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July 2010 ~ Issue 17

~ Photo of the Month ~

3000 Veterans on motorcycles from across the USA paraded in Washington, D.C. the Sunday before Memorial Day. A solitary Marine greeted them with a salute on Constitution Avenue. The Marine stood at attention saluting for 3 straight hours, while the parade of roaring bikes kept on coming. The event is held in remembrance of those who've fallen in the military; the group is called "Rolling Thunder." As the camera is on the Marine he struggles with his emotions, and continues holding that 3-hour long salute -- his head lowered, his eyes down, in reverence for the fallen. It got to be overwhelming for him, and his tears started flowing. Semper Fi brother.



See video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gfnmDGk0KM&feature=related>



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CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

God and Country: Happy Birthday America

Dr. Ronald Reese Smith
1LT, FO, B/2/503d, 3/319th
ronaldreesesmith@gmail.com

Call me sentimental! Call me emotional! Call me patriotic! Whenever I am at an athletic event, a civic function or any place where our national anthem is played, I cannot seem to finish singing without tears rolling down the crevices of my cheeks. My mind can't help but bring up memories and pictures of friends and comrades who serve and served our country in the cause of freedom for other countries. No nation is perfect, not even ours. Yet no nation in the history of humanity has given so much and has asked for so little in return.

At the World Economic Forum, retired Four Star General and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and then Secretary of State, Colin Powell, was asked a lengthy and complicated question by George Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury. The long and involved question ended with a statement suggesting that America was *"in danger of relying too much on hard power and not enough on building the trust from which the soft values...when the bottom line is reached, [that] is what makes human life valuable."*

Secretary Powell delivered a lengthy response to the former Archbishop's question. Included were a number of poignant statements, especially this one:

"We have gone forth from our shores repeatedly over the last hundred years and we've done this as recently as this year in Afghanistan and put wonderful young men and women at risk, many of whom have lost their lives, and we have asked for nothing except enough ground to bury them in, and otherwise we have returned home to seek our own lives in peace, to live our own lives in peace. But there comes a time when soft power or talking with evil will not work where, unfortunately, hard power is the only thing that works."

It is a privilege and a responsibility to be in an honored place among the nations of the world. President Reagan, referring to a biblical image used by Jesus, declared us to be *"A city on a hill."* As we celebrate our nation's birth this month and give thanks for the privileges and freedoms which are ours, it is important to recognize and give thanks to God our Creator who is the Lord and

Creator of all the nations of the world—whether nations recognize Him or not. He wishes us to be found by Him, to be with Him, to listen to Him, to enjoy Him and, yes, to experience His peace.

Psalms 46 was written by a school of musicians known as "the Sons of Korah." For nine verses they sing that we can rest securely and rest serenely because of the observable evidence of God's work around us. Then, in verses 10-11, God speaks; *"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth....The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah."*

Psalms 46 describes a great deliverance of God's people. Here is but a sample, a down payment, from the God who has promised to bring peace to the earth. God who has promised that His kingdom shall come and His will, will be done on earth as it is in heaven, will do that. We can be assured that one day, in His time, God will move in history, and put down the anger of the nations. Poets often reason that way.

During the War of 1812, the British attacked America. This lion of history felt it could win the second game in the series. So, during the war, in 1814, they came against our capital city, Washington, sacked and burned her buildings. Next, they moved on to Baltimore to do the same. There was a fort, however, Fort McHenry, that stood in their way. The British brought up their gun boats. They thought that they could destroy it easily.



Fort McHenry

Right at two-hundred years ago now, one of our own poets observed first hand the hand of God at work in our fledgling nation. He also wrote a hymn about his experience. That poet was also a young lawyer, Francis Scott Key, who had gone out to the gun boats to talk to the British Generals about releasing some American prisoners. While he was on board that British ship, the bombardment of Ft. McHenry began. It was in the evening as the sunlight disappeared.

(continued....)



Francis Scott Key stood on the deck of the ship and he saw the American flag flowing in the breeze. Then, night came. The bombardment continued. Through all the fire and bomb explosions he could still see the flag waving in the dark. The next morning when the British ammunition had been spent and he saw that Fort McHenry still stood, he looked and saw the star spangled banner, tattered, but still waving. As you know, Francis Scott Key wrote the "Star Spangled Banner" from that incident, which later became our national anthem.

**Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed,
at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars,
thru the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched
were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare,
the bombs bursting in air,
gave proof through the night
that our flag was still there.
Oh, say does that star-spangled Banner yet wave,
O'er the land of the free
and the home of the brave?**

What many, maybe even most, Americans do not know is that Francis Scott Key wrote second, third, and fourth stanzas to the national anthem that never make it to our football games. It was from this single incident at Fort McHenry that he looked forward to the future. In the 4th verse he wrote:

**Oh! Thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand
between their loved home and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace,
may the heav'n rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made
and preserved us a nation.
Then conquest we must, when our cause it is just,
and this be our motto: "In God is our Trust."
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!**

Francis Scott Key was saying that the attack on Fort McHenry was a symbolic sample of the fact that God had delivered this nation. God had rescued our country. And as he looked forward to the future, he felt as long as the nation was true to God, God would be true to the nation.

That's what the author of Psalm 46 was saying as he looks at that one incident and he sees that God has worked on behalf of His people. He sees that the Assyrians had been defeated -- when defeat seemed impossible. And as He looks forward to the future, He sees that God who has brought peace in the single incident, shall bring peace to all the earth.

Visitors to the Smithsonian Museum of American History can see the flag that flew over Fort McHenry when Francis Scott Key wrote the "Star Spangled Banner." The original flag measured 42 feet by 30 feet. It was the immense size of the flag that allowed Key to see it from his position ten miles out to sea, following a night of gunfire.



The Star Spangled Banner at Smithsonian Museum

The means by which a flag that large could fly on a pole 189 feet in the air is on display at Fort McHenry on Baltimore's inner harbor. There in one of the barracks were two oak timbers, eight feet by eight feet, joined as a cross. National Park Service personnel discovered this cross-shaped support near the entrance to Fort McHenry in 1958, buried nine feet in the ground. Not only did the cross piece help rangers locate the original site from which the star spangled banner flew, it answered the mystery of how such a large flag could fly in stormy weather without snapping the pole. This unseen wooden device provided a firm foundation for the symbol of our national freedom.

Similarly, the cross of Christ provides the foundation by which our faith in God and our hope for our country is rooted and supported.

