concept or the balls to execute the concept"*. This seems to stifle conversation.

**Jim Robinson, B/2/503d, '65-'66**



"Bills"

And the rest is history. **Walter Bills, C/2/503d, '67-'68**

**I WAS DRAFTED INTO THE SERVICE** 16 Sept 66. My 1<sup>st</sup> month's pay was \$77.00. Sometime around the third week of Basic Training they held an orientation to recruit personnel into the Airborne. They said we would be compensated an additional \$55 a month. I said *"Now I know what I'm going to be!"*

**IN JUNE OF 1961**, I graduated from East Bremerton High School. Bremerton was a Navy town, a Blue-Jacket town in Washington. My father had served in World War II as a personal liaison officer to Field Marshal Montgomery for the D-Day invasion and beyond, and his den was a temple adorned with memorabilia fit for a museum. Autographed photos of Kings, Lords, Generals, Prime Ministers, Princes, Field Marshals.... even a cigar wrapper from a cigar given to him by Winston Churchill when the my father crossed the Rhine River with him.



From the landings on D-Day "The Major" progressed to full colonel in the Army Reserves, and was instrumental in securing an appointment to West Point for my older brother, Court. Court graduated from West Point in 1959. Court later served as the Battery Commander of Charlie Battery of the 319th Artillery, 173d Airborne, 1966-67.

Gary

When I graduated from high school in 1961, Court was in charge of the third week, Jump Week, for the Airborne School at Fort Bragg. This is where my Airborne story started. The family took a vacation to see Court and his bride and we spent two weeks at Fort Bragg. Court decided to slide his younger brother into the Airborne School's first week of training with the next class and I reported to formation in section #1 in fatigues stripped of any rank.

It was August... it was hot... and holy shit those Black Hats were demented. I survived the training in splendid form until Thursday when the lead Black Hat figured out who the hell I was and set upon me...Thursday and Friday of that week were not nice. Court and my father, "The Major", were laughing as you might know.

On the following Saturday morning, without "The Major's" knowledge, Court took me out to the Sport Parachute Club, and, with the biggest sergeant I had ever seen as a jump master, I stepped out on the wheel cover of a Piper Tri-Pacer and Hit-the-Silk. "The Major" was on the ground with a camera which had very little focus. *Stand in the Door.*

**Captain Gary Prisk, C/D/2/503d, '67-'68**

### THERE IS NOT ONE REASON FOR ME...1)

I wanted to see if I could not just jump out of a plane, but also and maybe, even more so, to see if I could make it through the training. 2) because of the rep of being a U. S. Paratrooper....*"One of America's Best"* in WWII; and last but not least... 3) I wanted to join a Sky Diving Club when I was 17 and was away at school and needed my dad's written permission to join the club.....dad said *"Hell no, I won't sign for you to do that....no kid of mine is going to jump out of any damn plane!!"* So the army gave me the last laugh, because I showed him. lol For better or for worse...those were my reasons.

**Gary "Buzz" Cox, C/D/2/503d, '67-'68**



**Buzz**

**I ENTERED JUMP SCHOOL IN 1952**, at 17 years old. Why? Because the girls thought paratroopers were cool. Now here we are, 58 years later, the girls go to jump school and they are way cooler than we were.

**Ed Privette, HHC/2/503d, '67/'68**



**Larry**

**WHEN I ENLISTED** the recruiter rattled off all the "good jobs" I could sign up for: To be a cook, mechanic, etc. I told him I just want to be an infantry paratrooper. He looked at me dumbfounded and said, *"OK, but you're nuts."* I probably should have been a medic because I had worked

the previous two years as a hospital orderly. Had I pursued that path, though, there's a good chance I wouldn't have lived to tell about it, based on what our 173d medics had to go through.

**Larry Paladino, B/2/503d, '65-'66**

**I BECAME A PARATROOPER** because of the movie *Fathom* with Raquel Welch. Figured if babes like that jumped I better learn..haha! And, of course, because of



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the \$55. per month which, when you added it to the \$89. per month for being a Private, nearly doubled my salary.

**Jim Chieco, E/2/503d, '69-'70**

**WHY I BECAME A PARATROOPER?** Adventure.. glamour...the uniform...Hollywood. I wanted to join Special Forces. My recruiter told me that if I wanted to be Special Forces I would have to be Airborne qualified so I said, *sign me up!* He said that most of the guys in SF came out of the Infantry so I said, *sign me up!* However he didn't say anything about how old I had to be to get into SF. I was 18 and the minimum age at that time was 21. Shortly after I found out that all was not going to be as I had assumed it would be, my love affair with the Army waned.

Looking back though, I know that I did, unwittingly, make the right choice. I have had the rare privilege of being in the company of brave soldiers in the *Valley of the Shadow*.

I wouldn't want to do it again, but I sure wouldn't want to have missed it. Now I know to look before I jump, but then I was just 18, and gosh that was a cool uniform.

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



**Jim**

**MY BEST FRIEND** and next door neighbor, who is a year older, joined the army; went to OCS; became a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lewy and came home after OCS in 1966 to tell me about the outside world. He said,

*"You must join the army; you must go Infantry, and you must go airborne. This is the ultimate role in the army."*

He was my friend so I followed his advice.

A year later while mired in Dak To I received a letter from my friend. It was the first communication from him since my aforementioned conversation.

He said, and I paraphrase: *"I became a communications officer and am stationed outside of Houston, Texas. The officers barracks are full so we are being housed in a local motel off base where the Eastern Airlines stewardesses stay. Today is Sunday and we always have a beer and bikini party. It is awful warm today incidentally. Could not go into infantry or airborne because I am color blind."* I still hate the sonofabitch!

**Roger Dick, C/2/503d, '67-'68**



**Roger**



**AT THE RIPE OLD AGE OF SEVEN** or eight I was looking through a comic book and it had Paratroopers coming from the sky wearing those old jump boots, the brown ones with the two buckles on the flap at the top of the boot. I pestered my dad until he bought me a pair and I wore those boots everywhere. By the time I outgrew them, there wasn't much boot left.

My first jump was from the garage roof. The umbrella didn't even slow me down. The bed sheet inflated but didn't work either. I jumped from anything I could get to the top of. My mother was sick and bedridden, so my big sister was in charge of the household. She jumped right along with me. As I grew older the desire to jump from an airplane never went away. I got my chance to jump by going *Airborne All the Way*.



**Jerry**

**Jerry Wiles, B/2/503d, '67**

**THERE WAS ONLY ONE REASON** for me to go Airborne: Base Army Private pay would not cover my car payment. I had just bought a new 1963 Ford Fairlane 500 right before I got drafted. 289 Hi- Performance Engine, Four on the Floor, Positraction, Cheater Slicks. Always on the verge of losing my license. Dad told me, *"Dale, I can't afford to make the payments, so we will need to sell it."* Then I heard of "Jump Pay"! That was the answer! I loved and still wish I had that car.



**Dale**

Jump pay in the 60's was right there when I needed it to be. I did have one major hardship. I am not a jock. Looking at me, you can see that I have never been athletic. But I joined anyway, thinking I was going to die from exhaustion during basic and AIT. Then, through Jump School, I just thought I was dead.

In Basic, Sgt. Julian, only came up to my shoulders. But when we had to double-time, with a pack, out to some range somewhere, I was **ALWAYS** a long way behind my platoon, with old Sgt. Julian running right beside me, **BACKWARDS!** Now that is **JUST WRONG!**

He would tell me while we were running down the road, *"Olson, your doing fine, but if you give up and stop, YOUR MINE. I WILL KICK YOUR ASS!"* No doubt back in the day, he could or would have!

Well, I managed to survive Jump School. How I passed I don't know. I am still surprised I did not die on that first jump. Once the Jump Master said, *"Stand Up!"* I don't remember walking. I WAS PUSHED OUT THE



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**DOOR BY THE GUY BEHIND ME!** You NEVER jump with someone gung ho, behind you. That should be the first rule they teach at Jump School. They should just let all the eager beavers to jump out of separate planes.

Then, I no more than got Jump Qualified and assigned to A Company, 2/503rd and my dad **WENT AHEAD AND SOLD THAT CAR ANYWAY!** He used the money to buy my sister a new "CORVAIR". That's not a car, it was something a knuckle head thought up. But dad had a different reason. He hated that Red Ford. He would not ride in it, much less drive it.

So, when I found out dad sold my prize car, they started coming to us to make pay jumps. But you know, when I got there to the Brigade in Sept. 65, the guys were doing some pay jumps and they would jump out the back of a cargo plane and **THEY WOULD JUMP AND FREE FALL AND COLLAPSE A SO CALLED BUDDY'S CHUTE.** Since my motivation factor, my car was out of the picture, I decided I would **NOT** jump. I was not going to jump with those nutso guys that came over from Okinawa. No way.

Well, finally before someone tried to order me to jump, they had decided that for some reason, there would be no required jumps, pay or not.



At some point between Sept. 65 and February 1966, when I stopped going out on missions, do you remember 2/503d was told that we would be sent out on a combat jump? I freaked out. I was a weapons platoon radio operator and RTO's not only jumped with their rifle and personal pack, but a big box with your radio packed inside it. You know when you get close to the ground, you pull the cord and let the box drop and then you "slip" away. Yeah, right! I would just fall on the box. there is no way I could have done that. I knew it, but the Army did not.

I no longer worried about Charlie trying to kill me, the Army was going to make short work of my life themselves. I even think of that now and the hair on the back of my neck stands up.

Well, you said short story. But there you have it from a reluctant jumper.

**Dale Olson, A/2/503d, '65-'66**



## I WANTED TO BE IN NAM

with gung ho soldiers, not an ordinary Leg. The jump pay and the adventure of the jump itself were attractive, along with the uniform (jump boots, bloused trousers, jump wings, and "C" cap), but probably the best reason was just before I was drafted, the 101st came to Detroit, fresh back from Nam, to squelch the riots of 1967, and they looked like they could kick ass.

If I was going to Nam, I would be a paratrooper!!!!

(Sgt.) Rich Whipple, HHC/2/503d, '68-'69



Rich

**WHY WE JUMP?** I decided to go to Jump School so I might have another two months of life. I figured I was going to die if I went to the Nam so by going to Jump School I would live a couple more months. What you see here in this news clipping is from the *Fort Bragg Paraglide* dated 24 July 69. The photo was taken after I got back from the Nam. I'm still surprised I am alive but I am suffering the consequences for surviving the Nam. I think I should have died instead of **Roger Kofeod**, yet a better man than myself died and I did not. God Bless,

Doc Bob Evalt, 2/503d



Newspaper clipping: "A paratrooper stands with his hands on his head so the jumpmaster behind him gets a better look at his equipment. The jumpmaster inspection is conducted before loading the plane for an airborne operation." Photo of Doc Bob Evalt, Ft. Bragg, NC, 1969.



Jack

**MY STANDARD ANSWER** to the question is: *It's the most fun you can have with your clothes on!*

Jack Schimpf, B/2/503d, '65-'66



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**HAVING TWO OLDER BROTHERS** who had gone Airborne before me, Rick with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Div., and Bob with the 101<sup>st</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> Special Forces, it would have been difficult and very dangerous entering that home as a Leg. Also, coming from the poor side of the tracks, that 55 bucks was a major consideration. Unfortunately, I later learned most or all of it would be spent on laundry, tailors, Brasso, jump boots and nylon stockings used to polish those boots. They tricked me!

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

**L-R: Smitty & buddy Don Quale** getting ready to blast in Fulda, Germany with the 509<sup>th</sup> Airborne in '68.



### WHY WE

### JUMP?

I had a scout master who had served in the 82d and jumped at Normandy and then a friend of my father's who was also a World War II paratrooper who gave me a set of his wings when I was about twelve. From then on I wanted to get my own set of wings and I enlisted in the Army right after high school. "Airborne Unassigned", it was an easy sell for the recruiter. I went to jump school at Fort Bragg in 1961, and ended up serving 12 of my twenty years on jump status. That first pair of wings I passed on to my son when he graduated from Jump School in 1986.

Joe Logan, B/2/503d

### THIS MAY SOUND CRAZY,

as I was and I still am afraid of heights, but wanted out of the Second Infantry Division, so I requested Ranger School, Jungle Training in Panama, and Airborne Training, in that ORDER. I figured I'd defeat my fear of heights prior to going Airborne. However, Airborne Training came through first, so I said, "THE HELL WITH IT, I'M A SOLDIER AND CAN DO IT!"

I had already sent my family back home to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to visit family while waiting to go to school.



Top Dresser



A few weeks later my wife called me and asked, what was this ABN on my return address, so I told her it stood for AIRBORNE, and I was to make my FIFTH JUMP THE NEXT DAY. She said....."WHAAAT!!

*I thought you were going to Ranger and Jungle Schools first?"* I told her that the Airborne School came open first and I was going to be reassigned to the Airborne School as an instructor and that I was very pleased and proud of myself for doing this, and proving to myself that I could. I honestly loved the Airborne assignment. I served with the 173d in RVN, and was reassigned to the 82nd at Fort Bragg. I then become a Leg....BOO!

