



2/503d VIETNAM Newsletter



Contact: rto173d@cfl.rr.com

December 2009 / Issue 9

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



A RACE AGAINST TIME Hepatitis C Diagnosis and Treatment (Excerpt)

By Claudia Gary

It seems so obvious—a no-brainer, really. If one disease is responsible for the majority of liver transplants in the United States, and if liver function tests generally do not reveal that disease, but a simple blood test for it has been available since 1992, then surely that test must be included in standard blood screening protocols. Right? Wrong. In most cases, the test for hepatitis C is given only if you request it by name.

One Vietnam veteran heard about hep C and requested the test. But his HMO said the test wasn't covered since he "wasn't in a risk group." Because all Vietnam-era veterans are at risk for hepatitis C, he persisted and got the test. He tested positive, which made him angry. If he had been diagnosed earlier, he could have made lifestyle changes to minimize the liver damage and received treatment for the virus at an earlier stage.

Like many hepatitis C patients, this Vietnam veteran prefers anonymity due to the stigma associated with this disease. He believes he became infected while in service, either from a tattoo or an air gun injector. He doesn't deal with the VA, but many veterans have reported that the VA presumed they were intravenous drug users unless they proved otherwise—guilty until proven innocent.

In addition to battle-related infections, many veterans were infected with hepatitis C through blood transfusions prior to its identification in 1992. Some were infected through emergency transfusions of unscreened blood. There are also reports that the disease has been spread through medical procedures at VA facilities.

The lack of testing, the long-term lack of information, and the difficulty in establishing a service-connected claim have added to the doubts, mistrust, and frustration

that many veterans already feel toward the VA. But there is no time to waste; every veteran should be tested for hepatitis C.

Although the Vietnam War ended nearly 35 years ago, this particular wound is now taking a serious toll among Vietnam-era veterans. Some who were infected during that war only recently learned of the damage to their livers. Many still do not know.

Some Progress:

There have been improvements. Medical treatments have become more effective and easier to tolerate, due to the 2001 introduction of pegylated (long-acting) interferon. Information, too, has become more accessible, as have support groups. In the last ten years, according to Vietnam-era veteran, patient activist, and registered nurse Ron Iams, *"We've gone from a world where I had to convince doctors that there was a treatment for hepatitis C to a world where physicians in any VA clinic at least know what hep C is about and where to get the latest information."*

At the same time, *"We're seeing an explosion of cases of liver cancer related to hepatitis C,"* according to Dr. David Ross, who is the director of Clinical Public Health Programs for the Department of Veterans Affairs. *"We have roughly 220,000 veterans who have been exposed to hep C,"* he said. *"Not all of those patients have chronic hep C, [but] those who do are at risk for cirrhosis and liver cancer."*

Current treatment for hepatitis C includes use of pegylated interferon and ribavirin, which can be highly effective at clearing the virus but also can cause side-effects that make treatment very challenging for many patients. For this reason, support groups and plenty of information are essential.

Dr. Doris Strader is co-author of the most recent guidelines for medical professionals—*"Diagnosis, Management, and Treatment of Hepatitis C:"*

An Update,” published in the April 2009 issue of the Journal Hepatology. A gastroenterologist who did her residency at the VA, Dr. Strader said *“the VA’s reputation is unparalleled.”*

Dr. Ross noted that *“the VA’s national hepatitis C program is the largest provider of care to hep C patients, and we’re very proud of the program. We have a link to every clinic in the VA; treatment guidelines that are a model for the country. We are absolutely committed to providing state-of-the-art care to all our patients.”*

Dr. Ross described the disease’s long-term effects: *“Hepatitis C causes ongoing damage to liver cells. Liver cells die and get replaced by scar tissue—cirrhosis—or they grow back after some are destroyed, and sometimes the attempts to grow back lead to cancer. Both [cancer and cirrhosis] have a high risk of killing the patient. The risks of those things occurring increase the longer the person has been carrying the hepatitis C virus that has been multiplying in the liver. So, it’s in people who were infected 30 or more years ago that we’re starting to see more and more complications.”*

The number of veterans exposed to hepatitis C (HCV) who were later diagnosed with liver cancer jumped from about 1,100 to over 2,000—almost double—between 2004 and 2007. *“Liver cancer is a very difficult disease to treat,”* Ross said. *“Besides causing liver failure, liver cancer often will spread in the blood, through the portal vein, to other organs.”*

So, what’s the good news? *“First, there are new drugs coming out for hepatitis C,”* he said, *“and we are hopeful that these will be available within a couple of years.”*.... At present, there is no cure for HCV. But with appropriate care and a healthy lifestyle, life can still be good.

