

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

**WE TRY
HARDER!**

2/503d
VIETNAM
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ newsletter



Contact: rto173d@cfl.rr.com

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August 2010 ~ Issue 18

~ 2/503d PHOTOS OF THE MONTH ~

Honoring Our Helio Buddies

January 16, 2010

God's Own Lunatics

Filed under Rollcall

Presentation by Mr. Joe Gallaway, a war correspondent with the grunts and a hero. The only civilian to be awarded, from the Army, a Bronze Star for bravery in action.

From the sound track of *The Shadow of the Blade*, [gods-own-lunatics2](#)



2d Battalion on mission. Photo by: Wayne Hoitt, 2/503d



2/503d ready to board Huey's at the "Snakepit",
Bien Hoa airbase.

Photo by: Wayne Hoitt, 2/503d

I don't know if there is anybody here today who doesn't thrill at the sound of those blades. That familiar *whoop whoop whoop* is the sound track of our war. The lullaby of our younger days.

To someone who spent his time in Nam with the grunts, I've got to tell you that noise was always a great comfort.

It meant that someone was going to help, someone was coming to get our wounded, someone was coming to bring us water and ammo, someone was coming to take our dead brothers home.



2/503d **VIETNAM** Newsletter / August 2010 - Issue 18

Page 1 of 47



And eventually, someone was coming to give us a ride out of hell.

Even today when I hear it, I stop, catch my breath, and think back to those days. I love you guys as only an infantryman can.

Sometimes you stayed with us on the ground.

Photo by: Tom Goodwin, 2/503d

No matter how bad things were, if we called, you came.

Down through the green tracers and other signs of a real bad day, off to a real bad start.

To us you seem to be beyond brave and fearless.

That you would come to us in the middle of battle, in those flimsy, thin-skinned crates.

And in the storm of fire, you sit up there behind the thin plexiglas, seeming so patient, and so calm, and so vulnerable. Waiting for the off loading and the on loading.

We thought you were God's own lunatics and we loved you, still do.



And we knew you would always come to take our wounded and dead away. Photo by: Wayne Hoitt, 2/503d



We are the fortunate ones. We survived when so many better men gave up their precious lives for us.

We owe them a sacred debt, to live each day to it's fullest.

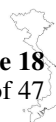
What they are saying when you listen hard enough is this, "We're at peace and so should you be... and so should you be."



No matter the risk, you would come for us.
2/503d at Dak To.



Again and again, we knew you would come.
2/503d Silver City. Photo by: Wayne Hoitt, 2/503d



SKY SOLDIERETTE'S CORNER



I am sitting here watching one of my heroes sleeping – the one who shaped my life, who gave me strength – who made me believe in myself - the one now weak and frail – the Rock of Gibraltar crumbling before my very eyes.

The past few weeks have been hard. In May, we celebrated my

Dad's 90th birthday – a man who could outwork and outlast most 65-year old men. Within weeks, he was diagnosed with lymphoma. He is ready to go and knows that he has made a difference in so many lives, but I'm not ready to let him go.

My solace is that his bravery, his courage, his unconditional love, and his life are my legacy and will always be there to prop me up when I feel I can no longer stand on my own. How long we have, no one knows. I just know that forever won't be long enough. I hope that I can be half the person that he is.

In November 1940, my Dad's oldest brother was drafted and joined the Colorado National Guard. He bet Dad a quarter that Dad couldn't get in. Of course, Dad never backs down and took Uncle Richard up on that bet. In January 1941, the Colorado National Guard was activated into the regular Army. Uncle Richard got to stay in Colorado because of a health issue – Dad went to Georgia for training.

He never talked much about his time in the service – except we knew he served in the Pacific theater. One night, he decided to talk to Wayne and I and what a story we learned. How he went to Hawaii on a luxury liner that had been converted into a troop carrier. His tank platoon of three tanks was positioned on the bow of the ship for protection. Because there were so many soldiers below decks, it was easier to sleep in the tanks.

From Hawaii, he was sent to the Phoenix Islands, then the Marshall and Solomon Islands. He earned a Bronze Star for Valor. Shortly afterwards he returned to the states for OCS training. He got into trouble for talking back to an instructor who he felt wasn't telling the truth about the armaments and supplies the soldiers were getting in the field and was kicked out just before he would have graduated. When he returned to the field, he found that his crew had rotated home and that he had more than enough points to get out. Without the crew that he had been with the entire time, he left the service in June 1945.