**Jim (Top) Dresser, A/HHC/2/503d, '65-'66**

(Top: *Once Airborne, always Airborne.* Ed)

**IN APRIL AND MAY 1964** I was staring high school graduation in the face and didn't like what I saw. My grades weren't good enough to get into college and all the crap jobs around Manchester, NH didn't interest me. The Navy recruiter almost got me; not sure why I walked away. The Army recruiter asked me what I wanted; I told him I had heard about Vietnam and was interested in going (this was spring of '64, before Tonkin Gulf). He said it was all training and observers, "*You definitely don't want infantry,*" he said, "*The army needs commo guys.*" So I signed up for radio school (RTT). And he said airborne training would be a big plus - and there would be extra pay! So I said sign me up for jump school.

Oddly enough, I got everything I asked for in the Army. After Jump school in Jan. '65 I, and 4 other guys (all commo MOS) in our class of 300+, were ordered to the 173d on Okinawa. The rest were off to the 82nd at Fort Bragg. The 5 of us were dancing and yelling at out luck. It was a very happy day for me.



**Wayne**

So? The reason I went airborne? To get as far away from home as possible, experience exotic adventures and make some extra bucks.

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

**THE REASONS (PLURAL)** for joining "Airborne" and wanting to jump are....I have always taken on challenges and it held interest to me just to watch sport (free-fall guys) jumpers even before I was inducted into the Army. And, the extra \$\$ money held some interest to me at that time also. Looking back on it now, in jump school (Ft Benning), it taught mental alertness along with getting into the best



**Mike**



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physical shape I probably ever was or ever will be. Summing it up "*When the going gets tough, the tough get going Airborne All the Way!*" Blessings,

**Mike Guthrie, A/2/503d, '65-'66**



**Steve**

**REAL SIMPLE**, while in AIT, I saw a poster that said you could earn an extra \$55 a month jumping out of airplanes. A part in me saw Join the Airborne and double your pay. I think we were getting \$67 a month when I went in. Then I saw you could make another \$8.00 a month going overseas and there you have it.

**Steve Haber, C/2/503d, '65-'66**

**ALWAYS WANTED TO RIDE IN AN AIRPLANE.** My first jump was also my first ride in a plane, also first landing was at Saigon International Airport.

**Sim Nicholson (aka, Terry Sabree) C/2/503d**

**BACK IN 1952 OR 1953** my 1st cousin, John E. Lawson, came home to Toledo, Ohio on leave. He was a member of the 82nd Abn Div and he looked so sharp in his uniform, with his Ike Jacket and his bloused highly, highly shined brown Corcoran Jump Boots with white bootlaces, and I said then, "*I want to be an Paratrooper and live the life of danger,*" plus the extra jump pay didn't hurt.

They said God created all men equal, but that's not true; He also created Paratroopers. He put guts in them and made an Airborne Paratrooper. So when I entered the U.S. Army back in 1962, I went to Jump School and became prop-blast cool and C-ration fed, my heart runs off of BA 30's and my blood is OD, (a quote from **Ben Burks**), because I am Airborne! Hooah! And remained until I retired in 1982, and to this day. **1SG John W. Searcy Sr., HHC/2/503d, '65-'66**



**Top Searcy**

**WHY DID I JUMP?** Because once I was in there, they didn't leave me any choice! In fact I was never the "gung ho", daredevil type and had never, ever imagined to wind up jumping out of airplanes. Instead I was a more contemplative young man, preferring to admire plants and flowers (also of the two-legged, double-breasted kind), and talk gently with the lovely creatures. What made me join the paratroopers had a twofold reason. First, at that time (1964), unless the recruiters told me fairytales, two out of five airborne outfits were stationed in Germany. Being a German national, I figured in my naive innocence that the US Army would be intelligent enough to send me to Germany and thus take advantage of a native German speaker's skills. Well, I learned fast the Army is not intelligent. Secondly, as **Jim Robinson** has already pointed out, 55 bucks jump pay added the meager "sold" of a simple soldier is a paying argument. So, the decision was made to commit the ultimate folly: join those crazy guys and jump. But I never regretted my decision, because I got to meet some of the greatest guys in the world.



**Herbert**

**Herbert Murhammer, B/2/503d, '65-'66**

## *CIB*

*The rifleman fights without promise of either reward or relief. Behind every river there's another hill -- and behind that hill, another river.*

*After weeks or months in the line only a wound can offer him the comfort of safety, shelter, and a bed.*

*Those who are left to fight fight on, evading death but knowing that with each day of evasion they have exhausted one more chance for survival. Sooner or later, unless victory comes, this chase must end on the litter or in the grave.*

**Omar N. Bradley**  
**General of the Army**  
**"A Soldier's Story"**



## **YOU COMBAT JUMPERS**

*Operation Junction City* will be featured in the March issue of our newsletter which will be distributed in late February, the anniversary month of the 2/503d and attached units' combat jump. Please send in your recollections and photos from the operation for inclusion in this special coverage to [rto173d@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rto173d@cfl.rr.com) Airborne!! Ed.



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## **CHAPLAIN'S CORNER**

A very provocative Independent Film was reviewed this week at the Sundance Film Festival held in Salt Lake City, Utah. Robert Redford is the Chairman of the Sundance Independent Films Review, the largest in the United States.



**Rev. Mac**

The Independent film, *RESTREPO*, is the hard work of two adrenaline junky independent filmmakers, Tim Hetherington and Sebastian Junger who go to war with the 2/503d in Afghanistan in 2008.

National Geographic has bought into this documentary and it will be out on the NGC channel this coming summer. I am not sure when the documentary will be available on video, but I will let you know.

Please be aware that when we go into the pain of another, we go into our own pain. If you decide to view this documentary when it becomes available, consider doing it in the company of other veterans. Those graphic memories are still vividly etched in our subconscious minds just beneath the surface. There is nothing wrong with walking into our past, when the time is right.

My prayers are with you men as you explore the possibility of watching this documentary. It follows our brothers in a "new" war, but I am sure all the veterans from the 2/503d will identify with these men in Afghanistan.

I have included a RESTREPO link if it is legal to run. I will leave it up to our Gestapo editor, Lew Smith. Love you guys. **Rev Mac 173d Airborne Sniper, 4/503d**

*Ja Ja, I'll include it.* Gestapo Editor

[http://www.indiewire.com/article/sundance\\_10\\_film\\_making\\_in\\_afghanistans\\_deadliest\\_valley\\_restrepo](http://www.indiewire.com/article/sundance_10_film_making_in_afghanistans_deadliest_valley_restrepo)

## **173d Airborne Association**



If you haven't yet become a member of the Association, to join, contact Jim Bradley at this email address:

[webmaster@173rdairborne.com](mailto:webmaster@173rdairborne.com)





# VIETNAM VETS TAKE NOTICE

Thanks to Ranger Ron Thomas and former 2/503d trooper for sending this in. While we can't speak for the veracity of these statistics, and some data are dated, they are nonetheless, interesting. The report follows, all photos are 2/503d. Ed.



Nobody wants to play the Grim Reaper here, but statistically based fact, shows that time apparently is in short supply for Nam Vets. Nothing is written in stone; however, on average, these stats are quite convincing, and perhaps discomfoting to all who are affected.

On the bright side, in most scenarios, there can always be exceptions to all situations, and a certain percent will survive longer. Just who, and how many, is the unknown value...perhaps it is time to start on that "bucket list" that we never seem to have time for!

## Some Important Data and Statistics: Please read on...

In case you haven't been paying attention these past few decades after you returned from Vietnam, the clock has been ticking. The following are some statistics that are at once depressing yet, in another sense, should give one a sense of pride.

*"Of the 2,709,918 Americans who served in Vietnam; less than 850,000 are estimated to be alive today, with the youngest American Vietnam veteran's age approximated to be 54 years old."*

So, if you're alive and reading this, how does it feel to be among the last 1/3rd of all the U.S. Vets who served in Vietnam? Don't know about you, but kinda gives me the chills, considering this is the kind of information we are used to reading about WWII and Korean War vets.

So the last 14 years we are dying too fast, only a few will survive by 2015...if any.



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If true, 390 VN vets die a day, on average. So in 2190 days from today, you're lucky to be a Vietnam veteran alive..... in only 6 years.

These statistics were taken from a variety of sources to include: The *VFW Magazine*, the Public Information Office, and the *Forward Observer*,



## FOR YOUR INFORMATION, STATISTICS FOR INDIVIDUALS IN UNIFORM AND IN COUNTRY VIETNAM VETERANS:

- \* 9,087,000 military personnel served on active duty during the Vietnam Era (August 5, 1964 - May 7, 1975).
- \* 8,744,000 GIs were on active duty during the war (Aug 5, 1964-March 28, 1973).
- \* 2,709,918 Americans served in Vietnam, this number represents 9.7% of their generation.
- \* 3,403,100 (including 514,300 offshore) personnel served in the broader Southeast Asia Theater (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, flight crews based in Thailand, and sailors in adjacent South China Sea waters).
- \* 2,594,000 personnel served within the borders of South Vietnam (Jan. 1, 1965 - March 28, 1973). Another 50,000 men served in Vietnam between 1960 and 1964.
- \* Of the 2.6 million, between 1-1.6 million (40-60%) either fought in combat, provided close support or were at least fairly regularly exposed to enemy attack.
- \* 7,484 women (6,250 or 83.5% were nurses) served in Vietnam.
- \* Peak troop strength in Vietnam : 543,482 (April 30, 1968).

## CASUALTIES:

The first man to die in Vietnam was James Davis, in 1958. He was with the 509th Radio Research Station. Davis Station in Saigon was named for him.



**Robert Guy, A/2/503d**

- \* Hostile deaths: 47,378
- \* Non-hostile deaths: 10,800
- \* Total: 58,202 (includes men formerly classified as MIA and Mayaguez casualties). Men who have subsequently died of wounds account for the changing total.
- \* 8 nurses died -- 1 was KIA.
- \* 61% of the men killed were 21 or younger.
- \* 11,465 of those killed were younger than 20 years old. Of those killed, 17,539 were married.
- \* Average age of men killed: 23.1 years
- \* Enlisted: 50,274 22.37 years
- \* Officers: 6,598 28.43 years
- \* Warrants: 1,276 24.73 years
- \* E1: 525 20.34 years
- \* 11B MOS (Infantry): 18,465 22.55 years
- \* Five men killed in Vietnam were only 16 years old.
- \* The oldest man killed was 62 years old.
- \* Highest state death rate: West Virginia - 84.1% (national average 58.9% for every 100,000 males in 1970).
- \* Wounded: 303,704 -- 153,329 hospitalized + 150,375 injured requiring no hospital care.
- \* Severely disabled: 75,000 -- 23,214: 100% disabled: 5,283 lost limbs; 1,081 sustained multiple amputations.
- \* Amputation or crippling wounds to the lower extremities were 300% higher than in WWII and 70% higher than Korea.
- \* Multiple amputations occurred at the rate of 18.4% compared to 5.7% in WWII.
- \* Missing in Action: 2,338
- \* POWs: 766 (114 died in captivity)

As of January 15, 2004, there are 1,875 Americans still unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

#### **DRAFTEES VS. VOLUNTEERS:**

- \* 25% (648,500) of total forces in country were draftees. (66% of U.S. armed forces members were drafted during WWII).
- \* Draftees accounted for 30.4% (17,725) of combat deaths in Vietnam.
- \* Reservists killed: 5,977
- \* National Guard: 6,140 served: 101 died.



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Total draftees (1965 - 73): 1,728,344.

\* Actually served in Vietnam: 38% Marine Corps Draft: 42,633.

\* Last man drafted: June 30, 1973.

#### **RACE AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND:**

- \* 88.4% of the men who actually served in Vietnam were Caucasian; 10.6% (275,000) were black; 1% belonged to other races.
- \* 86.3% of the men who died in Vietnam were Caucasian (includes Hispanics).
- \* 12.5% (7,241) were black; 1.2% belonged to other races.
- \* 170,000 Hispanics served in Vietnam, 3,070 (5.2% of total) died there.
- \* 70% of enlisted men killed were of North-west European descent.
- \* 86.8% of the men who were killed as a result of hostile action were caucasian; 12.1% (5,711) were black; 1.1% belonged to other races.
- \* 14.6% (1,530) of non-combat deaths were among blacks.
- \* 34% of blacks who enlisted volunteered for the combat arms.
- \* Overall, blacks suffered 12.5% of the deaths in Vietnam at a time when the percentage of blacks of military age was 13.5% of the total population.
- \* Religion of Dead: Protestant -- 64.4%; Catholic -- 28.9%; other/none -- 6.7%



**Dick Eckert, 2/503d**

#### **SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS:**

- \* Vietnam veterans have a lower unemployment rate than the same non-vet age groups.
- \* Vietnam veterans' personal income exceeds that of our non-veteran age group by more than 18 percent.