Bottom line....get checked for Hep C by your care giver.

173d Reunion 2010

Hal Nobles, president, South Carolina Chapter XXX, reports plans are well underway for the 2010 reunion in Myrtle Beach, SC. Hal states Sky Soldiers and their family members and guests are already registering to attend, including a number of troopers from Down Under, in Australia. Hal is asking everyone planning to attend to pre-register now, whether or not you remit your registration fee now or later....this will be very helpful to their planning. Go to www.173dreunion2010.com and register today. *See you on the beach!*



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9



Sky Soldiers in Myrtle Beach at 3/319th Reunion. The guy in yellow is **Jerry Wiles**, B/2/503d, who ate Vietnam Vet nurse **Major Mary Privette’s** (R) birthday cake all by himself and didn’t give one of us a single bite! Plus, in VN he never shared his pound cake either. Then again, who did?

WHO ARE THESE TROOPERS??

As a new feature for our newsletter, we’ll periodically include a vintage photo of **2/503d Sky Soldiers** and ask you to identify them. Who are these troopers?



CORRECTION

In the November edition of our Newsletter, Issue 8 on Page 8, in connection with the Dak To After Action Report, we incorrectly included this quote:

“We were the first on the killing field the next day. The bamboo was shredded with bullet holes. In front of one dead trooper slumped over his M-60, there were gallons of blood leading up to his gun. He must have killed a lot of them before they got him.”

Steve Vargo

While the quotation certainly fits the report, Steve was referring to his participation in the **Battle of the Slopes**.

INCOMING!

From a Trooper: Response to 'Incoming' page 10-of-18 (Issue 8). I recently got my Purple Heart 10% VA disability. I filed my claim with the AMVET rep located at the Columbus, Ohio VA. Amvet's advises NOT TO FILE DIRECTLY WITH THE VA. To the troop requesting this info, contact your closet Amvet rep and let them ramrod the claim for you. The way the 'backpay' works is that if your claim is approved, you are paid from the date of filing the claim. That will come to a few months and maybe up to year depending where you live and how long the claims are processed by the VA in your area.

VIETNAM WAR QUOTATIONS

Above all, Vietnam was a war that asked everything of a few and nothing of most in America.

--Myra MacPherson,
1984



You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours, but even at those odds, you will lose and I will win.

--Ho Chi Minh to the French,
late 1940's

You have a row of dominoes set up; you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is that it will go over very quickly.

--Dwight D. Eisenhower,
1954



Now we have a problem in making our power credible, and Vietnam is the place.

--John F. Kennedy,
1961



This is not a jungle war, but a struggle for freedom on every front of human activity.

--Lyndon B. Johnson,
1964

Tell the Vietnamese they've got to draw in their horns or we're going to bomb them back into the Stone Age.

--Gen. Curtis LeMay,
1964

We are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves.

--Lyndon Johnson,
1964



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9



We are at war with the most dangerous enemy that has ever faced mankind in his long climb from the swamp to the stars, and it has been said if we lose that war, and in so doing lose this way of freedom of ours, history will record with the greatest astonishment that those who had the most to lose did the least to prevent its happening.

--Ronald Reagan,
1964

We should declare war on North Vietnam. . . . We could pave the whole country and put parking strips on it, and still be home by Christmas.

--Ronald Reagan,
1965

I see light at the end of the tunnel.

--Walt W. Rostow, National Security Adviser,
1967

Let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that.

--Richard M. Nixon,
1969



I'm not going to be the first American president to lose a war.

--Richard Nixon,
1969

This war has already stretched the generation gap so wide that it threatens to pull the country apart.

--Sen. Frank Church,
1970

We believe that peace is at hand.

--Henry Kissinger, 1972

You have my assurance that we will respond with full force should the settlement be violated by North Vietnam.

--Richard Nixon in a letter to President Thieu,
1973



If the Americans do not want to support us anymore, let them go, get out! Let them forget their humanitarian promises!