As we celebrate the 234th birthday of independence of our land, let us also "praise the power that has made and preserved us as a nation." As we kick back and have some beer and BBQ, go to the beach or mountains, or just hang with our family, let us pray for our brothers and sisters in arms serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, especially those of the 173d Airborne Brigade in Afghanistan. Let us remember, *"Then conquest we must, when our cause it is just, and this be our motto: 'In God is our Trust.' And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave, O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!"*

May God continue to bless America and may America bless God.

An object of His grace, Ron



SKY SOLDIERETT'S CORNER

The first week of June was really indescribable to so many of us. To me, it was a revelation, an opportunity to develop a sense of meaning and purpose, a greater understanding of what letting go means, a homecoming, a completing of a circle, and a focal point for healing, rest and peace.



Again, I was struck by the sense of brotherhood so strong among the members of the 173d Airborne Brigade, from its inception to its current status. The feeling of comradeship that is felt by the members who have served with the 173d Infantry Regiment, to the 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team who jumped in Corregidor and islands in the Pacific, to the veterans of Vietnam, to the veterans of Iraq and the veterans and soldiers currently serving in Afghanistan. Again, I will state that with the various Veterans groups that we have been associated with, with the various veterans we have met who served with any other group, that this bond is stronger and more unique than any other out there.

I can only describe my own feelings about the Memorial at Fort Benning. I can only hope that you will understand when I try to tell you how very special I feel that Memorial is. How it will become a great place of healing for the men and women of the 173d Airborne Brigade.

The speeches were stirring. The ceremonial parts were emotional. The feeling achieved by watching the people in the stands was both inspiring and humbling as you watched all soldiers from all eras in the Herd joined together. The feeling of special honor of coming together that was felt when old guys acknowledged and greeted new guys was almost overwhelming. It transcended decades, countries, and being.

When the Color Guard walked across the field, it was as if they were leading a host of the Herd members who had fallen during World War II, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan to a final resting place. Those who had passed away since those conflicts that were members of the Herd were again joined with those who had fallen in War, and we were witness to the gathering of the greatest warriors we could ever know.

When I turned at the memorial and saw the two young men dressed in Vietnam gear, I felt that they were held back from the memorial by those who had the Sky Soldier/Rock patch on their shoulders. It was fitting that they were there, but the place was for a very special group of people. When I walked into the memorial and looked up at the globe and wing, I knew that thousands had come home.

The Vietnam Wall is a good place to start healing, but this was a place of peace for all.

Thank you, Col. Smith and the Memorial group. I now know that there is a final resting place for the Herd. And, yes, Ray, there is a Trooper's Green. I have seen it, I have felt it, I want to return.

Iva Tuttle
(Wife of Wayne Tuttle, C/2/503d)

INCOMING!!

If anyone here remembers me and they can write a letter to me stating that they remember serving with me, I need that letter for help with my disability claim to the VA. I was with 2/503d, N Co. 75th Rangers in '68-'70. Thanks for mailing a letter to me at the address below. It will be greatly appreciated.

Robert Lookingbill
53586 CR 27, Lot 134, Bristol, IN 46507

Bob

GREAT NEW BANNERS!

Thanks to Ashley Bowers, graphic artist extraordinaire, and daughter of C/2/503d good buddy Wayne Bowers (fortunately, she got her mother's good looks), for creating three, great new banners for our newsletter. All three are so unique and professionally produced we'll alternate use of them in future issues. Thanks Ashley!! Anyone needing super graphics work created might want to contact the dad Chargin' Charlie at bowway@aol.com

WHODAT?



Who can identify this 2d Bat trooper with his new friend?



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

VA ANNOUNCES CHANGE TO MEDICATION COPAYS FOR SOME VETERANS

June 10, 2010

WASHINGTON - As previously announced on January 7, 2010, the Department of Veterans Affairs froze prescription copayment increases for six months. Veterans who generally have higher income and no service-connected disabilities - referred to as Priority Groups 7 and 8 Veterans - will now pay an additional \$1 for each 30-day supply of outpatient medications. Taking effect July 1, the increase to \$9 from \$8 is the first change in VA's medication copay since Jan. 1, 2006.

"Because of the harsh economic reality facing many Veterans, we delayed the change," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "We're now ensuring the Veterans most in need of VA care are those least affected. Yet, even with this increase, VA medication copays are lower than much of the private sector."

This change does not impact Veterans in Priority Groups 2 through 6 who will continue to pay \$8 for each 30-day supply of medications for their non-service connected conditions unless otherwise exempted. These Veterans will also continue to have their out-of-pocket expenses for VA outpatient medications capped at \$960. per calendar year.

Veterans who have an injury or illness connected with their military service resulting in a disability rated 50 percent or greater – who are known as Priority Group 1 Veterans -- are exempt from the copay.

VA generally sets its outpatient medication copay rate based upon a regulation that ties the rate to the Medical Consumer Price Index for prescription drugs.

Veterans who have difficulty paying copayments for outpatient medications should discuss the matter with their local VA enrollment coordinator. Veterans may also contact VA at 1-877-222 VETS (8387) or visit VA's health eligibility web site at www.va.gov/healtheligibility

NEW INSIGHT FOR TREATING PARKINSON'S

June 14, 2010

Veterans and others with Parkinson's disease who undergo deep brain stimulation (DBS) may benefit from research co-sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs and published recently in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*. The new report shows DBS is equally effective at either of two sites in the brain. Earlier results from the landmark study appeared last year in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, indicating that DBS overall is somewhat riskier than carefully managed drug therapy but may hold significant benefits for appropriate patients. The new analysis finds both sites roughly equal for patient outcomes relating to movement symptoms. Researchers will follow the study participants several more years to examine the relative benefits and risks of each DBS approach. An abstract of the study is available on the *New England Journal of Medicine* website <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/short/362/22/2077>

VA ANNOUNCES NEW HOTLINE

June 14, 2010

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) has announced a new telephone hotline to provide emergency support and resources to homeless veterans. The hotline of the new National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-4AID VET will provide homeless veterans with timely assistance and coordinated access to VA and community services. Family members, workers at community agencies and non-VA providers also may call the hotline to find out about the many programs and services available to assist homeless veterans. For more information:

**Homeless Veteran in need of help?
Call 1-877-4AID VET
(1-877-424-3838)**



"I WAS THERE LAST NIGHT"

By Robert Clark
Neillsville, WI

A couple of years ago someone asked me if I still thought about Vietnam. I nearly laughed in their face. How do you stop thinking about it? Every day for the last twenty-four years, I wake up with it, and go to bed with it.