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### INTERESTING CENSUS STATISTICS & THOSE TO CLAIM TO HAVE "BEEN THERE":

\* 1,713,823 of those who served in Vietnam were still alive as of August, 1995 (census figures).

\* During that same Census count, the number of Americans falsely claiming to have served in-country was 9,492,958.

\* As of the current Census taken during August, 2000, the surviving U.S. Vietnam Veteran population estimate is 1,002,511. This is hard to believe, losing nearly 711,000 between '95 and '00. That's 390 per day.

During this Census count, the number of Americans falsely claiming to have served in-country is 13,853,027. By this census, **FOUR OUT OF FIVE WHO CLAIM TO BE Vietnam vets are not.**

The Department of Defense Vietnam War Service Index officially provided by The War Library originally reported with errors that 2,709,918 U.S. military personnel as having served in-country. Corrections and confirmations to this erred index resulted in the addition of 358 U.S. military personnel confirmed to have served in Vietnam but not originally listed by the Department of Defense.

(All names are currently on file and accessible 24/7/365).

Isolated atrocities committed by American Soldiers produced torrents of outrage from anti-war critics and the news media while Communist atrocities were so common that they received hardly any media mention at all. The United States sought to minimize and prevent attacks on civilians while North Vietnam made attacks on civilians a centerpiece of its strategy. Americans who deliberately killed civilians received prison sentences while Communists who did so received commendations.



- \* 76% of the men sent to Vietnam were from lower middle/working class backgrounds.
- \* Three-fourths had family incomes above the poverty level; 50% were from middle income backgrounds.
- \* Some 23% of Vietnam vets had fathers with professional, managerial or technical occupations.
- \* 79% of the men who served in Vietnam had a high school education or better when they entered the military service.
- 63% of Korean War vets and only 45% of WWII vets had completed high school upon separation.
- \* Deaths by region per 100,000 of population: South -- 31%; West --29.9%; Midwest -- 28.4%; Northeast -- 23.5%.



### DRUG USAGE & CRIME:

- \* There is no difference in drug usage between Vietnam Veterans and non-Vietnam Veterans of the same age group. (Source: Veterans Administration Study).
- \* Vietnam Veterans are less likely to be in prison - only one-half of one percent of Vietnam Veterans have been jailed for crimes.
- \* 85% of Vietnam Veterans made successful transitions to civilian life.

### WINNING & LOSING:

- \* 82% of veterans who saw heavy combat strongly believe the war was lost because of lack of political will.
- \* Nearly 75% of the public agrees it was a failure of political will, not of arms.

### HONORABLE SERVICE:

- \* 97% of Vietnam-era veterans were honorably discharged.
- \* 91% of actual Vietnam War veterans and 90% of those who saw heavy combat are proud to have served their country.
- \* 74% say they would serve again, even knowing the outcome.
- \* 87% of the public now holds Vietnam veterans in high esteem.

## Snake Eyes! ~ Vietnam Style

**Michael (Mac) McMillan, 4/503d:**

But I heard that the cold you are enduring in Florida is killing off the Pythons and other tropical reptiles that you don't really need.



**Green Viper, VN**

**Jerry Wiles, 2/503d:** Pythons? I'll

never go to Florida again, unless it gets too cold here in TN, then I'll be down soon.

**George (Scotty) Colson 2/503d:** Burmese Pythons.

**Jerry:** They seem to have a bad attitude!



**Cobra, VN**

**Mac:** We had them in Viet Nam

Jerry.....we saw one that was over 8 feet once in Bein Dinh Province. The Highlands came right down to these lush green beautiful valleys teeming with wild-life and reptiles. Once we were working our way through thick shit with our NVA Chieu-Hoi on point. We were practically doubled over, sweating like hell....you guys have been there.

Our stocky little NVA friend ran by me like a little wide-eyed, mumbling rat....minus his ruck, he headed toward the rear. I had never seen him show fear before. The Slack was doing the best "move it out" job in reverse I had ever seen....with weapon pointed up the trail.

When he got to me he just said: *"It's a cobra and it's standing up in the middle of the trail!"* The snake had looked the little gook right in the eyes and sprayed at him. I think we needed to back-up real quick. And we did!

The Slack tried to go around me so I blocked him offering some scared advice: *"You're fucking rear-security now and don't try to go around me again, and I mean it!"*

**Lew (Smitty) Smith, 2/503d:** During Marauder in Jan. '66, we had finally beat back the VC and that afternoon we moved into what had been their line during the battle, all bombed to shit. We were napping along the trees when the guy next to me jumped into the air making Jerry's *EEK!* sound. He had been sleeping next to a giant, dead python.

Probably told you about the kid right behind me who died from a snake bite crossing a stream. For over 30 years I tho't he had drowned. When **Bill Vose, Gus Vendetti** and I went back to VN in '05 and into the "D" Zone jungle, we found some snake holes with eggs, but saw no snakes. Spooky, untrustworthy, slimy little creatures aren't they? So are the snakes.



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(Cont'd) Scotty might remember this from when we were there together on his first tour. We'd take a scorpion and a mouse and put them in a large can to duke it out. This was before Armed Forces Radio.

**Jerry:** There were always snakes around. After a while I got tired of looking for them. Once I nearly got bit. I got into it with a little brown snake that came out of bamboo we were cutting. Had to kill the little bastard. He tried to bite everyone around him. I was mad as hell and wasn't going to take it anymore.

**Bob (Doc) Evalt, 2/503d:** I had a Bamboo Viper come at me while walking across a rice paddy dike. I didn't see it but one of our squad leaders did. All I saw were bullets skipping off the water to my right -- so I dove off the dike to my left. Well you know how the rice paddies were, 4" of water 3" of mud. Even though my ears were covered with water I could hear the rest of the platoon laughing saying, *"Look at Doc!"* I decided it was safe to come out of my opossum position. I washed the mud off of my face and the guy behind me said, *"So-and-So saved your life."* There, 3' on the right side of the dike from me, that squad leader had clipped the back side off that little bastard's heart-shaped head. It was a beautiful greenish yellow. You ought to see a Cobra swim through elephant grass at about the 4' level. It comes on you so fast you don't have time to pull a trigger. Pythons sound like VC sneaking up on you in a rice paddy.

**Ed Privette, 2/503d:** I was helping my platoon SGT (**Hatcher**) fill sand bags. When we finished I picked up my shirt and a damn bamboo viper was in the sleeve. Scared the shit out of me.

**Bob (007) Fleming, 2/503d:** I was still in A Company at the time, at Dak To. We were walking thru some pretty dense growth. I had my radio handset in my left hand and my 16 in my right with my arm resting on one of my ammo pouches. Something went past my face and hit my right arm. My sleeves were rolled up at the time. I looked down and it was a bamboo viper. I jerked my right arm out to the side and jumped away from the spot I was in, yelling *"Snake!"* My platoon medic, **Dennis Barbato**, was right behind me carrying a D handle shovel. He cut the little fucker in half with the shovel. I know what you mean Ed. Those are some scary assed snakes. We probably all have a snake story.



# A DAY IN AGENT ORANGE COUNTRY WAR ZONE D

By Court Prisk

Sometime in the late September 1966, the 173d Abn Brigade had received intelligence that a North



Vietnamese regiment had moved into War Zone D and was operating out of the area. Given that no one had lived in the Zone

since battles with the French in 1954, this was considered an escalation in the War.

The plan was for the 1st and 2nd Battalions 503rd Infantry to conduct an Air Assault on a Landing Zone deep in War Zone D. So deep into the Zone there was no Artillery support for the infantry unless at least a battery of Artillery was moved forward.

Someone at Brigade S-3 came up with the idea that airlifting a battery of Artillery into the Zone would be an obvious give away; likewise, it would take a minimum of an Infantry Company or two to secure a landing zone for an airlift. The Brigade S-3's solution was to have a land convoy into War Zone D; one battery of artillery, a cav troop, and an Engineering mine sweeper section could do the job of two infantry companies

Great solution except no one but the Viet Cong had been in War Zone D since the French had left 12 years earlier. Defoliant had been used extensively to uncover roads for aerial observation, without any consideration that US troops might

someday use those roads. The 173d had enjoyed having the Australian Infantry Battalion, a Battery of Australian 105mm Artillery, and a Battery of New Zealand 105mm Artillery up until August



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(eight weeks before the War Zone D operation). All 173d Brigade Infantry and Artillery units had deployed to Xuan Loc for the establishment of a new Australian HQ in July, then after combined operations with the 173d Airborne Brigade, the new established Australian Brigade, and the Korean Tiger Division, the majority of the 173d had returned to Bien Hoa in early September. After almost 80 days straight in the bush and in combat, and with three weeks before I was scheduled to change of command, I assumed I would not redeploy. Wrong!

I was, by virtue of date of rank, one of the senior Captains in command of a company size unit. Any time Charlie Battery deployed with a Task Force without a Bde command element, I became the Task Force Commander. Damn early one morning, our Task Force left Bien Hoa for a trip west and then north to enter War Zone D. Sometime around 0930, we crossed the line into the zone; about two miles in we lost the first Cavalry jeep and an Engineer mine sweeping team to a mine, three casualties (remember, no Med Evacs until we fired the Artillery Preparation schedule in another 75 minutes). We moved a Cavalry jeep from the center of the convoy to the front (took the 50 Cal Machine Gun off of the wrecked Jeep and told the Bn S2, my soon to be replacement, to police up the casualties in one of the 2 1/2 Ton Ammo Trucks before he let his portion of the Convoy proceed.

About five minutes later the convoy was halted by a four-foot wide and four foot deep trench across the road (too wide to bridge with materials on hand especially given the time). There was only one side of road to go around the trench. Engineers did their best to eliminate the mines, but we lost another two-man Engineer Team (both badly wounded) and the Fire Direction 3/4 Ton Truck, the Fire Direction Center-FDC-Tent, equipment,

and one of the two 2 1/2 Ton Trucks carrying ammunition (broken axle).

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By the time we got back on the road with two Cav Jeeps with 50 Caliber Machine Guns, one Engineer Minesweeper Squad, my jeep with the Jump FDC in the trailer, and the 3/4 Ton Trucks hauling the six guns and 37 rounds of Ammunition each, we had 30 minutes before time on target for preparation for the landing zone for the Infantry.

I estimated that it would take another 60 minutes to get the rest of the convoy and wounded around the trench. I called Black Jack 6 (Brigade Commander) and told him the situation. His response was, *"I'll brook no delays."*

I motioned for my driver to come up to where I was talking with the Cavalry Platoon Lieutenant. The driver backed up the jeep to swing around the vehicle in front of him and the passenger side tire of the trailer ran over a mine and blew the trailer straight up and then twisted it and the jeep into the ditch. By a miracle, the driver was not hurt in this slow motion fiasco, but the jump FDC, was scattered all over the place.

Short of time, we drove the jeeps and the guns across vegetation-denuded dirt into the center of an old town several clicks from the planned FOB. Having a fairly precise location for the center of battery (intersection in the town), I laid the guns with a lensatic compass placed on a rock (pointed them in the right direction) gave them an elevation in mils and a charge-the amount of propellant (all that because some old Captain at Fort Sill had made us memorize the 105 charges and elevations for 4,000 and 6,000 meters). I fudged between the elevations using a pencil to measure the distance by eyeball. We had four minutes before Time on Target. We fired on time and the rounds were two hundred meters long. The aerial observer gave me a correction and we fired 10 three-guns along the north side of the LZ and 10 three-guns along the west side of the Landing Zone.

By the time the tail end of the convoy arrived, with the WIAs, the LZ insertion had begun. Meanwhile my FDC Lieutenant had policed enough of the pieces of the FDC together (even parts of my gear from the trailer). By the time we got the first

fire mission from the Infantry, the FDC was functioning.

Shortly after that Medevacs arrived to evacuate nine wounded. Major Montel arrived with



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the first evacuation helicopter and left with the last one. I thought I had done something spectacular to fire a 120 round preparation using a compass, a pencil and stuff I'd learned seven years before. Montel wasn't impressed. He told me that he heard *"brook no delay"* comment and knew I would figure a way to fire the preparation on time, even if I had to stake the 105 (M-102) howitzers in a line on the road.



In this 1966 photo is Major Robert (Bob) Montel on my left. He was the Bn S-3 1st Battalion 319th Artillery on his obligatory Artillery assignment from the Special Forces. He had already served four years in Vietnam. Note that we were in the fatigues-to-BDU transition period; the towels, shorts, and tee-shirts were now OD, but Bob's brass and shoulder patch were still white and shiny. I am





in the new jungle boots, Bob still has the pre-1959 brown leather boots.