--Nguyen Van Thieu,
1975

Television brought the brutality of war into the comfort of the living room. Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America--not on the battlefields of Vietnam.

--Marshall McLuhan,
1975

Vietnam was what we had instead of happy childhoods.

--Michael Herr,
1977

Vietnam presumably taught us that the United States could not serve as the world's policeman; it should also have taught us the dangers of trying to be the world's midwife to democracy when the birth is scheduled to take place under conditions of guerrilla war.

--Jeane Kirkpatrick,
1979

It's time that we recognized that ours was in truth a noble cause.

--Ronald Reagan,
1980

There is the guilt all soldiers feel for having broken the taboo against killing, a guilt as old as war itself. Add to this the soldier's sense of shame for having fought in actions that resulted, indirectly or directly, in the deaths of civilians. Then pile on top of that an attitude of social opprobrium, an attitude that made the fighting man feel personally morally responsible for the war, and you get your proverbial walking time bomb.

--Philip Caputo,
1982

Saigon was an addicted city, and we were the drug: the corruption of children, the mutilation of young men, the prostitution of women, the humiliation of the old, the division of the family, the division of the country--it had all been done in our name. . . . The French city . . . had represented the opium stage of the addiction. With the Americans had begun the heroin phase.

--James Fenton,
1985

No event in American history is more misunderstood than the Vietnam War. It was misreported then, and it is misremembered now.

--Richard M. Nixon,
1985

I was proud of the youths who opposed the war in Vietnam because they were my babies.

--Benjamin Spock, 1988

All the wrong people remember Vietnam. I think all the people who remember it should forget it, and all the people who forgot it should remember it.

--Michael Herr, 1989



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9



We are the strongest nation in the world today. I do not believe that we should ever apply that economic, political, and military power unilaterally. If we had followed that rule in Vietnam, we wouldn't have been there.

--Robert MacNamara

TUNNEL RAT TRIVIA

Guys: I recently read about something that I was unaware of. It is my understanding that **Larry Paladino** (B/2/503) might have been the first American to enter a VC tunnel. He was equipped with a .45, a flashlight and company commander **Roy Lombardo** telling him to get in there. Later there were small guys outfitted with suppressed .22's manufactured by High Standard.

I was not aware of the Smith and Wesson model 29 with a 1.4" smooth bore barrel. It was loaded with a special round, the 40 QSPR. As I recall the M-29 could handle the 41 mag. round. The round was a solid steel case. Within the case there was a plastic sabot containing 15 tungsten balls. So far so good, the trick was, that between the powder and the sabot there was a metal piston. The firing pin would strike an anvil that would then strike an enclosed primer, detonating the powder. This drove the piston forward to the mouth of the case, where it was halted by internal threads. As a result no powder gas escaped from the cartridge. Consequently, there was no muzzle flash. A very desirable feature in a pitch black tunnel.

I wonder if they ever got to the troops that were supposed to use them? My guess is, the Saigon commandos scarfed them up. I suppose that a revolver and a box of this ammo in good condition would fetch a fancy sum.

Jim Robinson B/2/503

SENT BY SGT. LARRY HAMPTON 1/503

"When I became the D Company CO at LZ Uplift, I was invited by the First Sergeant to share a cold one at an unofficial bar in one of the hooches. Behind a bar built out of 2x4s and plywood was a small fridge packed with ice cold beer. The two brands were Budweiser and Carling Black Label. Any concerns about fraternization were swept away when I spotted the sign on the refrigerator, 'Beer, 50¢ per can. Officers \$1 (includes 50¢ Sir Charge)!"





AMERICAN LEGION
Voice for Veterans

President Barack Obama recently signed new legislation which creates

predictable funding for veterans' health care. The **Veterans Healthcare Reform and Transparency Act** calls for appropriations a year in advance after more than two decades of regular budget delays. *"No longer will VA and the veterans in its care have to suffer from the 'check's in the mail' syndrome,"* said **Clarence E. Hill**, national commander of The American Legion. *"Advance appropriations will go a long way toward minimizing compromises in the delivery of the high quality VA health care our veterans expect and deserve."*



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9

FREEZING THE BALLS OFF A BRASS MONKEY?