But this is what I said. *"Yea, I think about it. I can't quit thinking about it. I never will. But, I've also learned to live with it. I'm comfortable with the memories. I've learned to stop trying to forget and learned instead to embrace it. It just doesn't scare me anymore."*

A psychologist once told me that NOT being affected by the experience over there would be abnormal. When he told me that, it was like he'd just given me a pardon. It was as if he said, *"Go ahead and feel something about the place, Bob. It ain't going nowhere. You're gonna wear it for the rest of your life. Might as well get to know it."*

A lot of my "brothers" haven't been so lucky. For them the memories are too painful, their sense of loss too great. My sister told me of a friend she has whose husband was in the Nam. She asks this guy when he was there. Here's what he said, *"Just last night."*

It took my sister a while to figure out what he was talking about.

JUST LAST NIGHT. Yeah I was in the Nam. When? JUST LAST NIGHT. During sex with my wife. And on my way to work this morning. Over my lunch hour. Yeah, I was there.

My sister says I'm not the same brother that went to Vietnam. My wife says I won't let people get close to me, not even her. They are probably both right.

Ask a vet about making friends in Nam. It was risky. Why? Because we were in the business of death, and death was with us all the time. It wasn't the death of, *"If I die before I wake."* This was the real thing. The kind where boys scream for their mothers. The kind that lingers in your mind and becomes more real each time you cheat it. You don't want to make a lot of friends when the possibility of dying is that real, that close. When you do, friends become a liability.

A guy named Bob Flannigan was my friend. Bob Flannigan is dead. I put him in a body bag one sunny day, April 29, 1969. We'd been talking, only a few minutes before he was shot, about what we were going to do when we got back in the world. Now, this was a guy who had come in country the same time as myself.

A guy who was loveable and generous. He had blue eyes and sandy blond hair. When he talked, it was with a soft drawl. Flannigan was a hick and he knew it. That was part of his charm. He didn't care. Man, I loved this guy like the brother I never had. But, I screwed up. I got too close to him. Maybe I didn't know any better. But I broke one of the unwritten rules of war. DON'T GET CLOSE TO PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING TO DIE. Sometimes you can't help it.

You hear vets use the term "buddy" when they refer to a guy they spent the war with. *"Me and this buddy a mine."*

"Friend" sounds too intimate, doesn't it. "Friend" calls up images of being close. If he's a friend, then you are going to be hurt if he dies, and war hurts enough without adding to the pain. Get close; get hurt. It's as simple as that.



2/503d buddies in Vietnam. There last night.

In war you learn to keep people at that distance my wife talks about. You become so good at it, that twenty years after the war, you still do it without thinking. You won't allow yourself to be vulnerable again.

My wife knows two people who can get into the soft spots inside me. My daughters. I know it probably bothers her that they can do this. It's not that I don't love my wife, I do. She's put up with a lot from me. She'll tell you that when she signed on for better or worse, she had no idea there was going to be so much of the latter. But with my daughters it's different.

My girls are mine. They'll always be my kids. Not marriage, not distance, not even death can change that. They are something on this earth that can never be taken away from me. I belong to them. Nothing can change that. I can have an ex-wife; but my girls can never have an ex-father. There's the difference.

(continued....)



I recall the smells, too. Like the way cordite hangs on the air after a fire-fight. Or the pungent odor of rice paddy mud. So different from the black dirt of Iowa. The mud of Nam smells ancient, somehow. Like it's always been there.

And I'll never forget the way blood smells, slick and drying on my hands. I spent a long night that way once. That memory isn't going anywhere.

I remember how the night jungle appears almost dream like as the pilot of a Cessna buzzes overhead, dropping parachute flares until morning. That artificial sun would flicker and make shadows run through the jungle. It was worse than not being able to see what was out there sometimes. I remember once looking at the man next to me as a flare floated overhead. The shadows around his eyes were so deep that it looked like his eyes were gone. I reached over and touched him on the arm; without looking at me he touched my hand. *"I know man. I know."* That's what he said. It was a human moment. Two guys a long way from home and scared shitless. *"I know man."* And at that moment he did.

God I loved those guys. I hurt every time one of them died. We all did. Despite our posturing. Despite our desire to stay disconnected, we couldn't help ourselves. I know why Tim O'Brien writes his stories. I know what gives Bruce Weigle the words to create poems so honest I cry at their horrible beauty. It's love. Love for those guys we shared the experience with.

We did our jobs like good soldiers, and we tried our best not to become as hard as our surroundings. We touched each other and said, *"I know."* Like a mother holding a child in the middle of a nightmare, *"It's going to be all right."* We tried not to lose touch with our humanity. We tried to walk that line: To be the good boys our parents had raised and not to give into that unnamed thing we knew was inside us all.

You want to know what frightening is? It's a nineteen-year-old-boy who's had a sip of that power over life and death that war gives you. It's a boy who, despite all the things he's been taught, knows that he likes it. It's a nineteen-year-old who's just lost a friend, and is angry and scared and, determined that, *"Some asshole is gonna pay."* To this day, the thought of that boy can wake me from a sound sleep and leave me staring at the ceiling.

As I write this, I have a picture in front of me. It's of two young men. On their laps are tablets. One is smoking a cigarette. Both stare without expression at the camera. They're writing letters. Staying in touch with places they would rather be. Places and people they hope to see again. The picture shares space in a frame with one of my wife. She doesn't mind. She knows she's been included in special company. She

knows I'll always love those guys who shared that part of my life, a part she never can. And she understands how I feel about the ones I know are out there yet.



Two guys writing home in 1966. A/2/503d troopers Jack Ribera & Mike Sturges.

I can still see the faces, though they all seem to have the same eyes. When I think of us I always see a line of "dirty grunts" sitting on a paddy dike. We're caught in the first gray silver between darkness and light. That first moment when we know we've survived another night, and the business of staying alive for one more day is about to begin. There was so much hope in that brief space of time. It's what we used to pray for. *"One more day, God. One more day."*

And I can hear our conversations as if they'd only just been spoken. I still hear the way we sounded, the hard cynical jokes, our morbid senses of humor. We were scared to death of dying, and trying our best not to show it.