Watching the series "The Pacific" is the only way that we really knew what he went through as he was the armor support for the marines who went through those Islands. He downplays everything he did.



The Tuttle family. Wayne and Iva with daughter Lauri, grandkids Josh and Aaron, and Dad.

Once while we were talking, I said to him that at least in his war men knew what they were fighting for. His response was – *"My friends and the man next to me – nothing more and nothing less. Ideals go out the window when you are fighting for survival."*

This week he has told me of the nightmares that have plagued him for years – of fighting – of being trapped – of pushing bodies into a pit. I suspected – just knew that when we were young, you didn't wake Dad out of a sound sleep except by yelling while you were out of range of his thrashing.

PTSD – always was – always will be – something I've suspected for years. May all the ones who fight find peace someday.

**"From the men of the 2/503d,
thank you for your service,
and job well done Dad."**





Leadership That Serves

by Dr. Ronald R. Smith

1LT, B/2/503d

At the close of the European phase of WWII, General George Patton held a conversation with General Omar Bradley. Patton felt that since the battle in Europe was winding down, there would be no further need for his services. Bradley assured Patton that he was mistaken. Battles still had to be fought in the Pacific and General Douglas MacArthur would welcome Patton's services.

Patton replies, *"No. MacArthur won't have me. You see, we fought together in the same Company during WWI; MacArthur was a Captain; I was his Lieutenant. One day I was ordered to capture a hill, but our troops were cut down by enemy fire. When MacArthur received that order, though, he jumped to his feet and charged up that hill calling his men to follow him. I went with him step by step all the way to the top."*

Then Patton added, *"MacArthur never forgave me for that!"*

That story reflects the five-star egos of two great American Generals, but it also makes me nostalgic for a time when the world seemed populated with courageous leaders. Now the supply of leaders seems as bare as 'Mother Hubbard's' cupboard. Indeed, this lack of leadership seems endemic to American society. From government, to business and industry, sadly, the leadership landscape is monotonously flat of great soul leaders. Indeed, in some ways our society seems to work against leaders. Yet, leadership is a noble calling. In fact, if you have come out of your mother's womb wired to be a leader, you cannot not lead. But leadership is hard work.

In John, chapter 13, Jesus gives us one of the world's greatest examples of true leadership. The events of that Passion Week Thursday culminated when Jesus sent his disciples ahead to an upper room to prepare for a Passover meal together. Usually, there was a servant with a bowl, a pitcher of cool water, a towel and a stool for each guest to sit while the servant unlaced their sandals and washed their feet. Animals often left their calling cards on the paths, which people picked up on their feet.

If you've ever seen Leonardo DaVinci's painting of the Last Supper you get the idea that Jesus and his men lined up on one side of a long table as though posing for a team photo. As inaccurate as that portrayal is, it is not any more

inaccurate than some conclusions drawn from that episode.



As Jesus enters the room, He discovers the disciples had been arguing over the question, *"Who of us is the greatest?"* To stifle that "Mohammed Ali complex" Jesus stood up, took off His outer robes, and with a basin of water He knelt and washed His disciples' dirty feet. Then, He dried their feet with a towel. *"I have set you an example,"* He declared. *"I have washed your feet. You must wash one another's."*

Many of us like to take our lead from Superman and it is always, "up, up and away." But with Jesus, it is always "down, down, down." From Godhood to manhood; from manhood to servant-hood; from servant-hood to death on a Roman execution rack. Jesus lived among us as one who served. In the company of Jesus Christ, therefore, service is our most important product. Service—not domination; service—not manipulation; service—not exploitation; service—not climbing to the top; service—not advancing our own agendas; service—not putting our name in lights; service—not because it is good public relations, but because it is good leadership and good Christian relations.

Having washed His disciples' feet, Jesus returned to His seat and declared, *"You call me Lord and Master and you do right. If I, your Lord and Master, wash your feet, you are to wash one another's."* A leader spoke those words and modeled what He spoke. Jesus was a servant, but He spoke with authority. He was in charge of His operation. He knew where He was going. He was not a leaf tossed about by the wind, he was an arrow centered on the target. It is accurate, spiritual grammar to talk about "the servant as a leader."

In the Providence of God those of us who are privileged to serve our country and our fellow soldiers in one of the most elite military units in our nation's history, have also been blessed to lead the way in that service. Our country still needs our service and they need our leadership. And we will be grateful for brothers and sisters who stand and charge any hill with us. May God give us men and women who will serve as leaders and lead by serving.