From **Walter "Bills" Bills** (C/2/503d), here is more useless information to fog the mind. Thanks Wild Bill!

It was necessary to keep a good supply of cannon balls near the cannon on old war ships. But how to prevent them from rolling about the deck was the problem.



No. Not these monkey balls.

The storage method devised was to stack them as a square based pyramid, with one ball on top, resting on four, resting on nine, which rested on sixteen. Thus, a supply of 30 cannon balls could be stacked in a small area right next to the cannon.



Nope, not these. Blue balls is another story.

There was only one problem -- how to prevent the bottom layer from sliding/rolling from under the others. The solution was a metal plate with 16 round indentations, called, for reasons unknown, a *Monkey*. But if this plate were made of iron, the iron balls would quickly rust to it. The solution to the rusting problem was to make them out of brass - hence, **Brass Monkeys**.



Now you're talking!

Few landlubbers realize that brass contracts much more and much faster than iron when chilled. Consequently, when the temperature dropped too far, the brass indentations would shrink so much that the iron cannon balls would come right off the monkey. Thus, it was quite literally, *cold enough to freeze the balls off of a Brass Monkey*. And all this time, you thought it was just a vulgar expression. (Far be it from us to be vulgar. Ed)

The only thing I can add to that is, "Balls!" cried the Queen. The King laughed, because he had to.

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AT THE FIRST SESSION

Begun and held in the City of Washington on Tuesday, the sixth day of January, two thousand and nine.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of American in Congress assembled,
SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009".

SEC. 2. PRESIDENT'S BUDGET SUBMISSION.

Section 1105(a) of title 31, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end of the following new paragraph:

"(36) information on estimates of appropriations for the fiscal year following the fiscal year for which the budget jis submitted for the following medical care accounts of the Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs account:

- (A) Medical Services.
- (B) Medical Support and Compliance
- (C) Medical Facilities.

SEC. 3. ADVANCE APPROPRIATIONS FOR CERTAIN MEDICAL CARE ACCOUNTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) In General -- Chapter 1 of title 38, United States Code is amended by inserting after section 116 the following new sections:

117. Advance appropriations for certain medical care acct's
(a) In General -- For each fiscal year, beginning with fiscal years 2011, discretionary new budget authority provided an appropriation Act for the medical care accounts of the Department shall --

- (1) be made available for that fiscal year; and
- (2) include, for each such account, advance discretionary new budget authority that first become available for the first fiscal year after the budget year.....

Speaker of the House of Representatives

Vice President of the United States and President of the Senate.

OUR NEWSLETTER

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

FALLEN SKY SOLDIERS

JOHN BORQUEZ

*I just found out a comrade of mine, 2/503 Co A (68-69), passed away from liver disease. His name is **John Borquez**. We went through Basic, Medic training, Jump School and the Nam together. He had Hep C. We were in the same areas doing the same operations. I talked to his wife last night. I waited too long to find him. I am sorry I waited so long.*

Doc Bob Evalt



John Borquez (L) and Doc Evalt, October 1968

GARY WRIGHT

A notice of Gary's passing appeared in the latest edition of *Sky Soldier* magazine. Many of us were unaware we had lost this trooper.

"Gary Wright died in early 2007 from lung problems and complications. As Jim Robinson has already mentioned, Gary and I were inseparable for the 14



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9

months of my company command, sharing C rations, stories, and a dry poncho when such was available. He was tough as nails and lugged the Bn Net PRC 10 before we got the PRC 25 in RVN. Many times after I left the company, Gary took charge of the company when the Co Cmdr was wounded and kept the Bn informed until an officer would take charge. He survived 3 company cmdr WIA and should have been decorated by each of them but wasn't.

I was looking at his picture last night and a Challenge Coin he gave me from the 2d Bn of the 1st SF."

Col. Roy Lombardo

AIRBORNE BROTHERS!

In Issue 6, Page 6 of our Newsletter, we included this photo of a birthday cake and asked if anyone knew what the hell it was all about. We found a buyer in **Col. Roy Lombardo**, CO B/2/503d.