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# INTERVIEW WITH THE COMMANDER

**Colonel George E. Dexter (Ret), former battalion commander of the 2/503d in Okinawa and Vietnam, now retired and living in Albuquerque, NM, accepted our invitation to be interviewed for our newsletter.**



**Colonel George E. Dexter**

**Q: What were you doing at the time when you were given command of the 2/503d, and recognizing the unit might be deployed to a combat zone how did you approach preparing the battalion for war?**

**Dexter:** For two years prior to taking over 2/503 I was

serving with the 1st Special Forces Group on Okinawa as a company commander. Special Forces companies at that time were commanded by lieutenant colonels. The same unit is now called a battalion. Our job at the time was preparing Special Forces A Detachments for 6 months TDY assignments to Vietnam working with the Montgnards in patrolling remote areas near the Laos and Cambodian borders to cut down on infiltration of troops and supplies from the North. I got the chance to visit some of our detachments in Vietnam in the fall of 1963. I also spent several months in the planning of guerrilla warfare exercises in Korea in 1963 and Thailand in 1964, working with indigenous Special Forces units in both those countries.



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In May of '64 I was reassigned as Deputy Group Commander of the 1st Special Forces Group, and a month later I took over as acting group commander upon the departure of the previous commander and pending the arrival of his replacement two months later. Since I was a 2d lieutenant, it had been one of my ambitions to someday command an infantry battalion. However, in the mid-1950's the Army became concerned with the possibility of having to fight on a battlefield where atomic weapons were employed. Infantry units were reorganized into what were called battle groups, which were the equivalent of a small brigade with only five rifle companies. There were five battle groups in a "Pentomic Division," and they were commanded by colonels. The battalion was eliminated from the infantry organization. When I arrived on Okinawa in 1962, the infantry unit there was the 2d Battle Group of the 503d Airborne Infantry.

Within a few years of adopting the Pentomic Division, the Army realized that it was difficult to handle five subordinate maneuver units in a combat situation. Infantry was reorganized back to pretty much what had existed before, involving three subordinate maneuver units at division and brigade, and the battalion was resurrected. On Okinawa the 2/503 Battle Group became the 173d Airborne Brigade, but with only two infantry battalions, the 1st and 2d Airborne Battalions of the 503d Infantry.



L-R: Maj. Bob Carmichael, Sen. Scoop Jackson,  
LTC George Dexter



*Sky Soldier* on Taiwan, flying down, jumping in and  
operating cross country for about ten days.  
A/2/503d Okinawa, 1964



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On Okinawa I saw that this might be an opportunity for me to command an Airborne Infantry Battalion. After I had given up command of my Special Forces Company and took over as Deputy Group Commander of the 1st SFG,



I went to see General Williamson, commander of the 173d Airborne Brigade, and asked for command of one of his infantry battalions. It turned out that he was expecting a vacant command assignment in one of the battalions soon. However, my transfer was delayed by the early departure of the 1st SFG Commander and my having to take over as acting group commander pending arrival of his successor. Two weeks after his arrival I was released for transfer and took over 2/503 in mid-August 1964.

The 173d was the "Fire Brigade" for the Pacific Command at the time, and we were expected to pack up and go to any hot-spot in the theater and enter immediate combat if called upon. Therefore, we were constantly in training on Okinawa, though it was not a tropical island and the environment probably matched very little of what we would encounter if deployed. The brigade had participated in a month long training exercise in



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In addition to the training, the personnel records of the troops were kept up to date for deployment, and throughout the year we were getting upgraded equipment, such as the M-16 rifle. (However, we were still using Korean War vintage radios up until after we had been in Vietnam about two months). I must admit that all of these efforts to prepare us for combat were initiated and planned at brigade headquarters, and in the battalion we just carried them out.

### Q: What are some of your more memorable recollections of the time the battalion was stationed on Okinawa?

**Dexter:** My most memorable recollection of the time the battalion was stationed on Okinawa wasn't really on Okinawa, but rather it was Exercise Sky Soldier, the brigade exercise we conducted on Taiwan in October '64. It took us quite awhile to get there. We took off sometime after midnight in C-124 aircraft, the first time I had ever been in one. We knew it would be several hours before we jumped, so we allowed the troops to take off their parachutes and lie down on the floor of the planes and try to get some rest. The C-124's were quite large, and there was plenty of space to do that, but an aluminum floor is pretty hard to sleep on.



We got them up in plenty of time to don their chutes and have them inspected by the jumpmasters. We exited the aircraft in mid-morning to find that there was quite a wind on the DZ, and we were all dragged quite a way on landing. Luckily the ground was recently plowed and we did not suffer many jump casualties.



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The DZ wasn't very big, and the plan was to drop half the troops on the first pass, then circle around and jump the other half.

But because of the wind it was decided to scrub the second pass, and half the battalion flew back to Okinawa and had to go through the whole drill again the next night and morning. Without half the battalion, we couldn't start the ground phase of the exercise, so we all got a good night's sleep

### **2/503d jump into Taiwan**

The next day was beautiful with negligible winds. The jump came off without a hitch. We captured an initial objective and then the following day we loaded on trucks to be carried around Taipei, the biggest city on Taiwan, and were dropped off south of the city. The exercise continued for about a week. We covered a lot of ground, and the battalion maneuvered extremely well, but the terrain was fairly easy. When the exercise was over we assembled, got cleaned up after a week in the field, and flew back to Okinawa the next day.

On Okinawa it was a constant round of training, broken by Exercise Sky Soldier and Christmas break. Every month one of the six rifle companies in the brigade went on alert status and had to pack up all their equipment, mount their jeeps and trailers on heavy drop platforms, and be prepared to fly off and jump into some hot spot on a moment's notice. In January '65 the whole brigade was put on alert to go to South Vietnam. The situation in Vietnam was rapidly deteriorating. Up until then certain key US military and civilians in Vietnam were allowed to have their dependents in Saigon. It was decided to evacuate them all in January, and we were alerted to go to Saigon to provide security for the evacuation. However, after a couple of days of furious preparation, it was called off. I guess the ARVN was able to provide the security. Still, it was a pretty clear warning that we were going to Vietnam sometime in the not too distant future.



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In February '65 we underwent our Infantry Battalion Army Training Test. This consisted of a two-day exercise involving the preparation of a defensive position, a night withdrawal and a daylight attack. Then in March we had the Airborne battalion test, which involved simply a jump and the seizure of an initial objective. At that stage we were up to strength with people and had all the latest equipment (except that we were still using some Korean War vintage radios), and I would say that we were probably as fully prepared for combat as an airborne infantry battalion could be.

While we were stationed on Okinawa we were allowed one off-island leave. By the spring of '65 my wife Katy, I and our kids had been on Okinawa for 2 1/2 years and decided that we would take a leave to the Philippines where Katy and I had met in 1946. I applied for leave for the week before Easter when the kids would be on spring break from school. I had been on leave for one day and we were all set to fly out the next day to the Philippines when I got a call from the brigade adjutant notifying me that my leave was cancelled and that I was to report back to duty the following day. That's when I learned that the brigade was deploying to Vietnam on the 5th of May. Nobody was surprised at this. We went through about two weeks of frantic preparations but were not allowed to tell our families. Obviously, they all suspected we were headed to Vietnam.

On the evening of May 4 it was announced on the Armed Forces Radio on Okinawa that the 173d was being deployed to Vietnam, so the families all knew a few hours before we had to report to Naha AFB at midnight for loading our equipment and troops onto C-130's for the flight to Vietnam. At that time it was announced that this was to be a Temporary Change of Station, which meant that we were to return to Okinawa sometime in the near future and all the dependents could stay in their quarters on Okinawa for the time being. That lasted for about a month, when our status was changed to Permanent Change of Station, and all the dependents had to return to the US.

**Q: Upon arriving Vietnam in May 1965, what were some of the toughest challenges faced by you and the battalion?**

**Dexter:** Our biggest challenge on arrival on May 5th 1965, was adapting, first to the physical environment, then to the combat environment. On Okinawa April and May are about the two nicest months of the year.

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The humidity, which for the rest of the year is terrible, is way down and the temperature is delightful. In Vietnam April and May are the hottest and driest months of the year. We landed at Bien Hoa Air Base at dawn and after unloading the aircraft we were loaded into trucks and taken to an area northeast of the Bien Hoa air base where we were to take up defensive positions. It was a former rubber tree plantation that had been cut down a few years previously. A few bushes had grown back, but overall it was completely devoid of any shade. Our troops unloaded, deployed and began to dig in as the sun and the temperature climbed higher and higher. My guess is that the troops never experienced a more miserable day in Vietnam than that one. The Brigade Engineers had established a Water Point a couple of miles to the west, and the company water trailers went over to fill up and keep the troops' canteens filled, which probably saved us from having a lot of heat casualties that day.



**Rubber tree plantation, first home to 2/503d in VN, 1965**



We stayed in that position, which was just west of where Camp Zinn was later established, for two or three days. In the meantime the troops had found out that the scrub brush across the road to the north of the position could be cut to make stakes to support ponchos over their positions, bringing at least some shade during the day. From there we were directed to move into a live rubber grove about half a mile to the east. This made a lot of



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sense, and the troops were really delighted to have shade all day. We dug in a perimeter defense just inside the tree line and erected pup tents for the troops a few yards back from the positions. In this base camp we began to learn how to conduct combat operations in the jungle.

The area east of the camp for several kilometers was flat jungle. We used this as a training ground to get the troops used to moving and navigating through jungle. The big problem with jungle is its limited visibility. On Okinawa there were very few trees and it was fairly easy to pick out landmarks for orientation. In the jungle we had to depend on navigating by compass. In the training we sent individual squads into the jungle to go for a certain distance and then return, to see how close they came back to where they started. Then platoons and companies went deeper. Concurrent with this we conducted air-mobile training. There were few if any troop-carrying helicopters on Okinawa, and we had never conducted any air-mobile training. While some of our units were learning how to navigate the jungle, others were learning how to load on choppers and unload on a Landing Zone. Actually, air-mobile operations are a lot simpler than airborne operations, and our paratroopers caught on quickly.

Beginning around mid-May, Brigade began sending our battalion out on one or two day operations in the area east and northeast of Bien Hoa and south of the Dong Nai river. The Dong Nai was the major terrain feature in the area and flowed from east to west, north of the Air Base, and then looped around the west end of the base and headed south. We had very little contact with the VC on these operations, but we became more adapted to the jungle.

Around mid-June the rainy season started, and we had to adapt to this new situation. Our delightful shaded





base camp in the dry season became  
**mission, June 1965**

**2/503d**

a quagmire. We

moved back in the open on the higher ground that became Camp Zinn and received squad tents for the troops and eventually materials to build mess halls, orderly rooms, clubs and offices.



## INTERVIEW WITH THE COMMANDER

By late June the 1st Battalion, which had initially been deployed to the Vung Tau area, had joined us at Bien Hoa, and we had received the 1st Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment to be our third infantry battalion in the brigade. We were now ready to begin brigade operations.

The type of operation we conducted was known as "Search and Destroy," and the first job was to find the enemy. To do this we deployed on a fairly wide front -- two or three companies abreast, and within the companies two or three platoons abreast and within the platoons two or three squads abreast. With the limited visibility of the jungle and so many units moving parallel to one another, it was essential we maintain contact between adjacent units. It was very slow at first, but with practice we got better. We also had a problem at first with losing people and even units. In one case a unit stopped for a break. One of the troopers fell asleep. When they started up again the squad leader failed to check to insure all men were accounted for, and the squad went off and left the sleeper. When the loss was discovered, the whole company went back to find him. They did. None in that company made that mistake again.



**Beginning of Camp Zinn, home to the 2/503d, 1965-67**

During an airmobile assault a fire team pushed into the jungle at the edge of the LZ and went too far. They lost contact with the rest of the company, and in trying to work their way back to the LZ they stumbled on a VC camp. A sniper killed the fire team leader-- the first KIA in the battalion. The other fire team members dragged him out of there and tried to carry him back with them, but he was a big man and was slowing them down. They tried to hide him under some brush and continued on until they got back to the LZ and rejoined the company, but they didn't tell anyone about what had



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happened until the end of the day when the company was assembled on a clearing to be picked up and returned to Camp Zinn. The whole company was returned to the area the next day and searched all day but never found the body. About two weeks later the battalion was operating nearby and came upon an abandoned VC jungle camp with many documents left behind. One was a report to higher headquarters by the VC unit that had killed the fire team leader. They had found the body and buried it somewhere. In another case a company with an inexperienced company commander landed on an LZ with the battalion and headed off towards its initial objective but got completely lost. It was late in the day, so they went into a perimeter defense. We were in radio contact with them from battalion all through the night, but they were not able to rejoin us until the next morning. Luckily, we made no contact with the enemy on that operation.

If we found the enemy entrenched in good positions in the jungle, we brought in supporting fires from artillery, helicopter gunships and Air Force tactical air before assaulting the positions. At best, this was ticklish business in the jungle. Artillery forward observers with the infantry in the jungle had difficulty locating targets on a map, and they just had supporting artillery fire a round into the area and try to walk subsequently adjusting rounds into the target by sound. Mistakes were made, sometimes resulting in friendly casualties. In addition, with the jungle canopy possibly a hundred feet above the floor of the jungle, artillery rounds coming from behind the infantry often struck limbs or trunks of trees above the friendly troops as the rounds descended toward the enemy position, resulting in detonations over the friendly troops and friendly casualties occurred. In some operations the infantry was inserted deep in enemy territory and attacked back toward the artillery.