An object of His grace,

Ron Smith



Soldiers want to see more combat-relevant fitness test

That was the lead-in to a recent report from Gannett news service by Joe Gould, where he stated "*The Army plans to overhaul the 30-year-old Army Physical Fitness Test and soldiers couldn't agree more: 'Army Strong' should be even stronger.*" Well, maybe.

On occasion I have the opportunity to visit Patrick AFB here in Central Florida, and with few exceptions the young fly boys and fly girls I see appear to be in good to excellent shape. There are a few whose physical composition may be suspect and suggests they may have snuck under the wire, or rolled over it, but by and large they are a fit lot.

The Atlantic Ocean is immediately across the street from the base offering surfing and other physical activities; the preferred one we call *Sea Creature Watching* which exercises the eyes yet does little in preparation for charging machine gun nests. Thus, one solution might be to move all the army forts to ocean front property.

"Army fitness has gone to an all-time low, I believe," says Staff Sgt. Jimmy W. Creech, of Redstone Arsenal, Alabama. Hey Jimmy, Alabama has waterfront property, albeit somewhat oily these days.

Many active duty soldiers believe these changes will help alleviate the problem of the army being 'Almost Army Strong':

- Add pull-ups.
- Add crunches.
- Dump sit-ups.
- Add shuttle runs for a road march.
- Work out in combat gear instead of PT clothes.

Combat gear instead of PT clothes?! Oh, the shorts, T-shirts, tennis shoes, saw dusted ground with shaded areas with lots of cool water to drink....how silly of me, I forgot. That might help some.

Yet with little hope for moving all army forts to the surf-boarding sea, and the very scary hot weather likely to keep the stylish PT clothes in vogue, not to mention those mean Sergeants who yell at you to *keep running, keep pushing*, it seems another solution must be devised to help those kids become physically fit combat-ready soldiers. Hmmm, but what could that possibly be?

SEND THOSE YOUNG ASSES TO FORT BENNING AND JUMP SCHOOL IN JUNE.

There's an idea.

Smitty Out

~ Colonel Ken Smith ~

2/503d Sky Soldier of the Year ~ 2010

In the April edition of our newsletter we put out the request for troopers to nominate who they believe should be recognized as our battalion's "Sky Soldier of the Year ~ 2010," Vietnam era trooper. A selection committee was formed, pretty much at random, mixing ranks and years in-country, to include an equal number of officers and enlisted men of the 2/503d; from a private to a LTC.

During the selection process each man was unaware who the other men were on that committee, and a 'blind vote' was cast by each trooper based on the merits of the nominations they were considering. A number of deserving 2/503d Sky Soldiers were nominated for this special recognition, and I can only say I'm pleased I didn't have to participate in the difficult selection process.

These men, acting as the voice for us all, voted unanimously for the one trooper who stood out among his many equally deserving comrades.

On behalf of the men of the 2d Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep), Vietnam era, we are pleased to honor Col. Ken Smith as our "2/503d Sky Soldier of the Year ~ 2010." Congratulations Colonel Smith, job well done, Sir.

INCOMING!

I served with Ken Smith after he replaced Dave Milton soon after the *Battle of the Slopes*. His leadership through this spiritually draining transition is a testament to his resolve and acumen as a thoughtful military strategist. He was assigned the unenviable task of reinvigorating a unit made up of 80% FNGs and the remaining disenfranchised Alpha grunts. Somehow he pulled it off, and Alpha's successes through the Fall of that year can be directly attributed to his vision.

Over the past few years Ken and I have had the opportunity to commiserate not only about our Vietnam experiences, but life's challenges as well. His association with the Brigade and especially his piloting of the 173d Memorial speaks for itself. Ken's quiet but effective demeanor is his most outstanding asset. A more uniquely charming human you'll never find. I'm proud to call him friend.

As long as Ken remains an integral part of the Herd, we shall prosper.