LET THEM EAT CAKE



Photo by Jim Robinson

The 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment was attached to the 173d Abn Bde in late May 1965, to give the Bde a 3d maneuver battalion (2 up and 1 back). Company C, or as they called themselves "C" Coy, was adjacent to B/2/503 in the perimeter. To improve our relationship, I learned that the Queen's B'day was celebrated on 25 June and had the **Mess Sergeant (Diamond Jim Kimbrel)** bake a cake and decorate it. This, in itself, was a minor miracle because we were eating 9 in 1 rations, which were units of canned food for 9 soldiers in one box.

He baked that cake in a garbage can cover, lined with tin foil. He combined the ingredients and had us eating better than anyone in the Bde. I led a small contingent to the HQ C Coy to present the cake. It was a surprise and well received and improved the relationship immediately. We had some ice tea and a Foster's or two with the cake and all was well.

Along on 4 July, here comes a small contingent from C Coy, bearing a hand-carved boomerang. **Stan Hanuszewicz**, the carver, was a world-class boomerang thrower, although unknown to us at that time. He wanted to demonstrate his throwing skill but I declined because the boomerang had a 1-RAR crest mounted on it and carvings to Bravo Bull Coy, 2/503 from C Coy, RAR and the date 4 July 1965 (Independence Day). I have it in my Hall of Honors and will before long present it to Battle Company, 2/503.

I've been in contact for 40+ years with the Australians of RAR and recently got an email from the carver, **Stan Hanuszewicz**. He had another piece of the boomerang story which he called the Buzzsaw. Seems that he demonstrated it before presentation and it clipped his best buddy, **Billy Carrel**, in the head as he tried to catch it, sending him to the dispensary. When the surgeon came to examine the injury, Carrel was asked, "What happened to you?" He answered "I was hit in the head with a boomerang." The doctor replied, "Don't be a fucking smart ass with me, soldier..." then it went downhill from there. Sadly Carrel became a KIA later in 1965.

When Stan wrote me on 4 July, we remembered **Billy Carrel** and all those Sky Soldiers from B/2/503 and C Coy RAR that are no longer with us, BUT it all started with a cake for the Queen.

Fondest Airborne regards, BDQ Roy

This is not the boomerang Roy speaks of, but it is from Australia. Years ago A.B. Garcia, HHC/2/503d, sent it to me as a gift. Like Roy's boomerang, it has never been thrown. Ed.



CHAPLIN'S CORNER



News of the recent shooting at Ft. Hood left me stunned and grappling with the question of why? These were the same emotions I felt while I watched the second plane fly into the World Trade Center the morning of that great tragedy. I automatically fell back into the emotional survival mode that served me well in combat; anger, frustration and numbness.



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9

In my role as a Pastor/Healer, I ministered to many people in emotional pain over my career. The worst was the loss of little children and senseless acts of violence. I quickly learned that I could not go into their pain without going into my own. I came to learn the importance of grief resolution, trying to find some glimmer of hope to point people toward a beacon in a fierce storm. I was forced by the nature of my calling to rise above my own pain and move the wounded toward healing.



Rev. Mac

I marveled at the professionalism of the Healers at Ft. Hood. While the various news reports assaulted us with the reality of this great horror, healers quietly moved between the wounded, guiding them toward physical, emotional and spiritual healing. No amount of money or recognition can compensate these quiet servants when tragedy comes our way, but where would we be without them?

The next time you see an EMT, a policeman, a nurse, a fireman, a minister/chaplain, thank them for their service to humanity. Your encouragement may mean a lot more than you think; like an outreached hand from a departing Huey, a shove on the Alice pack going up a steep hill or a mouthful of water. It is the little things in life that make a big difference. Tragedies will always be a part of this physical life. Thank God for the healers who walk among us showing us the way and giving us hope.
Rev. Mike McMillan (ret'd Pastor and 173d Sniper)

2010 COMPENSATION & PENSION

"VA compensation and pension benefits cost of living allowance (COLA) is paid based on the Social Security Administration (SSA) COLA. Compensation COLA by statute may not be more than the SSA COLA and pension COLA is equal to the SSA COLA. This year SSA did not increase COLA. VA will be providing letters to beneficiaries informing them that there will be no increase due to COLA for 2010." *Damn, they're giving it to us right in our COLA.*

ANOTHER SEND OFF

A number of 2/503d Vietnam era troopers visited Sky Soldiers of the battalion in Vincenza, Italy to wish them well on their upcoming next tour of duty in Afghanistan. Here is Jim Robinson's report.