This way any airbusts of descending rounds were over the enemy, not us.

Air Force strikes were controlled by an airborne Forward Air Controller (FAC), an experienced combat pilot in a light aircraft with communications with a FAC on the ground or with the ground commander. It was impossible for the airborne FAC to see friendly or enemy troops in the jungle, so the people on the ground would mark their location by popping a colored smoke grenade.



## INTERVIEW WITH THE COMMANDER

The smoke would rise through the canopy to where it could be seen by the airborne FAC. Then the people on the ground would tell the airborne FAC how far and in what direction from the smoke they should strike. The airborne FAC would in turn relay these instructions to the striking aircraft when they arrived on station.

This system was subject to problems. If there was wind, the smoke could drift some distance before exiting the canopy. But the most likely problem was in the relaying of instructions from the people on the ground to the airborne FAC and from the FAC to the strike aircraft. On February 26, 1966, the day I was wounded, A Company was combing some jungle west of Bien Hoa when it encountered well dug-in VC force who inflicted heavy casualties on the company. The company commander called for an air strike. The strike hit the company, not the VC, resulting in many more casualties.

This was ten months after we arrived in country, which illustrates the fact that the problem of casualties from friendly fire was not solved during our time in Vietnam. During Operation Marauder, which was in open terrain, not jungle, we had both an airstrike land on a platoon of B Company and a short artillery round land in the middle of the C Company's command group. I estimate that during my time in command of 2/503 at least 10% of our casualties were caused by friendly fire.

**Q: With the buck stopping at your desk, and something singularly unique to combat leaders, how were you personally able to cope with the tragic losses suffered by men under your command?**

**Dexter:** You asked how I was personally able to cope with the tragic losses suffered by men under my command, and I have to say I don't really know. How do doctors cope with the death of their patients? How do we cope with any tragedy? We just cope. If it's a personal thing -- the loss of a wife or a child -- I guess it's just a matter of time. As the saying goes, time heals everything.

If a tragedy is not personal, its emotional impact is significantly less. If your buddy is killed, it hurts. If he is wounded you may feel some relief that he was not killed. If you come across the body of another American soldier whom you did not know, the impact is significantly less than what it was for your buddy. If you come across the body of an enemy soldier, you may even feel some elation, but more likely you just don't feel anything at all. But your overwhelming concern when others around you are being killed or wounded is that it did not happen to you.



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Death and maiming are an integral part of combat, but they are also pretty much limited to those soldiers who come face-to-face with the enemy -- the front line combat infantrymen -- or at least they were before the days of IED's and suicide bombers. To those who do not deal with death and maiming closely, the whole thing tends to become intellectual -- non personal.



**A fallen brother of the 2/503d**



**Note:** Most of us never took photos of our fallen, but this photo was recently sent in. These men represent a major part of our shared history, and as such, we honor them here with this unnamed but not forgotten Sky Soldier. **Ed.**

I was on the battlefield with the battalion but far enough back to be able to control the movement of the companies and call for support when needed. Except in rare instances, people around me were not being hit, and rarely was someone hit whom I felt close to. When people were wounded, we called in Dust Off and got them out of there and on their way to a medical treatment facility as soon as practical.

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## INTERVIEW WITH THE COMMANDER

If they were killed, we waited longer to get them out, but basically they were placed where they were not readily visible to the troops, put in body bags as soon as practicable and flown away as soon as choppers could be made available. So I seldom saw many dead or wounded on the battlefield, even though I could see the Dust Off choppers coming in, and I was getting reports from the company commanders on how many casualties they had sustained. My primary concern here was with how effective the company was and whether they could continue on their mission.

For platoon leaders and company commanders, who interacted every day with the troops getting killed and wounded, it was definitely more personal. Back in 1945 as a brand new 2d lieutenant I reported to my first assignment, a rifle company, about two months after World War II ended. One of the other platoon leaders in the company who had been through combat with the company told me that he never made any friends in the Army because he didn't want to lose a friend. I don't agree with that sentiment, but I can understand it, and I imagine it is the basic reason behind the class separation between officers and enlisted men in the military services. Commanders cannot let their sorrow over the loss of their men interfere with their ability to do their own job.

**Q: During the many operations in which the 2/503d was involved in Vietnam, what are some of your more memorable recollections?**

**Dexter:** Of the many operations the battalion conducted during my ten months of command in Vietnam, three stand out. Unfortunately I have misplaced the list I had of all the operations conducted by the brigade during the Vietnam War, so I cannot give you the name of the first operation, but I do know the names of the other two and the dates of all.

The first operation occurred July 6-9, 1965, north of the Dong Nai River. The Dong Nai flows from east to west a few kilometers north of Bien Hoa Air Base. At that time the area north of the river was known as War Zone D because it was completely under VC control. Over the previous two months the battalion had conducted a series of operations, all south of the Dong Nai except one and that was only a one day operation. We had only scattered contact with the VC and had suffered only one man killed and 26 wounded, mostly minor. The first battalion (1/503) had initially been deployed in the Vung Tau area south of Saigon but in June was brought up to Bien Hoa to join the rest of the brigade. Also in June the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1/RAR) was



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attached to the brigade as our third infantry battalion. This, then, was the first full scale brigade operation since we arrived in South Vietnam.

About six kilometers north of the Dong Nai was a small stream flowing to the east, and the jungle was clear back about a hundred meters on both sides. The brigade concept for the operation was to fly all three infantry battalions into this clearing side-by-side and then have them sweep south to the Dong Nai. The artillery battalion and the brigade command post were deployed in the clearing along the north bank of the Dong Nai and were provided security by the brigade "tank" company, which was mounted in Armored Personnel Carriers (APC's). 2/503 was the easternmost of the three battalions and because we had an open flank, the brigade cavalry troop, E Troop, 17th Cavalry, was attached to the battalion. They normally were mounted in jeeps, but since this operation was primarily in the jungle, they were on foot, operating as infantry.

We landed in our sector of the clearing at 0850 on July 6th, and the three rifle companies then pushed north of the clearing to search for any enemy forces in that area, while the cavalry troops reconnoitered to the east and Headquarters Company established a Battalion CP south of the clearing. No contact was made that day, however, Headquarters Company (I believe the Reconnaissance Platoon) found an abandoned VC camp on the south side of the clearing and recovered a lot of documents that had been left behind.

The next morning (July 7), the battalion jumped off, headed south toward the Dong Nai with the three rifle companies abreast, B Company in the



middle, and the cavalry troop screening our east flank. This whole area was primary jungle, with the ground sloping uphill gradually from where we started in the northern clearing to **Brig. Gen. Williamson** about halfway to the Dong Nai, then sloped down to the river. We were at that time still using Korean War FM radios for communications within the battalion and with brigade. We had no trouble communicating within the battalion, but while we were north of the highest ground we had a lot of trouble communicating with brigade.



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Actually back at the clearing it was pretty good, but as we started going up the gradual slope it got worse, even though we were getting closer to brigade. When it was worst, General Williamson went up in a chopper and relayed for us.



### 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Ron Zinn, KIA

Around 1000 at about a kilometer into the jungle B Company encountered a well defended VC jungle camp. A heavy fire fight ensued, and the camp was overrun, but the VC had managed to escape. I advanced both A and C Companies a short distance beyond the firefight hoping to intercept the VC but without any success. In the fire fight B Company lost five killed and ten wounded, the highest casualties a company had sustained to date. One of the killed was **2d Lt Ronald**



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**Zinn** who the summer before had competed in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics as a walker. Camp Zinn was named in his honor.

We evacuated the wounded and the dead back to the clearing we left that morning where they were picked up by helicopters. In the meanwhile Company B searched the camp they had overrun. The most interesting thing they found was a system of tunnels under the camp, which I suspect was how they escaped. One of the NCO's volunteered to search the tunnels with a pistol and a flashlight, but when the carrying party got back from the clearing, I decided we needed to move on. It was after 1100 by that time, and we had a long way to go before reaching the clearing at the Dong Nai. There were obviously VC in this jungle, though we had no idea how many, and they now knew where we were. I preferred to be moving through the jungle looking for them to sitting around that camp and letting them concentrate their forces against us. Also I did not like the communication problems we were having.

We had been going about two hours and were about at the highest point of our route when A Company was ambushed. It was a rather poorly set ambush and A Company responded very well, driving off the VC while suffering only three wounded. But one of those wounded was serious enough that he would have to be carried. I had to make a decision; do we (1) take him back to the clearing we had left that morning, (2) cut down enough trees so that a chopper could land at our location and pick him up, or (3) continue on to the Dong Nai, carrying him with us. Number 1 was out. We were closer to the Dong Nai. As for cutting down the jungle, the choppers could drop chainsaws and demolitions down through the canopy to help us, but I had no idea how long it would take -- I suspected it would be a very long time. The medics felt that the casualty could be carried, so I decided that we should go ahead. It turned out to be the right decision. We had no further contact that day, closed in on the clearing along the Dong Nai an hour or two before dark, had the



casualty picked up by Dust Off, and settled into a perimeter defense for the night.

It turned out that we were the only infantry battalion to reach the Dong Nai that night. One of them stumbled on a huge supply depot in the jungle and stayed to secure it while higher headquarters decided what to do about it.



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The other had the same problem we did, a wounded trooper who was unable to walk. They decided to cut a hole in the jungle for the chopper. It took them 24 hours.

On our very next operation we too cut a hole in the jungle for a Dust Off to get down to evacuate a casualty, but it was a much lighter jungle and it only took a couple of hours.

The second most memorable operation was **Operation New Life** from 21 November to 16 December 1965, in the La Nga River Valley, near the district capital of Vo Dat in northern Long Khanh Province, about 50 miles east of Bien Hoa. The purpose of this operation was to prevent the VC from seizing the rice harvest of this valley. A year after this operation when I was attending the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, I was asked to give talks to some local civic groups about the Vietnam War, and I chose this operation as one of two I discussed. To do this, and with the help of the War College staff, I had slides made of the area involved.

A little background on the area. In 1954 after the peace treaty which ended the French-Indochina War, splitting Vietnam into two different countries, those people living in North Vietnam who wanted to move to the South to avoid living under Communism were allowed to do so, and similarly those in the South who wanted to go North were also permitted to do so. I think something like a million moved south, most of them Catholics, and the Government of South Vietnam (GVN) had to find places to settle them. One such place was the La Nga River Valley, which was isolated and undeveloped but had

considerable potential as a rice growing area. A number of the refugees from the north were moved into the area, established several farming hamlets, and developed the area so that by 1964 there were a large number of fields growing rice. The 10th ARVN Division had been moved into the area to provide security for these hamlets.

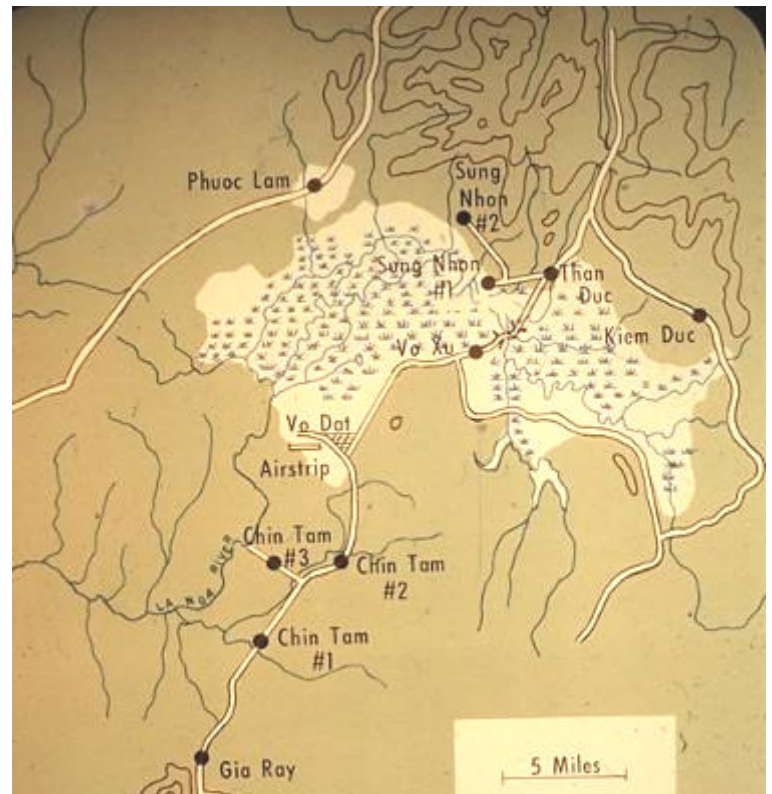
Operation New Life



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In the meantime the VC were growing throughout this area and by late 1964 felt strong enough to attack the ARVN 10th Division in a three day battle called the *Battle of Binh Gia*. As you know, throughout the Orient 'Number 10' means the worst, and the ARVN 10th proved to be Number 10. They got their clocks cleaned,



and the 10th withdrew from the area, leaving the people to the VC. That year's La Nga Valley rice harvest went to feed the VC rather than to the Saigon markets. That



battle was one of the incidents which convinced the Johnson Administration that South Vietnam needed help and fast.