Wambi Cook, A/2/503d





2/503d SKY SOLDIER OF THE YEAR 2010

(Vietnam era)

~ Colonel Kenneth V. Smith ~

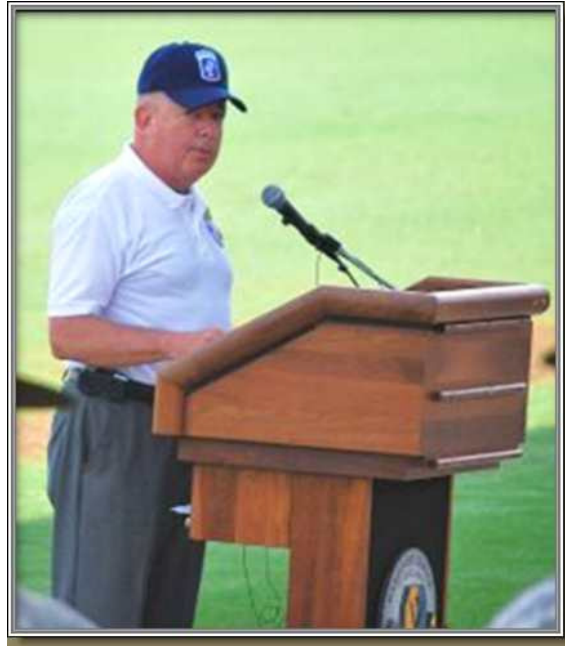
Colonel Smith served in the 2/503d, 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep) beginning in March of 1967. During his tour with the 2/503d he was Battalion S-3, was company commander of Alpha Company 2/503d, and formed and commanded Delta Company 2/503d.

Throughout the years Ken has served his fellow paratroopers as editor of *Sky Soldier Magazine*, and has faithfully served as treasurer, and as president of the Society from 1995 to 1999. During his time in service to the brigade, Col. Smith's leadership kept the society prospering.

Ken is one of the President's Emeritus of the 173d Airborne Brigade Association, which includes Gen. Ellis Williamson and Col. Robert Sigholtz, who have both since passed on.

Ken's fund-raising efforts made it possible for the 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep) to have a marker stone placed at the Airborne & Special Operation's Museum in Fayetteville N.C. Thanks to Col. Smith we of the 173d Airborne Brigade were the second unit to purchase one of the many markers outside the museum and ours is the second from the entrance.

During his tour of duty as a company commander with the 2/503d, he made a promise to one of his soldiers as he died in Ken's arms, *"That he would never be forgotten."* Over the many years since, Col. Smith has always fought to keep that promise he made to that dying Sky Soldier.



On 1 June 2010, Ken kept his promise with the dedication of the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial at the National Infantry Museum's Patriot Park just outside Fort Benning, GA.

During the past four years and through his leadership and guidance, the 173d Memorial was completed. From concept to dedication, Ken has served as Treasurer, Head of Fundraising, and President of the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation. The Colonel spent countless hours of his time to raise the required and substantial funds needed to

build our memorial. In each of his letters to prospective donors he included a personal message. His unwavering commitment to this project and his never ending leadership was the driving force which made it possible.

Col. Kenneth V. Smith is also the Honorary Colonel of the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment.

Ken continues to demonstrate his lifetime commitment to his fellow Sky Soldiers and those who were taken from us so many years ago. His service to our battalion and all those who served and are serving in the 173d Airborne Brigade is unmatched.

It is our honor to recognize Col. Kenneth V. Smith as "2/503d Sky Soldier of the Year - 2010" Vietnam era. And from the men of your battalion, Colonel, we salute you.

Airborne! All The Way Sir!



173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation, Inc.

I have been asked by several fellow Sky Soldiers to discuss the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation, its relationship to the 173d Airborne Association, the 173d Association Foundation, and the Paver Program at the National Infantry Museum. I would like to start with a little background on the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation, how it came to be, its purpose, and future.



Erecting the Memorial at Fort Benning, GA. (Mike Elliott)

In July of 2004, at the Daytona Reunion, the Board of Directors of the 173d Airborne Brigade Association voted in favor of Terry Modglin forming a committee to explore the feasibility of building a 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial. Over the next two years the committee, composed of association members, visited existing 173d Memorials along with other unit memorials to enable them to make a recommendation to the Association. Along with visiting existing memorials, the committee visited possible sites for a 173d Memorial. In January of 2006, at the Association's Mid-Winter Conference, a formal design proposal and site recommendation was submitted to the Association's Board of Directors, and was scheduled for discussion at the 2006 annual reunion.

During the 2006 reunion held in Fayetteville N.C., the Association Executive Board tailored its approval of the proposal by requiring that a 'separate and distinct' organization undertake the project. The Association Board reasoned that the project could jeopardize the Association's financial stability if a funding shortfall were to occur. The Board drafted a motion proposing the Association's commitments to the project and approved sending that proposal to the General Membership. The proposal was brought to a vote at the General Membership Meeting and unanimously approved on June 24, 2006.