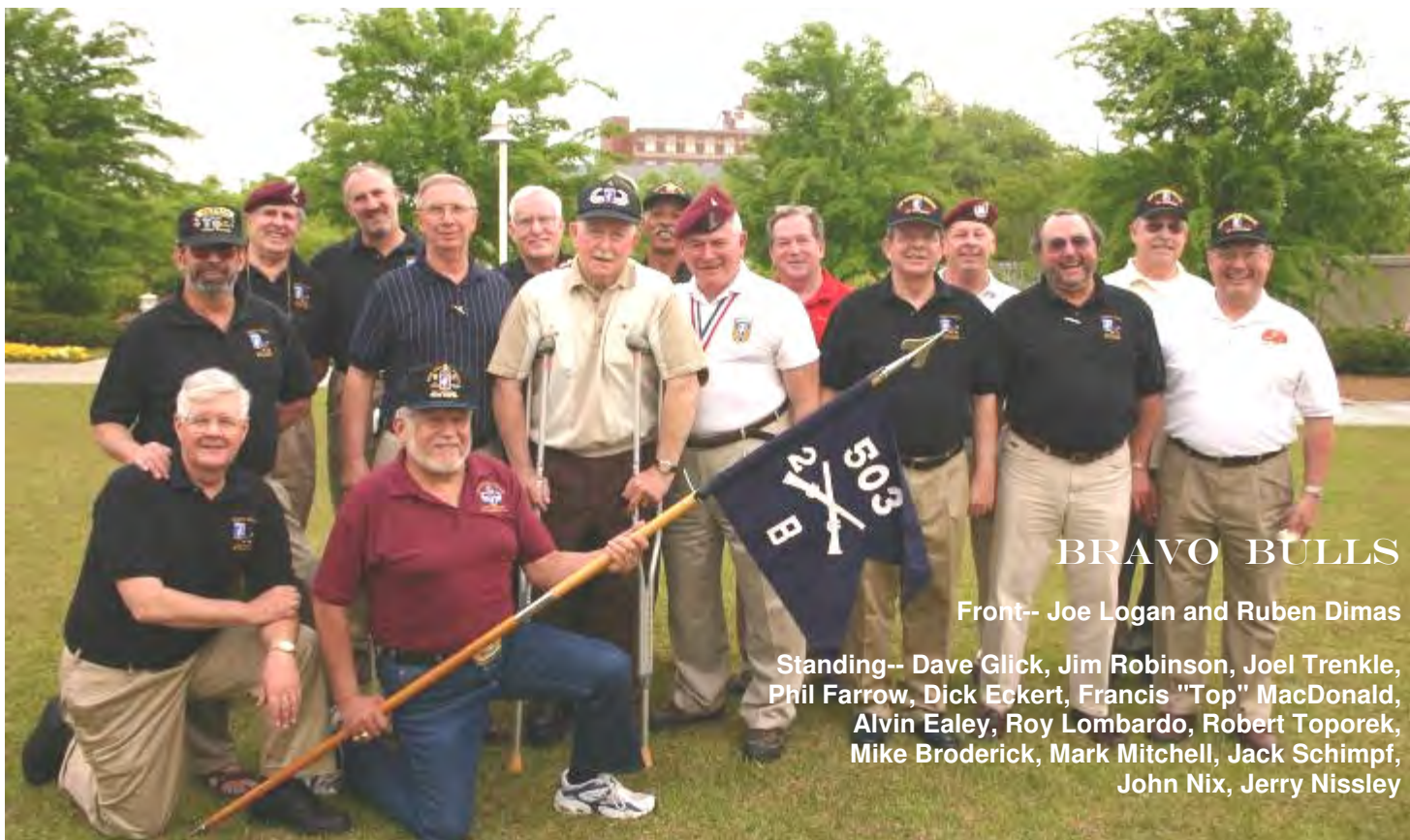
The ones who still answer the question, *"When were you in Vietnam?"* with *"Hey, man. I was there just last night."*

[Thanks to Mike Sturges, A/2/503d, for sending in this story, a story we all understand too well].

NOTE:

See Pages 42-43 for an invitation from the WWII 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team (PRCT) Association's invitation to all Sky Soldiers to attend their annual reunion in Dallas, Texas this coming September.





BRAVO BULLS

Front-- Joe Logan and Ruben Dimas

Standing-- Dave Glick, Jim Robinson, Joel Trenkle, Phil Farrow, Dick Eckert, Francis "Top" MacDonald, Alvin Ealey, Roy Lombardo, Robert Toporek, Mike Broderick, Mark Mitchell, Jack Schimpf, John Nix, Jerry Nissley

FAREWELL TO ANOTHER BRAVO BULL, SKY SOLDIER JOHN NIX



I am writing to inform the Bulls that John Nix, the 4.2 Mortar FO, has gone to join Ruben Dimas, John Wills, and Dick Eckert. John was always in my back pocket in training and stayed there when we went to RVN. The arty FO team, led by Jim Robinson, only came when we went

to RVN, so I kept John and had Jim fly and move with the 3d Platoon to crossload Fire Support. John was taciturn and no nonsense from the get-go and always had a fire mission ready when needed. He warned me off a few times because he said that he wasn't sure that the 4.2's were where they said, which took a lot of balls.

When we went into D Zone to try to recover Van Campen's body, we were mortared by the VC on the LZ. Fortunately the rounds buried in the paddy and didn't detonate. Newby that I was to enemy fire, I initially thought that someone was firing the 40 mm grenades too close. I had John fire onto the high ground beyond the assembly area and that was one of the times he told me to hold off on additional 4.2 fires. Arthur

McClain was wounded and we had our second med evac before moving out to search for Van Campen.

I did meet John in Northern Virginia for dinner and he and his wife attended our rally at Fayetteville as did Dick Eckert. He left the military, educated himself as a



Petroleum Engineer, moved to Alaska, and begged me to join him on the Tanana River for fishing. He also had family in Mississippi and we had many a conversation about where they lived.

Linda & John Nix

May God and all of the deceased Bulls welcome John into the Final DZ to await our arrival in the very distant future, as several emails have already said.

Roy Lombardo, LTC (Ret)
CO, B/2/503d



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FILLING THE RANKS

Gary Prisk

Captain

Charlie Company, 2/503d

It was the 22nd of June, another dirty, dusty Delta day. But, it wasn't Bobby Joe or Billy McCallister.. it was No Deros Alpha...it was Dak To. And this day changed the 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) forever.