I failed to mention an activity that the Bulls perform. We supply leatherman tools to B company to award to the soldier of the month. Additionally, we present annually, a knife, in a presentation case, to both the Soldier of the Year and the NCO of the Year. These selections are made by the senior NCO's of the unit. This years recipients were **SPC Ian Zajac** and **SGT. Andrew McLaughlan**.

Day 2 dawned with Phil still not having his luggage. Thank you Iberian Airlines. So he and Herbert took off to round-up some things he needed. Roy, Carol, Carla, Marjie and I squeezed into our "4 passenger" rental car and headed to the Bottega Veneta work shop. After we left, the dollar dropped 4 points against the euro! No one was quite sure how we found the shop, but Roy's great navigation skills had to have helped, or so I was told. After lunch we returned to the hotel to prepare for the Ball. Everything went smoothly, until Marjie could not find her diamond. After rummaging through everything, it was decided, " *that it must be at home.*"

Once again we loaded into busses (the busses are very nice and comfortable) and drove west to Restorante Al Frassino in Verona. What a fabulous job they did. The hor d'erves were great. There must have been at least 4 bars set up. I did not see a single thirsty paratrooper. My favorite was the round table with a hundred Bellinis ready to go. The food was great. How often have you ever had great food at a banquet? It is usually rubber chicken or burnt beef. This event was a Battalion Ball with all the pageantry associated with this kind of event. There were over 600 attendees. Ladies dressed to the nines. Men in military dress uniform with medals or formal attire with or without medals.

For us, the highlight was the time spent visiting with the young men and their wives, who are left to carry on, during the long absences of both training and combat. We were often embarrassed by the affection shown to us by many of the soldiers. I think I saw a little moisture around the corner of Roy's eyes. I toughed it out, but we all know what a softy he is. These events are both heartwarming and emotional. In the past, we have met and spent very personal time with some of these warriors who did not return. We can only hope that this coming year will be an exception to the previous deployments

I mentioned how outstanding these youngsters are. I lack the ability to put it into words that make sense.



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9

These guys have volunteered to join the army. They have volunteered to go to jump school. They have volunteered to be assigned to an airborne unit. They have volunteered to serve in the 173d, knowing full well that if there is a combat operation going on anywhere in the world, that they are the point of the spear. These are the guys and the gals that have stood up and said "I'll go, send me".



**L-R standing: Roy & Carol Lombardo, Phil & Carla Moulaison, Anne & Herbert Murhammer.
Sitting: Jim & Marjie Robinson.**

On day three we loaded up in Herbert's car and our Hertz limo and drove north to the town of Marostica. This is a walled city with an old ruin on the summit of a hill, with the walls running down the two ridges on either side of the summit. We had a perfect day as far as the weather was concerned. Marostica is in the foothills of the Alps. Every-bit as scenic as the foothills of the Sierra Nevada range in northern Mexico. In the square, there is a giant chess board where, according to Roy, the duke would award his daughter to the winner. The chess board is large enough so that the knights are mounted on real horses. They do a rather elaborate reenactment on the first weekend in September. In the village, we stopped into a small joint to have lunch. I ordered a bottle of prosecco (Italian Champagne) so as to toast Roy and Carol's 50th Anniversary. We had a great meal, I had pumpkin tortelli that looked like what we call ravioli. Roy slipped out and picked up the entire bill! Had I known he was going to do that, I would have ordered more expensive wine.

From Marostica we drove the short distance to Bassano where the river Brenta flows through the town. We looked at the covered bridge designed by our guy Paladio (the same guy that Jefferson stole from, for his house known as Monticello). On the east side of the river, the German side, the bullet holes in the houses have been left unrepaired. Interesting. From there we made a run into Venice to show Phil and Carla the ropes of getting around and a quick lay of the land, or water if you prefer.

Next morning, Marjie and I headed off to the train station to go to Florence. We have really enjoyed the trains in France. They are fast, easy to access, fast, clean, stylish and did I mention, go like hell? It is much faster, city center to city center, to take the train than to fly. Well, we were not in France any more. The train was only a little late, I guess they have been that way ever since they strung up Mussolini. Filthy, and so dirty on the exterior that it was difficult to see anything through the windows. We arrived in Florence, the 2 places we were planning to see were closed on Monday so we just wandered around and gawked at the buildings. Marjie shopped but not with as much vigor as other trips to Europe. Things are just so damn expensive. The e class Mercedes priced at 60,000 euros, is \$60,000 here, you factor in the exchange rate and the damn car is \$90,000! We were hoping to have a better train ride back to Venice. But it looked like we had the same train. Marjie said the bathroom would rival anything in Zimbabwe.