In July of 2006, the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation, Inc. was formed. Among its first tasks, the Foundation filed Articles of Incorporation in the State of Georgia, crafted and adopted governing By-Laws, attained a Federal 501(C)3 non-profit tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service, and formed a Board of Directors.

The purpose of the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation was to raise the funds to build and maintain a 173d Memorial to be build on the grounds of the National Infantry Museums' Patriot Park Walk of Honor.

The 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation was organized and incorporated as a 'separate foundation'.



Our buddies. Always to be remembered. (Jerry Hassler)

(continued....)





We can only hope these panels forever remain blank.
(Jerry Hassler)

The 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation is not connected to, governed by, or part of the 173d Association or the Association's Foundation. It has no members. It does have donors to the memorial project who are sent an annual financial and progress report. The 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation also provides a semi-annual report to the 173d Association's Board of Directors and an annual report to the Association's General Membership at the Annual Association Reunion.

The 173d Airborne Brigade Foundation is a separate foundation created by the 173d Airborne Association to support the scholarship program and other non-profit purposes of the Association. For further information on the 173d Association Foundation, checkout the 173d Association's web site.

The National Infantry Museum Paver Program is entirely an Infantry Museum project and Fund Raiser. The 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation receives no monies from the sale of pavers from the museum. What we did receive is a prime piece of ground for the 173d Memorial from the National Infantry Museum along with two distinct areas for placement of 173d pavers (Sections: 17A and 17B along the 'Walk of Flags'). The 173d Memorial Foundation could not have built the memorial without the generous offer of the site for the 173d Memorial from the National Infantry Museum.

Although the 173d Memorial is built, there is still a lot for the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation to accomplish. The memorial was built to be a perpetual memorial so that data and names could be added over time if needed. The 173d Airborne Combat Team is again deployed to Afghanistan and unfortunately it has taken casualties. Names of our fallen brothers will need to be added along with deployment dates and additions to the unit history. A formal maintenance agreement with the National Infantry Museum remains to be finalized. This is in progress and should be completed in the coming months.

Although the Memorial is completely paid for, the Foundation needs to raise funds in the future for these ongoing items.

I hope this explains some of the questions Sky Soldiers and their families and friends have about the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation and its relationship to the 173d Airborne Brigade Association and its Foundation and the National Infantry Museum Paver Program. If anyone has any further items that they need information on regarding the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation feel free to contact me at my email address below.

Craig D. Ford
Treasurer
173d Airborne Bde. National Memorial Foundation, Inc.
Email: cdford1503@verizon.net
C/1/503d, 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep) 3/64 to 4/66



Welcome home brothers. (Jerry Hassler)



From Photo Collection of Wes “Johnny” Johnson B/2/503d ’68-’70



Wes Johnson, johnson173rd@yahoo.com



GAMING THE SYSTEM

In a recent edition of FloridaToday newspaper was a letter to the editor from a retired soldier. He was complaining new VA rules relieve much of the necessity to demonstrate 'stressors' by vets who served in combat zones and who are now and will be filing claims for PTSD. He further stated this will result in many G.I.'s 'gaming the system,' and he may well be right. Nevertheless, countless men and women from our war and all wars go untreated....one only needs to perform minimal research on the subject of suicides among war veterans to confirm this. The unfortunate twist is, and in spite of such new relaxed regulations, too many just, worthy and deserving claims go unapproved by that agency. Ed.

ENTRUSTING THE VA

The real reason civilian assessments are so important.

I evaluated a 41 year old Gulf War veteran today, who returned from the War while his first wife had his marriage dissolved. He was in the front lines and experienced significant trauma as a combat engineer (crawling over dead Iraqi's and as the only portable bridge operator in the midst of the prime offensive, he was a prime target), as well as being exposed to a multitude of toxins to include burning oil, detonations of depleted uranium, toxins in the infra-red chemical in the Battle Dress Uniform (BDU), toxins in the bug repellent and sunburn cream, aspartame and pyridostigmine (untested anti-nerve agent designed to be taken 14 days). He was forced to take pyridostigmine for several months and returned with an intense reaction which included multiple chemical sensitivity and birth defects in his child.

After assaulting his second wife with a shot-gun, she divorced him. He decided to return to active duty after not fitting into the occupational world and trained at Fort Benning, GA in the Infantry. During his training he had adverse reactions to the loud explosions, but while the cannons fired at Graduation, he lost it and was hospitalized at the local VA where the senior psychiatrist (who also treated his WWII grandfather) gave him a service connected PTSD diagnosis and sent him to a local civilian hospital because he was active duty. He was diagnosed with severe and chronic PTSD and released. The Army DID NOT conduct a Medical Board and the veteran was told to file with the VA. He filed a claim with the VA in 2003 for PTSD and it was denied for insufficient stressors.