### La Nga River Valley

By November of 1965 there was an ARVN infantry battalion in the area and the District Capital, VO Dat, was under GVN control. The hamlets south of Vo Dat were largely abandoned, while those north and east of Vo Dat on both sides of the river were under Communist control. But this control consisted of local Communist cadre who controlled the people in their hamlets and a few platoons of local guerrillas. There were no known Local Force or Main Force VC units in the area, though it was feared that some such units would move into the area before the harvest to insure it went to the VC again.



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There was a pretty good airstrip at Vo Dat. The operation began at 0700 on 21 November when 2/503 conducted a helicopter assault on the airstrip, moved out to establish a perimeter defense, and conducted a thorough examination of the airstrip to insure it was free of booby traps and in good enough condition to land C-130's. A small detachment of engineers was attached to the battalion to make the examination. We encountered no opposition on the landing. When the examination of the airstrip was completed the other infantry battalions were brought in largely by helicopter, while the artillery, brigade headquarters and other brigade units were brought in by C-130, making that small airstrip a pretty busy place all day.

By that evening the town of Vo Dat had been secured; 1/503 and 1/RAR had pushed off to the north and east and we went into a perimeter south of the airstrip. Still no enemy contact.

The next day was spent in patrolling south and southwest of the airstrip. Then on 23 November 2/503 moved south astride the road with a company in the jungle on each side of the abandoned hamlet of Chin Tam #1. Here we set up a base camp and patrolled in all directions for a few days.

One of these days was Thanksgiving, and a full, hot Thanksgiving dinner was flown in for us to enjoy. Still no enemy contact.

Probably around November 27th we moved troops into position to secure the bridges between Chin Tam 1 and Gia Ray, and a

battalion of the 1st Infantry Division moved up the road by truck to Vo Dat.

The next day we moved out of Chin Tam 1 and swept the jungle west of the road while moving to an assembly area north of the airstrip. That same day 1/RAR attacked and seized the village of Vo Xu northeast of Vo Dat and also seized the bridge over the La Nga just beyond the village. They encountered opposition in the village and especially at the bridge.

Late that afternoon 2/503 received orders to cross the La Nga the next day and seize the hamlet of Than Duc. Two companies were to cross the river in the APC's of the brigade tank company, D Company, 16th Armor (APC's could swim), and one company was to be landed by helicopter close to the hamlet. I got a helicopter from brigade for a reconnaissance and noted that the La Nga River was probably ten feet lower than the surrounding countryside with steep banks on both sides.



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The 1/RAR was in position near the river, so I contacted them and requested that they find a place where we could get the APC's down to the river and up again on the other side and guide us to the spot in the morning. They agreed to do it.

The next morning the two companies loaded on the APC's, and headed to the spot where they would be met by guides from 1/RAR. I took off in a command and control chopper and flew to the spot where they were to cross, only to find that the APC's could indeed get down to the river, but there was no place for them to get back out on the other side and climb back up to the surrounding fields. I told the commanders to go ahead and get into the river and start swimming downriver in the APC's while I flew ahead and found a place where they could get out. I also informed the battalion CP and





brigade of what was happening.

## 2/503d Crossing the La Nga River in 1965

I found a place about a kilometer downstream that looked good from the air for getting the APC's out of the water but was questionable for getting back up to the surrounding countryside. I landed to look it over, and shortly thereafter General Williamson also landed. We decided that some troops with entrenching tools could probably cut enough of the bank away to get the APC's all the way up to the field level. It took awhile, but finally all the APC's were up to the fields and ready to move cross country to Than Duc. I then directed the company waiting on the choppers to take off and conduct their assault in a field a little way south of Than Duc.

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The SNAFU's weren't over. It turned out that the field I had picked out from the air for the helicopter landing was covered with elephant grass, much taller than the troops. We had not encountered it before, and it was not obvious from the air. As the choppers came in they flattened it, but when they lifted off, the troops were engulfed and had to struggle their way out. In the meantime, the APC's were approaching and linked up with the company on the LZ. As the choppers were landing, scattered fire was received from Than Duc, and **SP4 Ramiro Rodriguez** of B Company was killed as he stepped out of his chopper. There were no other casualties during the assault.



**Ramiro Rodriguez, KIA**

The troops dismounted from the APC's and both elements entered the hamlet on foot, encountering sporadic fire and chasing the VC through the town and



out the other side. In the process one trooper was wounded.

We searched the village as the people began to emerge from their homes. I do not believe that there were any civilian casualties. All military-age males were blindfolded, their hands tied behind their backs, and brought to a small field at the southern end of the hamlet where they were questioned by our Vietnamese interpreters, picked up by choppers and taken to Vo Dat. There they were further interviewed by a brigade intelligence team and turned over to the District Chief. There weren't many of them. There were no young men.



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and those few we picked up were middle aged. We pulled back the troops into a perimeter on the south side of town, put out ambush patrols for the night and settled down for several days in the area. I think it was that night that 1/503 crossed the La Nga west of us, moved cross-country and captured the hamlet of Phuoc Lam at daylight.

The next day we pushed elements into Sung Nhon 1 and 2 with no enemy contact. That day the medical detachment set up an Aid Station in the village administrative building in Than Duc, and the people flocked in -- women, children and old men -- with all kinds of ailments. Although the people appeared to be well fed, they were obviously very poor. I doubt if there was a bar of soap or a spool of thread in the hamlet. The District Chief flew out from Vo Dat to speak to them. I think he probably told them that they would all be evacuated back to Vo Dat to build a new village there, and that they would be able to bring anything they wanted with them.

To the north of Than Duc, and Sung Nhon 1 & 2 were some forested hills, and over the next week or so we sent a company up there to patrol for a few days searching for any VC presence, then brought them back and sent another company higher up, etc. No contact, but in the middle of this the people in Sung Nhon 2 informed us that a platoon of guerrillas wanted to come in and surrender. **Captain Paul Sutton**, our Battalion S-2, agreed to be the person they surrendered to.



**Paul Sutton**

Accompanied only by an interpreter, he went to a designated spot and waited while the S-3 remained

overhead in a chopper with radio contact with him. It came off as planned, and I think about 20 guerrillas came in and surrendered.

Beginning about a week after we entered the Than Duc area, the people were evacuated. Several big American trucks were brought into the hamlets north of the river, and the people loaded everything they had on them, including the sides and roofs of their houses, which were mainly woven and thatch. In just two days, there was nothing left.



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A couple of days later they were all trucked back out to begin the rice harvest. This was something they had been doing all their lives and was very well organized, with something of a festive air about it. Each person had his or her cutting tool, and they were organized into teams, with bosses. They got off their trucks, had a short meeting and proceeded into the fields where they began cutting. We provided security. At certain spots in the fields were thrashing stations. As the grain was cut it was brought to the thrashing stations. Here there were large baskets. The thrashers had a technique for striking a mat with a bundle of stalks, causing the grain to come off the stalks and fall into the baskets. When the baskets were filled they were carried to the road and loaded in the trucks.

At the end of a long day everyone loaded back on the trucks with their baskets of rice and were trucked back to the refugee camp at Vo Dat.

During the second day of the harvest we were notified that the brigade would be moving out the next day to participate in an operation many kilometers to the south. We were to send all our vehicles back to brigade near Vo Dat and prepare to be picked up by choppers early the next morning. We began to take down tents,



send our vehicles back and pack up. The people noticed. Pretty soon we began to notice a steady stream of people on the road with their cutting tools walking south toward the bridge over the La Nga. They were not going to continue the harvest without our security

*Sorry Charlie*

Two days later we were involved in a large fight in the vicinity of the Courtenay Rubber Plantation in Phuoc Tuy Province, resulting in 6 killed and 38 wounded in B and C Companies. It was a necessary fight and foiled a



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buildup for a VC offensive over the Christmas period. We never heard what happened to the La Nga Valley rice crop that year. Did the 1st Division take over from us and provide security to continue cutting, or did it rot in the fields? I don't think the VC got it because there were no villagers available to cut it.



On January 1 1966, the 173d Airborne Brigade loaded up for **Operation Marauder** in Hau Nghia Province about 30 kilometers

**Doc Carter on New Life**

west of Saigon along the Vam Co Dong River in the northern Mekong Delta. It was a change in environment for us. Instead of jungle it was flat open country, basically rice fields. We had encountered this in Operation New Life in the river crossing and helicopter assault on Than Duc, but that was a half-day operation.

In the Marauder operation wide rivers meandered through the area feeding canals which in turn provided water for the fields. Dikes had been built up separating the fields into rectangles. The dikes were about three feet high by six wide, and shrubs and trees had grown up on them, making them good defensive positions with excellent fields of fire over the rice fields. The area had been largely abandoned for a few years and the rainy season had stopped about a month previously, but there was still plenty of water in the fields.

On January 1<sup>st</sup> the brigade moved, some by helicopter but most by truck convoy, to Bao Trai, the capital of Hau Nghia Province. Here the brigade set up its CP and the artillery battalion emplaced its guns to support the operation. That afternoon the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion was inserted into its operational area on the far side of the Vam Co

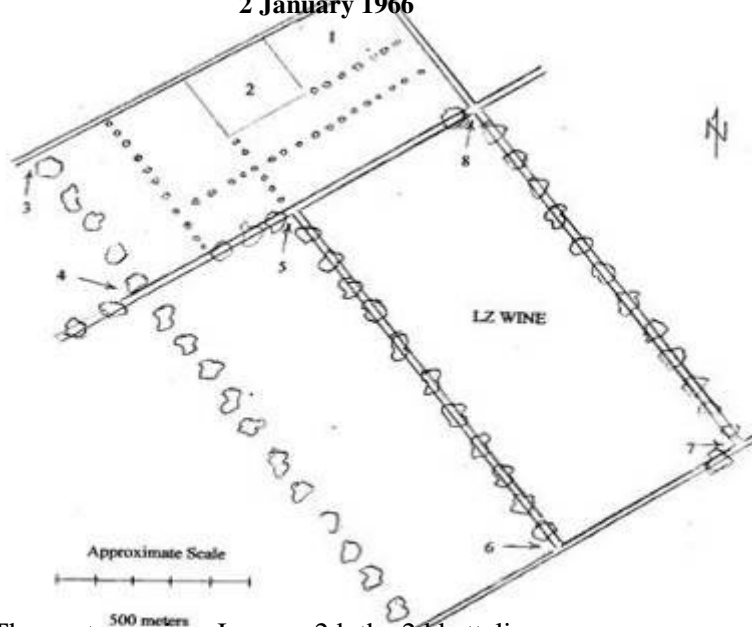


Dong some 8 kilometers southwest of Bao Trai, and the Aussies were inserted into theirs on the near side of the river and north of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion. By nightfall neither battalion had made contact with the VC.

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SKETCH MAP OF AREA IN VICINITY OF LZ WINE  
HAU NGHIA PROVINCE, SVN  
2 January 1966



The next morning, January 2d, the 2d battalion was scheduled to conduct a helicopter assault into an LZ some 7 kilometers south of Bao Trai on the near side of the river and from there move two kilometers southwest to the river. For this operation we would be short two platoons from C Company, which brigade had attached to D Company 16<sup>th</sup> Armor, the brigade reserve.

This was the company of APC's that had ferried us across the La Nga River in Operation New Life. I was promised that if I needed it, I could ask brigade to release D/16<sup>th</sup> Armor to 2d Battalion.

On the afternoon of January 1<sup>st</sup> the D/16<sup>th</sup> Armor commander and I made a reconnaissance by helicopter along the route from Bao Trai to the LZ for the next day's action and over the LZ, which was code-named *LZ Wine*. The ground was dry around Bao Trai, but the closer we got to the LZ the wetter it became. I began to have serious doubts that the APC'S could get to the LZ without bogging down. The Tank Company Commander assured me that it could be done.

The sketch map above shows the area in which the battle occurred. As you can see, LZ Wine was quite large, about 1,000 meters long and 500 wide. On the sketch map the topographical features from 5 to 6 and 7 to 8 were dikes, while those from 4 to 8 and 6 to 7 were canals about ten feet wide and three feet deep. We were scheduled to land on LZ Wine beginning at 0900. Beginning at 0800 tactical aircraft began bombing and strafing the dikes around the LZ until about 0845 when the aircraft departed and artillery pounded the dikes for another ten minutes. Then helicopter gunships



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began a reconnaissance by fire. As they flew down LZ Wine for a final check they received heavy fire from the ground, and the helicopter battalion commander decided to land the troops at Point 1 on the sketch instead of on Wine. Whereas LZ Wine was under about 4 inches of water, Point 1 was dry. B Company landed at about 0900 and took up positions to protect the LZ while the remainder of the battalion came in and landed under light and sporadic fire. When the battalion was all in I directed A and B Companies to jump off to the southwest to seize the battalion objective for the day.