As word of American paratroopers being executed by North Vietnamese Communist Regulars reaches the world stage, replacements were being diverted from parachute units around the globe. More importantly, a hard crust formed over the 2nd Battalion and the 173d Airborne Brigade. From that point on, sympathy could be found only in the dictionary....between shit and syphilis.

The men from the other companies and the men diverted to fill the ranks would walk the endless miles, eventually they would find their end.

One paratrooper diverted to the 2/503rd was PFC John T. Thompson. Assuming he was headed for No Deros Alpha, Thompson picked-up his toy gun, shouldered a near empty rucksack and reports for duty...with Charlie Company. Big, skinny, with red hair and more freckles than his hairy body could hide, Thompson fell-in with the likes of Spec. Four Jim Bednarski, Spec. four Glen Harmon, SSgt. Ernest Asbury, Sgt. Jose Baez, PFC Billy Knight, and PFC John Fish. There were more...maybe another story.

And so they began what they like to call, *The Bullshit Tour*...wandering around Dak To turning figure eights into a mystery...knowing that eventually the bastards that whacked Alpha company were wandering around in opposing circles and at some point the bullshit would stop.

In August of 1967...it could have been September...the battalion would find the Brigade LRRP Team that had gone off the net...skinned and mutilated. Ensuring that revenge was in favor, all hands had to examine the bodies. Sympathy would get a vigorous, newly coined definition.

Here's a picture of one of these boys: PFC John Thompson... somewhere in the mountains around Kontum. I called him Drips...you can guess the reason.



Drips

After Hill 875 not many men were still walkin' and talkin' in Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, or any of the companies for that matter. Again, replacements came from all points on the globe. I was headed for the Horse Cay until a paper pusher said the Herd was havin' a party in Dak To. I met General Sweiter (?)...he was a General anyway...for an "In-his-tent Howdy-Do"...when the general started cryin' ...I knew I was in deep shit.

Here's a shot of PFC Lloyd Green, Sgt. Paul Schreiber and PFC Donald Jones taken near Duc Co at the fire base.



Here's a couple shots of 875 survivors.. "The Hill People"... taking their leave at the EM Club at An Khe when the battalion rotated in for "Palace Guard"...PFC Glen Harmon, aka Squeak, and Thompson aka Drips... Doc Coward was there too.

Squeak & Drips

Here's a shot of Spec 4 Jim Bednarski (left)... aka Ben or Ski, with PFC Thomas Hurd (17 years old), Doc Walsh...PFC Collin Gillman, aka Pops...PFC Bobby Watts, aka Amps... and in front is Doc Dopart.



(continued....)



At the end of my tour (four-and-a-wake-up), Doc Dopart would present me with a Christmas card he had a friend in the states make for him. The card was a colored glossy of a VC one of the gunships had rearranged north of the Tiger Mountains. With no face and many-many holes, Chuck was back-stretched over a paddy dike facing the sky. Under the picture was a skyline relief of Bethlehem and under this were these words:

PEACE ON EARTH
Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion (Airborne),
503rd Infantry Regiment
173d Airborne Brigade (Separate)
Christians: 1 Buddhists: 0

This little ditty lead to a second Prejudicial Allegation being filed against me. This one was served on me when I was a student in the Ranger School during the Fort Benning Phase. For the record, the Ranger School cadre thought the card was hilarious. You see, the new battalion commander, a man I met for less than 5 minutes before he assumed command, was trying to get me court marshaled. Something about being responsible for everything your unit does or fails to do.

Senior medics could be extremely evil people. When I went on R&R, Doc Dopart along with the artillery FO, Lt. Cardenis, tied me up and the RTO's reported to battalion that Charlie Company had caught the deserter everyone seemed to be looking for...a damn good bit of black humor, no doubt.

Here's a picture of me being bound for transport to the rear area, branded a deserter. The MP's wanted to shackle-drag my ass from bunker to bunker and kept checking the loads on their 45's. Eventually, I went on R&R.



Here's a shot of one of our friends captured in the An Lao Valley, west of LZ English.



Bad Guy

When I took over 1st Platoon, Charlie Company, I had no idea where such a cast of characters could come from...helmets on backwards...rucksacks that were constructed out of trip wire and bits of twine ... eyes drawn into a void... bastard files to sharpen D-handled shovels... fatigues with every panel of fabric shredded ...and 40-grit words.

Here's a shot of myself and PFC Bobby Watts (left) aka Amps... and PFC Steve Senseney, aka Tennessee, the radio operators for Charlie Company, taken deep in the Fishhook just before another twilight came to call.



Amps, Cap & Tennessee

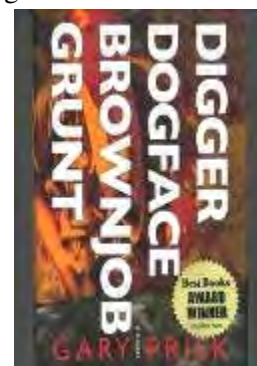
These men became my dearest friends...we have bonds that far exceed those of my primary family.



Point Team, 2nd Platoon

Seven of us got together for the dedication of the 173d Memorial at Fort Benning (see photo Page 19). Holed up in a laager...cabins and such in a rural part of Georgia. General Joe Jellison, my first company commander, Oscar Cruz, my platoon sergeant/field first sergeant, Tommy Thompson, aka Drips...Ernest Asbury, aka Nasty...Jim Bednarski, aka Ski, and Steve Senseney, aka Tennessee, raised our glasses high. We could not drink to all the men that fell, but we gave it a go.

Captain Gary Prisk served as platoon leader with and later company commander of Charlie Company, 2/503d, 173d Airborne Brigade in 1967/68 in Vietnam. He recently authored the multi-award winning Digger, Dogface, Brownjob, Grunt, a fictional novel based on his and his men's service during the war, available thru Amazon.com.



Those Faithful ARVN Allies



The following is an excerpt from the book, "A Viet Cong Memoir, an inside account of the Vietnam War and its aftermath," by Truong Nhu Tang, former Minister of Justice, Vintage Books.

"Although the Cambodian markets were favored for the security they afforded, the Vietnamese villages in the vicinity occasionally provided supplies unavailable elsewhere--especially after 1970. Up till then our usual means of transportation was bicycle or foot. But in the winter of 1969-1970 the whole country was inundated by an invasion of Japanese motorbikes. In one way or another, these bikes made their way out from the cities and into the hands of even the most remote country people, who would get their bikes from the local Saigon army forces--in our case the ARVN's 5th and 18th Divisions. Eventually, our Finance Department was able to set up regular supply channels directly between these divisions and the Front, forgoing the peasant middlemen.