The veteran later married, has three small girls and later held his third wife at shot-gun. She threatened to leave if he ever did it again and he eventually realized that it was easier to give up his cherished father's shot-gun than it was to keep changing wives.

The veteran struggles with his isolation, extreme anxiety and panic attacks, explosiveness (has chased people down and beat them), and other PTSD symptoms, and currently receives NO disability from the Army or the VA. He amazingly works in an isolated job where he continues to experience symptoms of toxic exposure and PTSD.

He produced documentation of his previous evaluations over the past few days. Welcome Home Vets has initiated the following:

- 1) Veteran has been introduced to a veteran service officer.
- 2) Veteran's 15 page evaluation has been completed.
- 3) Veteran and his wife will participate in PTSD and PTSD support groups.
- 4) Veteran will later join GULF WAR/OIF/OEF Support Group.
- 5) Veteran has been scheduled for a QEEG.
- 6) Veteran will participate in brain retraining to address his panic attacks.
- 7) Veteran has been enrolled in Enhancing Military Couples Relationships Program and completed the initial inventories.
- 8) Veteran will be offered legal assistance to pursue back pay for his claim which was originally denied in 2003 to the fullest extent of the law.
- 9) Therapy will be made available for the veteran's three young daughters.

We are Welcome Home Vets....We make a difference. It's what we do.

Some wounds don't end with the war. The severity and extent to which veterans suffer with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder is a direct response to our culture's willingness to Welcome Home and Care for its Warriors.

Veterans Caring for Veterans,

Scott Fairchild, PsyD
Welcome Home Vets, Inc. (WHV)
1370 Bedford Drive, Suite 106, Melbourne, FL 32941
Phn: 321 253-8887, Fax: 321 253-8878

Note: Doc Scott Fairchild is a retired LTC with the 82nd Airborne Div. and has helped numerous Sky Soldiers and their spouses from throughout the country.





173d Sky Soldier Killed in Afghanistan

A Soldier with the 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team, currently deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom X, was killed in action July 5, 2010.

Sgt. Louis Robert Fastuca, 24, of Boston, Mass., was killed while conducting combat operations in Wardak Province, Afghanistan.

Fastuca reported to Caserma Ederle and was assigned to the 173d's Delta Co., 1/503d Inf. (Airborne), where he served as an infantryman in 2d Platoon.

While deployed to Wardak Province, he completed more than 125 missions as an infantryman in support of Operation Enduring Freedom X.

"Without exception, the men of DOG Company loved Sgt. Fastuca for his genuine care and concern for his brother Soldiers. Just as he cared for all around him in life, he is without a doubt, now in God's caring arms," said Delta Company Commander Capt. Dave Panian. (Fastuca was recently reassigned from Delta to HHC).

He is survived by his brothers and parents, who reside in Pennsylvania. Fastuca was posthumously recommended for the Purple Heart Medal. A remembrance ceremony was held at the post chapel Tuesday at 3 p.m.

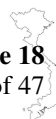


Sgt. Louis Robert Fastuca, a Sky Soldier, evermore.

Source: USAG Vincenza,
Installation Management Commander -
Europe.

**"THERE ARE NO HEROES
IN THIS PLACE,
ALL THE HEROES ARE ALL DEAD."**

(from a poem)



CU CHI TUNNEL SYSTEM AN AUSSIE VISIT BACK IN TIME

In April of 2009 my eldest son, Clay, and I made a trip back to Vietnam to spend a 'Boys Only' couple of weeks. My 'babysan' Alexander, only being 11 at the time, was pretty pissed at not being allowed to go with us as he said, *"I am one of the men in this family, aren't I?"* We explained that we intended to attempt some things that would be too strenuous for him as I had planned to get to some of the locations which we had frequently spent joyful 'strolls in the weeds' in 1965-66.

When we arrived in Saigon (I refuse to call it Ho Chi Minh City) we spent a day or two getting orientated as the city seems to change from month to month with all the construction work going on. On our third night I took Clay with me to do the family thing and visit my brother-in-law and his family on the junction that separates Saigon from Cholon (the Chinese section of the city) where he lives. We visited and had a few beers with my wife's brother and his sons and nephews then enjoyed dinner and a few more beers.