That about sums up the Italy trip. The highlight was visiting with the young patriots there.

Jim Robinson, B/2/503d

DD 214

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) has provided the following website for veterans to gain access to their DD-214's online:

<http://vetrecs.archives.gov/>

This may be particularly helpful when a veteran needs a copy of his DD-214 for employment purposes. NPRC is working to make it easier for veterans with computers and Internet access to obtain copies of documents from their military files. Military veterans and the next of kin of deceased former military members may now use a new online military personnel records system to request documents. Other individuals with a need for documents must still complete the Standard Form 180, which can be downloaded from the online web site. Because the requester will be asked to supply all information essential for NPRC to process the request, delays that normally occur when NPRC has to ask veterans for additional information will be minimized.



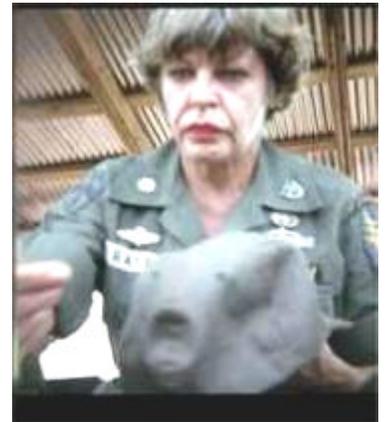
2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER December 2009 / Issue 9

The new web-based application was designed to provide better service on these requests by eliminating the records centers mailroom and processing time.

Special Notice: If you are a veteran in emotional crisis and need help RIGHT NOW, call this toll-free number **1-800-273-8255**, available 24/7, and tell them you are a veteran. All calls are confidential.

MAGGIE REMEMBERED

It was November 1966, when I was near completing my second TDY at **3rd Field Army Hospital** in Tan Son Nhut, on the outskirts of Saigon. This time I was serving in the capacity of one of the patients with the mean, nasty Falciparum version of malaria. They say that particular strain of the disease can later produce symptoms similar to PTSD while potentially having adverse affects on the brain...I can't argue that. For the record, not one anti malaria pill was ever missed.



I credit those two visits, totaling 3 months of a 12 month tour, as having increased my personal chances of returning to California in generally one piece. Perhaps the malaria was a gift after all?

While there I missed the practice jumps the 2/503d had conducted in preparation for the upcoming combat jump. Having already traipsed through the jungles and rice paddies with you guys for 10 months, and as you did, getting shot at by little people and living on C-Rats and somehow overcoming the dangers and depravities of war, as most of us did, frankly, missing those jumps was no great disappointment -- although to this day there remains a tad of guilt over 12 months of jump pay received but not earned. (Don't tell the army, please).

Two of you guys came by to visit me in the hospital. You had just made a practice jump, and stopped in to check on your hooch buddy. You making the effort to do this was very much appreciated....sadly, I can't recall who you were, but thanks, thanks a lot.

It was nearing time for me to be sent back to Camp Zinn in Bien Hoa, as they had licked the illness. Most of my strength had returned, if not the weight, and being in the ranks of the ambulatory was preferred after spending two months on my back.

I recall walking around the courtyard in the rear of the hospital near the area where Dustoff's would routinely arrive with their newest payloads of dying and, sometimes, dead G.I.'s right off the battle field. They rolled one kid in on a stretcher. His legs were gone as well as his genitalia. He would live. I think of him to this day and wonder of his life.



3rd Field Army Hospital, today an arms museum

It was in a small, 10'x10' office just off this same courtyard where the young G.I. carrying a live grenade confronted the hospital Administrator, demanding to be sent home. The Administrator escaped those small confines just before the grenade exploded, killing the young soldier. I thought then, he would be sent home. It was in 2001, when A.B. Garcia, HHC 2/503d, and I walked into that same office, while I passed my hand along the wall which was once pocked marked with holes and the gory remains of that troubled soul.