From that point on we had a regular supply, not just of Hondas, but of typewriters, radios, cigarettes, and a variety of other goods. Before long there was a thriving business between senior officers of these ARVN divisions and the Front in weapons and ammunition as well. Among the most popular items were grenades and Claymore antipersonnel mines. More than a few American soldiers were killed with these mines bought from their ARVN comrades. American walkie-talkies were in high demand too; though our troops were used to the Chinese AK47 rifles and never developed much of a taste for the American M-16."

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ARVN 5th INFANTRY DIVISION

Commander
General Hieu

General Hieu's first efforts were to strengthen the combat capability of the 5th Division. To achieve this goal, according to Colonel John Hayes, Senior Advisor of ARVN 5th Division, General Hieu made use to the fullest *the attack role of the 1st Armored Regiment* and gave orders to units of the division to switch from *defensive to attack posture*. By initiating a program of *carrying the war to the enemy*, in a year, the 5th Division bulldozed VC strongholds located in Binh Duong, Binh Long and Phuoc Long Provinces (Combat Zones D, C, Ho Bo, Iron Triangle...) forcing the VC to move its Southern Central Command headquarters to the neighboring Cambodia.



Officers of the ARVN 5th Infantry Division

Colonel Nguyen Khuyen, Director of III Corps Military Security Bureau, noted:

When General Tri assumed the Command of III Corps, coincidentally all three divisional commanders of III Corps were graduated of 3rd Class of Dalat Military Academy: Major General Nguyen Xuan Thinh held the command of 25th Division, Major General Hieu, 5th Division and Major General Lam Quang Tho, 18th Division. Among these three Commanders, General Tri seemed to favor General Hieu the most because General Hieu used to be his Chief Of Staff at I Corps and II Corps in 1963

Nguyen Van Tin

Soruce: <http://www.generallhieu.com/tulenhds5-2.htm>



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team
FOB Shank, Afghanistan 09634



Sky Soldiers, Families & Friends,

On this day we recognize past, present and future Sky Soldiers – men and women who have proudly served in uniform and delivered for the United States of America each and every time they've been looked to. Their accomplishments are praiseworthy, their sacrifices immeasurable and with this memorial we honor all Sky Soldiers.

Our bond, as Sky Soldiers is being part of a proud and decidedly tough group of professional warriors who throughout our history have shown resolve and commitment to every mission. To our veterans, I salute you and recognize the tremendous commitments and sacrifices you have made. You have paved the way, set the standards of excellence and gave all that you had. You've lost comrades, served in distant locations, apart from your loved ones, given so much of yourselves that I write this letter humbled, glad for this opportunity to help announce the unveiling of this fine memorial and assert to all of our membership that this is your tribute – this pays homage to your service and will help say to any and all visitors that those who served shall forever be remembered. Yours is a lasting legacy now made tangible thanks to this fine memorial. To some this memorial will be a tribute, to others a gathering place when veterans reassemble far from the fields of combat, and still to others, sadly - a final point of remembrance for a lost buddy. Whichever of these things the memorial will represent, it honors the proud paratroopers for which it is named.

Sky Soldiers are paratroopers, first and foremost. The men and women who have worn this patch, represent the epitome of Soldierly virtues that the Army has to offer. Our vision and mission statements are clear about the high standards that are expected from our Sky Soldiers on day one. And they have never let us down. It is the Airborne way.

For any trooper who has worn the Sky Soldier patch, there really is no substitute for the kind of pride that is yours to claim – those who have served in this brigade or been members of our extended Army Families and friends, who have supported their Sky Soldiers over the last 50+ years.

On the occasion of this ceremony, the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team is serving once again in Afghanistan, in support of OEF-X. The baton passes from generation to generation. Times change, but the high standards and traditions of fine units do not waiver. When our nation calls, "The Herd" is ready.

Intact today are the legacies forged by the Sky Soldiers, who have leapt from aircraft, grabbed their rifles and delivered on their commitments to this nation and all it stands for. I know the greatness of the Sky Soldiers, and it's found in their hearts and souls; they are warriors who are battle-tested professionals, hard-working, dedicated troopers – those who have served in peace or war, those who have made history and those whose lives have made a difference. This memorial is yours. It pays homage to you, your comrades, our Fallen, and our future paratroopers.

Sky Soldiers!

Colonel Jim Johnson
Bayonet-6



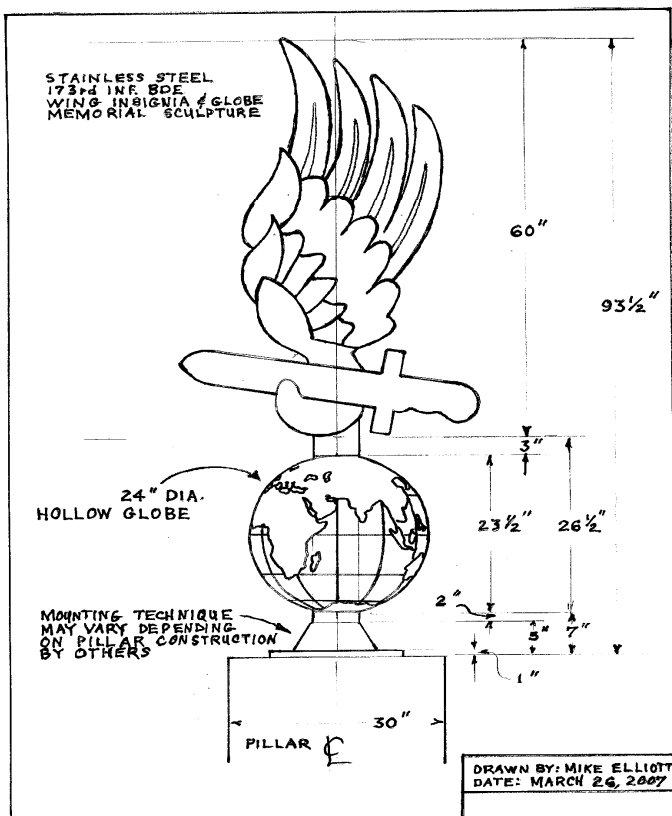
CREATION OF THE 173d MEMORIAL

By Mike Elliott
April 28, 2010

A little over three years ago a committee of the 173d Airborne Brigade Association came to Columbus, Georgia scouting a city to build a national memorial. They were also checking out potential companies to work with in bringing it to fruition. I was fortunate enough to have a meeting with them at the Columbus Chamber of Commerce where we discussed various concepts for the memorial. Association member Don Dali was designated the Director of Design and Construction.