As B Company jumped off they came under intense fire from their left flank from positions around Point 5 on the sketch map. They were soon pinned down. A Company crossed the canal around Point 8 hoping to outflank the VC positions at Point 5, but they soon received heavy fire from along the dike between Points 5 and 6. With no concealment in the field but low grass, A Company dropped to the ground, and both companies found themselves pinned down in the muck.

At this time I contacted brigade and asked that they release to my command D Company 16<sup>th</sup> Armor along with the attached troops from C Company. It was my hope that the APC's could move around the left flank of A Company, cross LZ Wine rapidly and get a lodgment on the dike between Points 5 and 6 from which they could roll up the enemy's positions. Brigade agreed, and I contacted the D/16<sup>th</sup> Armor Commander and directed him to join me as soon as feasible. This was around



noon. It was my hope that they would be in position to commence the attack around 3:00 p.m. In the meantime we pounded the enemy positions with artillery and air strikes.

**LTC Dexter and RTO Connelly during  
Operation Marauder**

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## INTERVIEW WITH THE COMMANDER

During this time two very unfortunate incidents occurred. The air strikes were being controlled by an airborne FAC. His aircraft was struck by an artillery shell from a concentration fired by the brigade artillery in support of our troops. The plane exploded and crashed, killing the pilot. In the other incident an Air Force plane on a bombing run in support of B Company dropped its bomb too soon and it landed right in the middle of a B Company platoon, killing several men and wounding others.

D/16 Armor managed to get within about two kilometers of our position when every single APC bogged down in the mud! I directed the D/16 Armor commander to release his two platoons of infantry and the C Company Commander to have them move cross country to join him and his other platoon behind the dike from points 7 to 8. We would then launch a coordinated attack with all three companies abreast, B Company on the right against Point 5, and A Company in the middle and C Company on the left, both to seize Dike 5 to 6. Since the C Company troops from the APC's would be moving cross country through the muck to get to where we were, I knew it would take some time to get into position for the attack, but I hoped we could jump off by 4:00 p.m.

Throughout the day helicopters were coming in at Point 1 bringing in ammunition and water and flying out casualties. One chopper brought in a load of reporters who spread around the area trying to find someone to talk to. One was overheard dictating his last will and testament to his hand held recorder!

As it was, the attack didn't get off until around 5:00 p.m. With artillery and mortars striking the enemy dikes and our machine guns raking their dikes from positions on Dike 7-8, we made slow progress through the muck. The break came around 5:30 p.m. A five man team from the 2d Platoon of A Company led by the **PSG Charles Daniels** and **SGT Timothy Aikey** managed to knock out a key position and got onto the dike. SGT Aikey was killed in the action, but the team was able to work its way along the dike knocking out position after position

until the enemy decided to withdraw. They pulled back through the open rice field behind them to the next dike line and in the process our artillery caught them in the open, inflicting heavy casualties. All three companies had seized their objectives on dike 5-6 by 6:00 p.m. They took up positions for the night, which had a full moon. The troops were exhausted, and throughout the night men kept rolling off the dike and into the water



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in their sleep. The remnants of the enemy managed to slip across the Vam Co Dong River to the southwest.

**Aerial view of battle at LZ Wine, 2 Jan 66**



We suffered heavy casualties that day -- 9 killed and 61 wounded, with the heaviest load falling on B and A Companies. Among the wounded was **Captain Carmen Cavezza**, the commander of Company A. I did not replace him immediately because his executive officer, **Lieutenant Lynn Lancaster**, was an excellent combat soldier.

The next morning, we counted 98 enemy dead on the dikes and in the field beyond. We also found what was apparently an enemy battalion command post which had been hit by artillery fire. Here we recovered many documents which revealed that we had been fighting the 267 Main





Force Battalion. The intelligence we received before the fight indicated that **LTG Carmen Cavezza** this unit was probably in the area. This was a first -- accurate intelligence!



## INTERVIEW WITH THE COMMANDER

After policing up the battlefield and issuing ammunition, water and rations, we resumed the attack southwest to the river. Just as we jumped off another friendly fire incident occurred. Each of our rifle companies was receiving direct fire support from an artillery battery back in Bao Trai. In the case of C Company, this battery was the 16<sup>th</sup> Gun Battery of the Royal New Zealand Army which normally supported the Aussies. Shortly after the attack started, an artillery round landed right in the middle of the C Company command group, killing 4 of our troopers, including **SP5 Jerry Levy**, the company medic, and wounding another 7, including the company commander, **Fred Henschell**, and the Vietnamese interpreter with the company.

When I received word that Fred Henschell and much of the C Company command group had become casualties, I directed **Captain Tom Faley**, who had joined the battalion a month or two previously and was serving as S-3 Air, to go take command of the company. He did and proved to be an outstanding company commander.

**Col. Tom Faley  
on Marauder**



We pushed to the river, crossing many canals in the process. We arrived in mid-afternoon and set up a perimeter defense in some abandoned cane and rice fields with dikes and trees. For the next day and a half we pushed along the river towards the northwest but made no contacts with the VC. We then turned inland, following a canal to the northeast for a few kilometers until we reached an abandoned village, where we set up a perimeter and sent out patrols for a couple of days.

Choppers were sent to pick us up one morning and take us back to Bao Trai, where we cleaned up, had a good meal and prepared to jump off on a new operation the next day. Operation Marauder was over.

**Q: You were severely wounded during Operation Phoenix in February 1966, ending your command of our battalion. Please tell us the circumstances under which that occurred.**

On February 26, 1966, 2/503 was in base camp at Camp Zinn. Late in the afternoon I received a call directing me to report to the brigade CP immediately. There I received orders for 2/503 to conduct an airmobile



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operation the next morning into an area across the Dong Nai River to the west of Bien Hoa airfield. I don't remember what the specific mission was other than the usual search and destroy mission. The area was flat jungle and rubber plantation broken by clearings. Since the battalion was operating alone, I was provided a command and control (C & C) helicopter for the operation.

At this stage of the war the enemy did not have effective anti-aircraft weapons, so basically a commander in a C & C chopper flew in circles around the area of operation trying to see what could be seen and maintaining good radio contact with his subordinate commanders. From time-to-time the helicopter had to fly back to where it could be refueled. In such cases I usually asked to be set down with one of the rifle companies until the chopper came back.

On the morning of February 26, A and B Companies were landed in the same clearing. A Company struck out to the north and B Company to the northwest, combing the jungle. C Company was held in reserve back at Camp Zinn. Around 3:00 p.m. A Company encountered a well fortified and well concealed enemy force in heavy jungle and suffered heavy casualties. They were too close to the enemy to bring in artillery and air support, so they fell back, but the enemy followed, apparently using a new tactic designed to reduce the effectiveness of our superior firepower. A standoff occurred. I directed B Company to move due east, which should bring them into the flank of the enemy in contact with A Company. I also directed C Company to land in a clearing north of B Company and move east into a rubber plantation where they could trap any VC trying to escape from A and B Companies.

A Company had a new company commander for this operation. After the fight had settled into a standoff he requested and received an air strike on the enemy. Apparently there was a miscommunication between the company commander and the Air Force which resulted in the bombs being dropped right on A Company, greatly increasing their already high casualties.

It was now up to B Company to come to the rescue of A Company. About that time my chopper ran low on fuel. B Company was crossing a clearing, and I asked the chopper to leave me with them while the chopper went back to refuel. I joined the company as they advanced across the clearing and began to receive fire from the tree line ahead.



## INTERVIEW WITH THE COMMANDER

The company commander, **Captain Les Brownlee**, called for an airstrike on the tree line, and while this was going on my chopper returned. The Air Force aircraft were coming in one at a time firing at the tree line when we took off. Apparently the helicopter pilot decided that his safest bet was to fly out in just the opposite direction, underneath the incoming Air Force planes.



**Col. Les Brownlee would later  
become Acting Secretary  
of the Army**

I was sitting in the "jump seat," which faced outward in the right door of the helicopter. This gave me an excellent view of the ground below on the right side of the chopper. As we were taking off from B Company and had reached an altitude of about 100 feet I felt a sting in my left forearm. I looked down and saw that I had been hit, probably by a bullet from the ground, and blood was starting to flow. It didn't hurt very much, in fact the arm was rather numb, but I knew it would need medical attention. The pilot was sitting in the seat to my left, facing forward. I reached over and tapped him on the shoulder and showed him my wound, and he immediately turned the chopper and headed for the field hospital at Long Binh, a few miles east of Bien Hoa. If you have to get



shot, get shot in a helicopter. We got there in less than fifteen minutes. During the flight I radioed the battalion executive officer, **Major Lt. Colonel Bob Carmichael** during 2<sup>d</sup> tour as Bn CO with 25<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. and told him that I had been wounded, was headed for the hospital and that he was in command. Also, during the flight, the door gunner on my side of the chopper gave me a shot of morphine. This was an



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assigned extra duty of door gunners on flights in a combat zone.

After the chopper landed at the hospital I unbuckled and tried to stand up. This was the first time I realized that I had also been hit in the left leg. Apparently at the time I was hit I was sitting with my forearms on my thigh, leaning slightly forward to look out of the chopper, and with a map case folded and on top of my left thigh. The bullet came up through the floor of the chopper, passed through my thigh lacerating an artery and smashing the thighbone, then passed through the map case and my left forearm, breaking both bones and severing the ulna nerve. It finally lodged in the roof of the helicopter, where someone later dug it out.

I spent ten weeks in the hospital, went on recuperation leave, returned to light duty as a student and was in PT for a year. In 1969 I returned to jump duty.

**Q: Now, 45 years later, is there anything you'd care to say to the Sky Soldiers who served under your command with the 2/503d?**

To the men of the 2d Battalion, 503d Airborne Infantry, who served under my command in South Vietnam during 1965 and 1966:

First, I want to thank you for answering the call of our country to serve during time of war. The freedom and independence of our nation has always depended on young men who stepped forward in time of need to bear the burden of battle. Our war was controversial and not popular. Most young men your age were never in danger of being drafted and chose not to volunteer. Many fled to Canada or Sweden to avoid the draft. You chose to serve. Not only that, you volunteered for airborne!

The Army, for whatever reason, decided that you should serve in the infantry. The rest of the Armed Forces brought you to the battlefield and provided you support, but then it was up to you. It was your boots that were on the ground. You combed the jungles, crossed the rice



paddies, swamps and streams, climbed the mountains, dug the foxholes, cleared the fields of fire, went on the patrols, manned the outposts, took your turn on watch. You carried on your body your weapons, ammunition,

water, rations, and often additional ammunition. You put one foot in front of another, hour after hour, day after day. You rested when you could, slept when you could, ate and drank when you could.



## INTERVIEW WITH THE COMMANDER

And in the end it was you who met the enemy face to face, where there was nothing between you and him but the bullets flying back and forth. And you did this only a few yards apart. You saw your buddies maimed or killed; you may have been maimed yourself. The horror of it may be with you still. But at the time, you did it!

You responded to the decisions that I made and the orders I gave. You did it with courage and skill and determination.

We made mistakes, but we learned and gave far more than we received. I thank you for the opportunity to serve with you and to command you. To this old soldier it was a true honor and the highlight of my military service.

**George E. Dexter**  
**Colonel**  
**US Army, Retired**





~ **SKY SOLDIER EXTRAORDINAIRE** ~

## **Gerald (Gerry) Levy Medic**

**Specialist Five**  
**HHC, 2ND BN, 503RD INFANTRY, 173D ABN BDE, USARV**  
**Army of the United States**  
**Born: Meriden, Connecticut, May 1, 1945**  
**Killed in Action: Mekong Delta, RVN, January 2, 1966**  
**Panel 04E Line 050 on The Wall**



Posted on the web site memorial for GERALD LEVY:

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

### ***In honor and memory of Gerry***

**Gerry Levy** and I arrived on Okinawa at about the same time back in early 1964. I came to know him because we were both assigned to HHC, he as a medic and I as a member of the 4-deuce platoon. I recall that he was from Connecticut and his father was a doctor. When we were in from the field at Camp Zinn, occasionally he would wander over to our mortar emplacements which were located adjacent to the NCO and Officer's Clubs to shoot the shit. He was frequently accompanied by a SP4 named **Gerald Dailey** and I seem to recall the two of them had a guitar and were doing some songwriting. I very clearly recall Gerry chastising me over my decision regarding the length of my tour of duty. As those of you

may recall who either deployed from the Rock or those who came over from the World in the summer of 1965, we were initially told we were 90 days TDY. I don't think many of us ever believed the TDY proposition and

we soon learned we were there for a one year tour of duty.