Clay and John Arnold. *"We were surprised to see they had named a restaurant after our family in Saigon! Even though we told them our name was Arnold we still had to pay the bastards for dinner."* John

My brother-in-law really enjoys a beer and he has learned to drink his beer the Aussie way (cold) and no longer has it the Vietnamese way with ice in a glass and hot beer poured over the ice. We fell into a cab sometime late that night and it got us back to our hotel safely, so far as I can recall.

The next morning we were up early, had a swim and then breakfast and decided to do a day trip out to the Cu Chi Tunnels complex. I had been there the year before when I took Alexander, Irene and my brother's wife who had travelled over there with us, and Clay had also visited the tunnels before when he and his wife travelled to Vietnam on an earlier trip.

Now, neither Clay nor I are what you would call small blokes so we each had a seat to ourselves on the bus which was pretty much filled with Aussies, Kiwis, Yanks, Frogs, Pommies and a couple of other Europeans from wherever. Our guide was brilliant, he was the man who trained RAMBO to be a pretty fair soldier but RAMBO would never be as good as this 'master of combat'. He said he had been in the Navy of the South Vietnamese forces and after re-education he got a job as a tour guide. He was a store man in the navy yards in Saigon but as the trip continued his role in our war took on enormous proportions to a point where he described his part in calling down an American helicopter airstrike on a VC unit and wiping them out. I tell you what, I gave him A+ for his ingenuity, courage and battle skills and his sound effects over the bus microphone were stunning.

When I go to Vietnam I never wear anything that might identify me as a veteran of our war; I don't usually say anything that may have a military slant to it and I keep fairly inconspicuous. This is a means of personal safety for me as I don't want to bump into any angry Vietnamese veteran who might take umbrage at my attire and attempt to do me harm, and as we're usually accompanied by members of Jane's family when we go out I don't want them to suffer any recriminations from the public or the authorities. Anyway, this guide must have 'pinged' me as a veteran and I don't know how, unless I unwittingly spoke to him in Vietnamese when getting on the bus. He played his little saga out for what seemed to be me alone as I don't believe any of the other passengers were veterans as they were mostly too young, wrong nation or ignorant of it all. I can only surmise what he was working towards but his saga never earned him a tip from me or, as far as I saw, any of the other passengers.

On the way to the tunnels Clay was a little apprehensive and told me about when he was there before he had to get out of the crowd and let his wife and their friends do the visit on their own while he spent the entire time sitting in the shade near a cool breeze as he became quite violently ill; fever, shakes, nausea (there's an irony; can any of you recall a 'cool breeze' in Vietnam?). He had not eaten anything 'odd' that could have caused this, and had not had any alcohol or drank any local water and it was a mystery as he was as fit as a fiddle the next morning. It was strangely coincidental as I had had a very similar episode when I visited Vietnam in 2008, but I put that down to a psychological reaction to being in the vicinity of that bastard of an operation we called 'The Battle of Ho Bo Woods' in January 1966.

(continued....)



I was pleasantly surprised when we arrived we didn't have to sit through that blatant propaganda film about how a 15 year old farm girl heroine of the Peoples Forces and a 75 year old grandfather fought off two battalions (or was it divisions) of American Aggressors and their Foreign Puppet Mercenaries in 1966.

We were arranged in groups and away we went. To accommodate the larger build of the European tourists the Vietnamese authorities have greatly enlarged the tunnels and the various small rooms which were used as mess halls, hospitals and weapons repair and manufacture, and removed the top covering of soil so you can look into these areas as if looking down into an amphitheatre or such. Mind you, for one who suffers claustrophobia as I do it was still a bit of an effort to even look into them. Maybe that's why I admire Tunnel Rats so much?

**Careful where you step in
Cu Chi Province,
Mr. Charles has been here.**



Our group was going on making the appropriate comments on all the information the guides were telling us about the various things on display when, as can often happen, our group merged into the one in front and they had a different guide with them. This bloke was a full on communist stalwart and he took every opportunity he could to make disparaging remarks about American soldiers and their inability to defeat the poor peasants of the area in their attacks. I took this with a grain of salt as he was probably only saying what he had been trained to say. This same guide by this time was about two people in front of me (I was hurrying as I was hot and wanted to go get a cold beer) when he went past a photo pinned to a wall of one of the huts and it was a GI yelling out to 'someone' and I noticed part of the HERD patch on his left shoulder. The guide made a remark about the "cowardly American Aggressor crying in fear when confronted by the valiant defenders of the tunnels." By this time I had had a gutful of this little prick; I was hot, thirsty, a bit fatigued and becoming somewhat unpleasant to assholes who derided our efforts.