Through ongoing discussions and correspondence with Don, it was agreed that I would make small plastic models of three versions of the sculpture. I made the models and sent them to Don. The models were displayed at a big associational meeting where it was decided which version they wanted. At some point during that period the group formed a not-for-profit foundation, the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation, to do their fundraising.

During the latter part of 2007 Don Dali and I discussed specifications for the sculpture and terms of an agreement. The work was authorized in mid January, 2008. During the first two months I procured materials and fabricated tools, dollies, and jigs that I would need.



Mike Elliott

The fabrication of the sculpture started in early March. All materials are high quality stainless steel. I made the globe first. A full sized drawing of the globe, base and center post was accurately etched on a sheet of flat metal. All dimensions for the longitude and latitude bars were taken from that drawing. The solid $\frac{3}{4}$ inch by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch square bar stock was first rolled to the required twenty-four inch diameter and then cut to fit the dimensions on the drawing.



The pieces were fitted and welded around the post to form the grid for the globe.

The continents were then drawn onto 14 gauge stainless steel with a fine point sharpie pen and cut out with various tools including a Beverly shear, drills bits, and a hand held grinder. I had made a large convex dolly to use in shaping the continents with a rubber mallet. Each continent is made with one piece of metal. I did have to cut and weld two notches at the top of Eurasia to keep it from puckering. The work went well and I put a randomly sanded finish on the continents because I didn't want the globe to be brighter than the wing and bayonet.

(continued....)



The bayonet was cut and formed by hand. The blade is made of two pieces of metal. The grip is four pieces and the hilt is six little pieces. Each feather was cut by hand with the Beverly shear then welded and finished prior to welding it to the internal frame. The welds were ground and the finish reapplied before the next feather was made and attached.

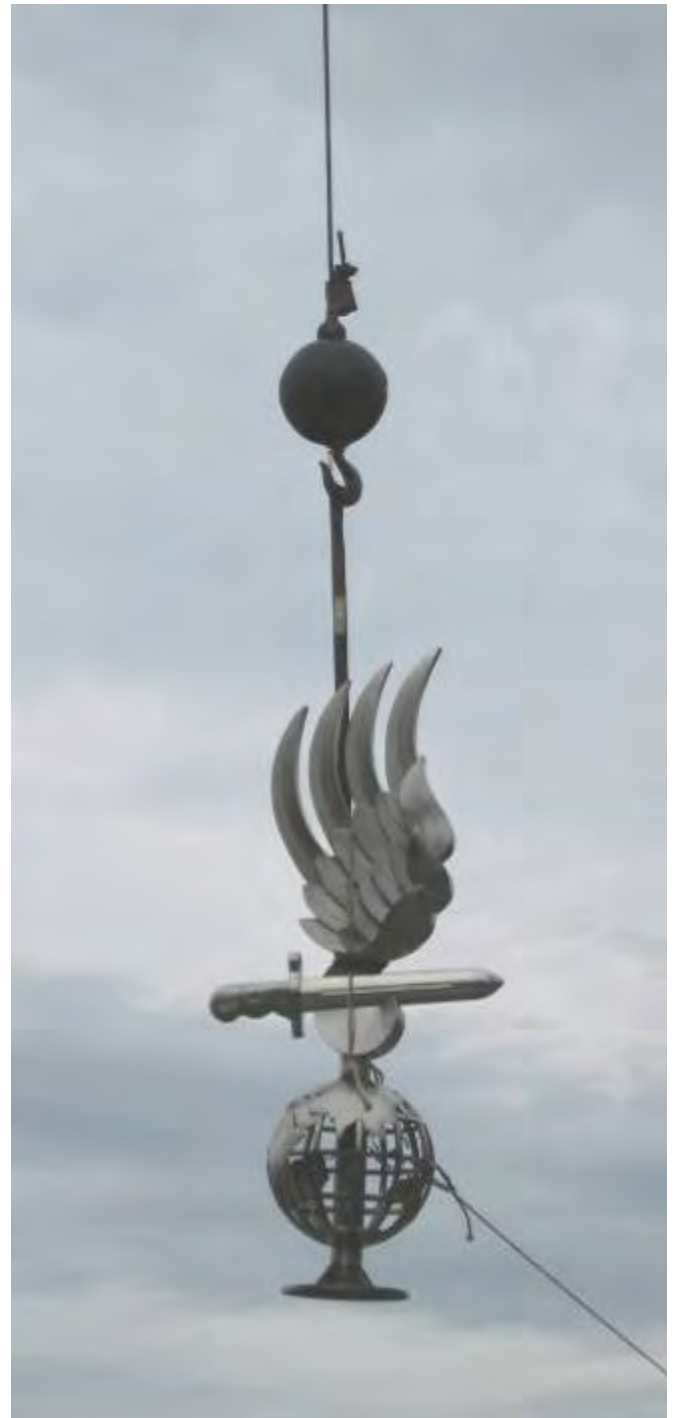
The wing and Bayonet is a separate piece with a strong frame inside. It has a smaller pipe at the bottom that fits inside the post of the globe. All pieces of the wing and bayonet were scaled up from the original plastic model.



I worked from the bottom up on the whole project with the final pieces being the four vertical feathers at the top. The project was finished in early October, 2008. It was crated and stored until it was installed on the center column of the memorial on Tuesday, April 20, 2010. It was a challenging but fulfilling project.



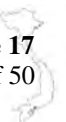
I have wondered which part was the most challenging and have decided that the part that I was working on at the time was the most challenging. After a portion was completed it didn't seem like it was as much of a challenge as that which lay ahead.



I am both honored and humbled to have been allowed to actively participate in creating this memorial.

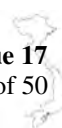
Mike Elliott

Thanks to Mike Elliott for providing background information on the creation and construction of the memorial and the photographs depicting his work from concept, commencement of the project, to finish, presented here. Job well done Mike!





Mike with his completed historic work.





173d Memorial Dedication ~ Fort Benning, GA

June 1, 2010

~ It Was a Great and Sad Day to be a Sky Soldier...and to Remember ~



Young, old and older alike were in attendance.