We were subsequently presented with a point system that was used to determine when we could DEROS. The tour of duty was one year but logistically we could not all rotate out and be replaced at one time. So we had this



point system which determined our eligibility for earlier DEROS. I've forgotten all the particulars of the system but I recall that you received points for how much time you had served overseas, points if you had been wounded, and I think there were points allocated on the basis of your MOS. Gerry and I had both spent about 15 months on Okinawa so we had high points based on that alone and could have DEROS'd in early February 1966 as I recall. We were in base camp around the time the DEROS dates came down and Gerry came around to our

without thinking of Gerry and inserting his lyrics. Levy gave us shots, treated our rashes, crotch rot, jungle rot, and did not mind touching some grungy in the field. Gerry was a trusted medic and friend, and I for one will never, ever forget him. **Johnny Graham, C/2/503d**

I met Gerry shortly after landing on Okinawa in July or August of 64 and being assigned to C/2/503. Gerry and I hit it off immediately for a number of reasons. One, we grew up very close to each other, had never met, but we think he beat the crap out of me at a party my friends and

## SP-5 GERALD (GERRY) LEVY

### ~ Sky Soldier Extraordinaire ~

mortar pits one night with SP4 Gerald Dailey and hung out for awhile with some of us. I think this was around early December of 1965. He brought up the fact that he and I were short timers and only had a couple of months to go before DEROS. I corrected him and told him I had elected to spend a full year in country because that would qualify me for an 89 day early out upon my return to the World. He ripped into me in a very big way and told me what a dumb ass I was for focusing on an early out rather than an early DEROS. My point of view was that after serving in Vietnam I had no desire to serve stateside as a spit and polish garrison soldier. He definitely wasn't buying my foolish strategy and I understand why – as a medic he was constantly in the line of fire and his exposure to harm on an operational basis was greater than that of the average infantryman. For that reason, I have a great deal of respect for him and all the other fine men who served with us as medics. Had I been a medic back then I would have taken an early DEROS myself in exchange for stateside duty. Sadly, the early DEROS dates came too late for Gerry. I do recall that Gerry somehow managed to finagle a leave back to the States in December of 1965 to see his family, and that was obviously a very fortunate thing. Strangely enough, and unfortunately as well, Gerry Levy was KIA on 2 Jan 66 during Operation Marauder, and SP4 Gerald Dailey was KIA just 9 days later on 11 Jan 66 during Operation Crimp. Two fine troopers and mutual friends, lost long ago. **Don Rice, HHC/2/503d**

Gerald Levy, a great Sky Soldier to remember. I knew Gerry from Camp Kue back in Okinawa. He really was everyone's friend. In the early 60's Ricky Nelson had a hit song *"I'm a Travelin' Man,"* to which Gerry changed the lyrics to *"I'm a Paratrooper,"* (*Made a lot of drops, all over the world, and on every drop zone I left the heart of a least one lovely girl*). He made-up lyrics for the whole song and we had a great time drinking and singing together. To this day I cannot listen to that song

I crashed back in Connecticut. Not that we were that religious, but we both were of the Jewish faith, a real minority not only in a combat outfit, but also among paratroopers.

Gerry was a big guy, probably over 6 foot and was the medic for the company. Gerry had this idea to rent a house in one of the dependent neighborhoods. Being lowly privates, the cost was out of our reach unless we could get some rank fast (that wasn't going to happen with me), or find another means. That's when we decided to pool our money and loan it out to those in need. Well, after just one month we had enough to rent this house in a nice neighbor surround by dependents from the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force. I'm sure some of you remember the place as we always had visitors. Eventually, the house was given up as we were to be deployed to Vietnam.

Arriving in Country and once settled in the rubber plantation, Gerry and I pitched our two man tent, dug our ditch around the tent and proceeded to work on the fox hole around the perimeter. I remember when Gerry got in trouble for administering those God-awful gamma globulin shots by slapping one's ass with an open palm while sticking that big bad ass needle into the posterior, so the pain from that thick serum made its way through the syringe into thy ass without that much discomfort although I'm not sure that was true of those big soldiers as they needed two of those shots.

Eventually, all the medics were sent to brigade and were assigned to the various operations as they took place. Before the January operation I really can't recall how often he was assigned to our platoon but he was with us the day we took the short rounds that wounded Johnny Graham and took Gerry's life shortly after being flown out. I can remember hearing the rounds coming in as we all tried to bury ourselves the best we could as we anticipated being hit. Sure enough, it was a direct hit, not on the enemy, but right smack on top of us. I don't remember how many rounds hit us, but I can tell you the one that came close to me is the one that took Gerry's life and wounded Johnny. How I got out of it without a

scratch is beyond me, as I was within a few feet of Johnny and Gerry. I guess it just wasn't my day.

War is funny, it doesn't give you time to grieve or reflect on the times with your friends. Maybe that is a good thing as we had a mission to do. Three months later during Silver City I was wounded, sent back to the

States and finally finished my last six months as part of the 101<sup>st</sup>. I can't say I spent much time thinking about the war.

**SP-5 GERALD (GERRY) LEVY**

**~ Sky Soldier Extraordinaire ~**

I went to work, got married, had a family, got divorced, another family and so on. Who really had the time to think about it and who really wanted to talk about it?

Over the years memories start to fade away and our lives take many turns. Although I thought of Gerry many times I never knew how much I missed him until that day in February of 2001 when a small band of brothers did a return trip to Vietnam and returned to the battleground of that day in January. When I truly realized where we were I broke down, collapsed to my knees and wept to no end. My wife and brothers left me to my grief as they knew this was a special moment that shouldn't be disturbed. Right now there are tears in my eyes as I write about my good friend. Since then, I have visited both the traveling Wall and the Wall in Washington to talk to Gerry and let him know how much I miss him. I cry like a baby with grief but I know I'm not alone as I look around and see may tears from others.

I don't think there is ever closure when you care about someone. Combat brings you closer to people, even people whos names you didn't know. I now think of Gerry often and will until it's my time to go.

Goodbye for now Gerry, it was great having you as a friend.

**Steven Haber, C/2/503d**





**Medic Gerry Levy on left, with a buddy, helping a wounded buddy.**

**Photo by: Horst Faas**



## From Jerry Taylor, C/2/503d

These photos were taken at Bien Hoa around June 1965. We were at the end of the road in front of C Co. to test fire M60s that came in from Germany. For some reason the 173d M60's were left in Okinawa -- at least that's what I was told. Maybe our newsletter can help I.D. the guys in center?



**Jerry Taylor, C/2/503d**

**Jerry Taylor, C/2/503d**



**2nd Plt. 3rd Sq. C Co., 2/503d**

**On the left is David Canady, on the far right are Wayne Stevens and Glenn Hood.**

(If anyone knows who some of the other troopers are in these photos please contact Jerry by email at: [jerrytaylor531@yahoo.com](mailto:jerrytaylor531@yahoo.com) Ed).

## More From Rev. Mac

British photographer Tim Hetherington's image of a soldier resting at Restrepo bunker in Afghanistan



(below), taken on assignment for *Vanity Fair* last September, was named World Press Photo of the Year for 2007. In capturing the *We know what you feel bro.* exhaustion of a single man, the image reflects the exhaustion of an entire nation. Traveling with *Vanity Fair*, contributing editor Sebastian Junger spent three weeks in Afghanistan's Korengal Valley embedded with the Second Battalion (Airborne) of the U.S. Army's 503rd Infantry...



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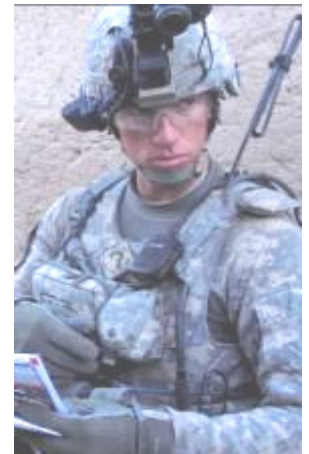
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## LOOKING FOR THE TALIBAN

Paratrooper 1<sup>ST</sup> Lt. Nick Privette, West Point graduate, is serving in Afghanistan, and is the grandson of Maj. Ed Privette (Ret), CO HHC 2/503d Vietnam.

**"Lt. Nicholas Privette leads members of 1st platoon, the "Roughnecks," on**

**cordoned search through nearby Huta village, looking for insurgents that may be holed up in the area." *Army Times***



## MORE INCOMING!!

Yesterday, the UPS guy made a delivery to my home. The numbers 2-22-1967 was printed on the outside of the box. I knew immediately what the date signified but had no idea what

was in the box. It was the date, almost 43 years ago that the 2nd Bn made the jump in Op Junction City. Well, one of my RTO's, SP4 **Harry Cleland** who lives in Cary, NC sent me a bottle of 12 year old Chivas, and on the bottle he wrote "for years to come". I will admit



that I was moved by this gesture. I called him and promised that on February 22nd, I would crack the **L-R: Capt. Kaplan & RTO Cleland** seal, measure out two fingers, and drink a toast to him and to all the Bravo Bulls out there...especially to those who I had the honor to serve with from Oct 66 to Apr 67.

**LTC Ken Kaplan, B/2/503d "We Try Harder"**

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## SKY SOLDIERETTE'S CORNER

I'm sitting here looking at a pile of books and articles that could help each and every one of you – a five-shelf bookshelf that doesn't hold all the books that have been gathered on Vietnam – a stack of videos that try to explain what happened in Vietnam -- magazines that I don't dare try



**Iva Tuttle**

to get rid of because it might have an article that is important – a list of "favorites" on this computer that are supposed to help you deal with what happened and get the help you need – answering a phone that sometimes seems to not stop ringing. And not a single thing is going through my head on what to write except that I'm damn angry.

I'm angry at the system that is making all of this seem useless – that treats the best and the finest as dispensable and useless. That talks the talk about how it is going to help, but does nothing but line their own pockets as they can't walk the walk. All the politicians and bureaucrats in the world do not get it – do not get the hurt, the pain, and the consequences of having to go through a life filled with the memories of close friends dying in your arms – of events that happened to you so long ago, but were so traumatic and against everything you were taught that you can't get over them regardless of the love that surrounds you. Memories so powerful that even today you can see the things that happened and wonder how you could have stopped it then. You replay it and replay it over and over trying to make the ending come out different, but it doesn't – it's always the same.

No bureaucrat or politician can fathom the hurt that is visited on your families as everyone that fought in any conflict – not sat in a chair in an office playing war and sending more young men and women to die. The ones that returned must continue to fight to get any help.

Vietnam Vets fought hard enough to get the words *PTSD* recognized, but the war to get it dealt with is not over. I have been called by vets still fighting to get help and being denied because "*their childhood could have contributed,*" or "*there is no proof that you walked off Hill 875 – only one of 13*" or "*you just have to get over it,*" or "*it can't be still bothering you.*"

I have seen veterans (Canadian and American) from Granada, Desert Storm, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Cyprus, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Panama (just to name a few places) struggle to deal with what they saw and what happened to them and not get the help they needed because the hoops they have to jump

through are more than they can deal with while they are struggling with their memories. The fight is just too much to continue. I have seen how trying to give them a venue to talk can create a backlog of memories in those trying to help that seem like being buried under a mountain.

I have seen veterans from as far back as World War II struggle to get into a system for help with even the simplest things such as medication, and be denied because they have assets – assets that another branch of the government says can't be used in



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any way but the care of a spouse that must be in a nursing home until that spouse is no longer living.

I've seen the effects on grown children and the choices they make in relationships, in dealing with the world at large. And I can only cry until tears drop off my chin at the hurt that is still being inflicted after years of turmoil and struggle to honor those who serve.

Yes, I am angry. Angry at the system and the hurt and the fight that must go on. Angry at the bureaucrats that stall any attempt to make something work.

Get angry with me and help those around you in their fight – the fight that most give up because they are just too tired to fight anymore. Help them get through the system and let them know you have their back. Encourage them not to give up. The VA is known to approve less than 10% of the applications and at a smaller degree of help than is needed. The bureaucrats know that only 10% of those denied will come back and fight through the appeal process to get more – and only 10% of the ones that get anything will follow through until they get what they deserve. And it carries on today with the younger vets.

I know it is hard – it's easier to give up and walk away – away from the system and away from those who need your help. It's easier to say "*I can't deal with your pain anymore.*" But we can't do that. A "*welcome home*" and "*Thank you*" isn't all that's needed – it's support and care *after* they get home.

***'Life is not the way it's supposed to be.  
It's the way it is. The way you cope with it  
is what makes the difference.'***

[On behalf of us all, thank you Iva. Ed. ]



## SKY SOLDIERETTE REGGIE SMITH (THE CO) IS DOING JUST FINE

Following a most serious operation in January, Reggie Smith is home with her family recuperating and is expected to



be as good as new within a few weeks. On behalf of the many Sky Soldiers you've helped over the years and who have sent in their best wishes to you, we thank you Mrs. Smith. Oh, the editor of this newsletter sends you his love and wants another 43 years with you if you don't .

**Reggie and granddaughter** mind. **Ed.**

**Sofia (Lil' Smitty)**