I couldn't help myself and said to this guide; *"What the fuck are you talking about mate? I was here on this day and I know you weren't because if you were you would know that GI is calling out an order or direction to his comrades and the only bastards running, hiding and crying were the fucking gallant Vietnamese defenders! Now shut your mouth or fuck off!"* Well, at this the entire number of the conjoined groups went silent, the guide in question went white, Clay grabbed me saying something to the effect *"C'mon dad, don't let the little prick bring you undone, let's go and sit down."*

I was at this stage trembling with rage and a very dark cloud enveloped me like I haven't had for a few years at that time. From among the group of tourists came an American lady's voice, *"You tell him Aussie, we love you guys,"* and then there was all sorts of chatter among the groups and people coming up and asking me questions and patting me on the back and such. I sort of got the feeling from what was being said that the group we had joined into was predominately American tourists even though they weren't veterans.

By this time that guide had slipped away and Clay said to me, *"Shit dad, I was going to suggest that we go over to the firing range and have a few shots but now you better not go there in case that asshole has a mate on range duty today."* With that we walked into the souvenir shop, Clay went off to the range (actually I have never touched a firearm since I left the government service) and I went and had a couple of cans of Tiger beer -- I never saw that guide again while we were there.

The tourists who went to have a shoot began firing off their rounds and I have to admit that the sounds of the AK47's, M16's and M60's (?) became too much for me and I went up to the end of the building furthest from the range and went around the corner of the wall and remained there with my beer.



**VC fighting the "Big Noses" at
Cu Chi cemetery.**

Now, I have said that there were no other veterans on our bus but there was one other there as while I was leaning against the wall I looked to my right and saw a bloke standing at the other end with his hands over his ears and we just kind of looked at each and shook our heads. I went closer to him and asked him if he was OK and he just put his hand up in a waving motion which I took as 'Leave me alone, I will handle this thing,' so I went back to my position and waited until it was time to join the bus to return to Saigon. It was a fairly quiet trip back with a couple of people asking if I was OK and other mundane murmurings and I eventually fell asleep on the bus.

John Arnold, 1RAR, '65/'66



No PMI with VA Loan

No private mortgage insurance is just one of the many benefits of the VA Home Loan Program. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs sets guidelines so that VA-approved lenders can offer attractive loan features to Qualified VA borrowers.

“...VA borrowers are not required to pay a monthly Private Mortgage Insurance (PMI) premium...”

One of the unique features of VA loans is that they don't require private mortgage insurance (PMI). PMI is insurance on a conventional mortgage with more than an 80% loan-to-value (LTV) ratio. (FHA also has a mortgage insurance premium ("MIP") on most of its loans regardless of LTV). The insurance helps cover lender losses in case a borrower defaults on the loan and the property goes into foreclosure. Because 25% of each VA loan mortgage amount is guaranteed by the federal government, VA-approved lenders consider the guaranty in lieu of PMI. Therefore, VA borrowers are not required to pay a monthly PMI premium.

Not having a monthly PMI payment can translate into big savings for the VA borrower. Typical PMI premiums on a conventional loan of \$200,000 can run about \$120 per month or \$1,400 per year. Some borrowers end up paying PMI on non-VA loans even after their principal amounts dip below 80% LTV.

In some cases, an appraisal is necessary before PMI is canceled. Most appraisals cost between \$300 and \$400. Not having to pay for another appraisal is just another savings VA borrowers may experience by not having PMI associated with their loans.

People in the market for a mortgage may find that some conventional loans may be marketed as no-PMI loans. It's important to be aware that some loans advertised as "no PMI required" may be lender-paid PMI loans with higher interest rates. With some such loans, the borrower may end up paying for the PMI indirectly through higher monthly mortgage payments.

Understanding PMI is just one step in realizing the savings for VA borrowers with a no-PMI loan. In addition to no PMI, there are many advantages in using your VA home loan benefits.

Other VA loan advantages include:

- No down payment
- Relaxed qualifying standards
- Competitive interest rates
- No penalties for mortgage pre-payment
- Cash-out and debt consolidation
- Streamline rate reduction

To learn more about no-PMI VA loans and to determine the best loan possible for your individual needs, contact a loan professional with a VA-approved lender.

Source: www.military.com



**Hmm. Wonder if I can get financing on this fixer-upper?
Home sweet home at Camp Zinn, Bien Hoa, Vietnam.**