If you were unfortunate enough to miss attending the dedication at Benning last month, well, you missed something special. Until you have the opportunity to personally visit the memorial, here's a brief recap of the event along with photos provided by some of the Sky Soldiers and guests in attendance.

The morning began like any June jump school day many of us remember at Benning; hot and humid, with more than a few of us mentioning how pleased we were to not be doing PE, running in cadence step, jumping the towers or any other vigorous activity other than what we were doing....sipping cool water while sitting in shaded bleachers waiting for the program to unfold in front of us

-- yet while the body was protesting our minds were ready to join the next class. It was a great day to be a Sky Soldier, and to remember.

Ken Smith had earlier sent a note saying there would be about 1500 people in attendance; 173d vets and active duty personnel and their family members and friends -- a number which sounded suspicious for some reason. But, damn, if he wasn't right; we didn't count everyone there but the bleachers were full and overflowing, and no one should ever again question the Colonel's math.

(continued....)





Sky Soldiers, Kiwi's and Aussies at Benning.

For many of us (all of us?), emotions ran high that morning. A number of moving speeches by Vietnam vets, active duty soldiers and an Aussie and Kiwi, coupled with traditional army and U.S. patriotic musical performances left few of us with dry eyes.

It seems there was a flare of controversy regarding this memorial some time ago by a few in our ranks, the details which are unclear today. Yet after attending this event, seeing and touching the memorial, talking without words to the names of our buddies on that memorial, it's hoped any such controversy, like old soldiers, will simply fade away.



It is a fine memorial, a beautiful memorial in a peaceful setting and no better place to keep the memory alive of those kids we used to know.



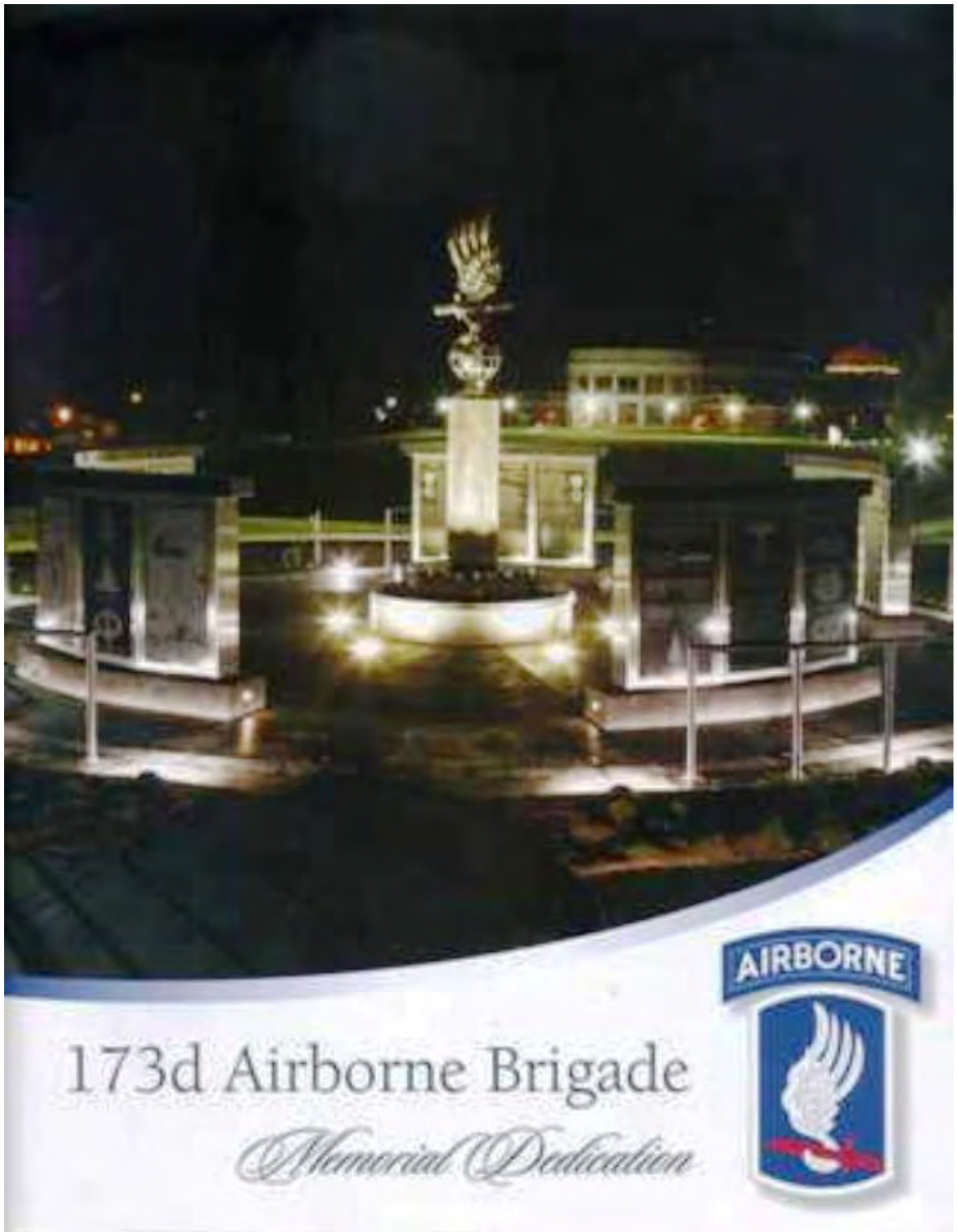
Some stayed late. Some are staying forever.

We had not forgotten the reason for us being there that morning. It was a sad day to be a Sky Soldier, and to remember.

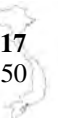
Choppers flew overhead. It was a great and sad day to be a Sky Soldier, and to remember.

Smitty Out





Memorial Dedication Program cover.



Some Photos from the Memorial Dedication at Fort Benning, GA



Sky Soldiers and guests at 173d Memorial dedication on June 1, 2010 at Fort Benning, GA. Photo by Wayne Hoitt, 2/503d



C/2/503d troopers in the Georgia woods, L-R: Sgt. Jim Bernarski, aka Ski; Sgt. Ernest Asbury, aka Nasty; MSG. Oscar Cruz, aka Top; Capt. Gary Prisk, aka Cap; Gen. Joe Jellison, aka Captain Joe; PFC Tommy Thompson, aka Drips.



Dedication

(continued....)



173d Memorial Dedication





Reunion Program cover.