But before rejoining you guys in Bien Hoa, a treat was in store for me, the hospital staff and all the able and not so able bodied patients. **Martha "Maggie" Raye** was coming to perform for us! Having always enjoyed her humorous antics on t.v. and in movies, as well as her singing ability, we were very much looking forward to her appearance.

The day arrived and so did Colonel Maggie. There to greet her were probably upwards of 100 people, including doctors, nurses, attendants, other staff, and many patients identified by their blue hospital garb. Down in front were the less fortunate G.I.'s confined to wheel chairs, and there were even a few gurney's there with wounded soldiers propped-up and ready to welcome Maggie from the prone position.

To wild applause and whistling, Martha Raye sprinted into the courtyard to the delight of the crowd. Before



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9

beginning her performance she burst into a diatribe of what a wonderful job the U.S. military was doing in Vietnam and how we were the best in the world....this fell on complete silence from the crowd gathered there and caught Maggie by surprise. She began weeping and ran from the courtyard. To whistles and begging from the audience she reluctantly returned to the stage area, only to again repeat the same, unwelcome congratulatory remarks.

Colonel Maggie performed for us. She was great.

Smitty Out

2/503d SKY SOLDIER JUMP STORIES



Oops!

About the third jump a buddy of mine had a Mae West, but didn't have time to cut away. He bounced about three feet into the air. I turned to the guy next to me and asked... *"Did you fuckin' see that?!"* It was our Chaplin I was talking to...20 push ups for me, but my buddy was OK.

Jerry Wiles, B/2/503d



Mr. Wiles standing guard in front of his KOA in Cleveland, TN.



Longest Jump Ever?

I had about as much luck with this (video) game as jumping in real life. Landed in the air on a chute once (believe my fourth) during my basic jumps at Benning. Ran off instinctively and heard a pop but never knew if it was mine refilling or the guy I had landed on. Naturally, his fault. Third jump, straps caught my balls and was in pain all the way to the ground despite attempts to climb my straps with the DZ instructor constantly yelling, "Jumpers aloft, keep your legs together!" My very first jump (first time in an airplane - C119) was my only perfect jump - PLF and all. Never had another like that one. Combat jump, landed on the side of the rice paddy and severely bruised my thigh. There were a few trees on the DZ and remember one guy landed in a tree way off the ground. The trees ran a hundred feet high or higher. He popped his reserve to climb down on but it still left him too far off the ground to safely drop. Finally, an hour or so later, a helicopter hovered over the tree to drop a line to him. The down draft from the Huey inadvertently blew him out of the tree also filling up his chute and he safely landed. Believe it may be the longest jump from airplane door to ground in history. **Jerry Hassler, HHC/Recon/2/503d**



**Vintage Hassler at his Franklin, TN gunshop.
Before you ask, Jerry's phone number is 615-599-5562.**

The Fool

It would be my final jump in the army, this one with the 509th in Germany before taking a European discharge in '68. It was a pay jump so it certainly couldn't be ignored -- at 4 DM to the dollar that was some major money. Leaving the little flat where my wife, Reggie, and I lived in Mainz, Germany, I told her, "I sure hope I don't break my leg today," hee hee. She saw no humor in that comment and said something in German which didn't sound good and made me shiver in fear, but not of the upcoming jump. We took off in a C-130 from Weisbaden, and exited the plane near the city of Fulda, over freshly plowed farmland promising a soft landing.



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9

I neglected to notice the hard, dirt, single lane road running through the middle of the DZ. Nearing the ground while enjoying the peaceful and quiet view of the beautiful countryside, I had a thought, and told myself, "You know, Smitty, you never made a standing landing." Like an idiot, I listened to this fool, and replied, "That's right, Smitty, I think I'll try it on this last jump!" With eyes focused on the horizon, knees and feet together while geometrizing time and distance to the precise instant my toes would touch earth, I popped my risers at the exact moment, and STOOD!! I stood for all of a nanosecond before crashing hard onto that dirt road. After twice trying to stand but falling down both times, it was then I noticed guys running towards me...never a good sign. Arriving home that evening with a knee-high cast on my right leg, my German frau opened the door and upon seeing the crutches and cast she couldn't stop laughing. Reggie thought it was a joke! But, the joke was on her, she had married me.



The Fool

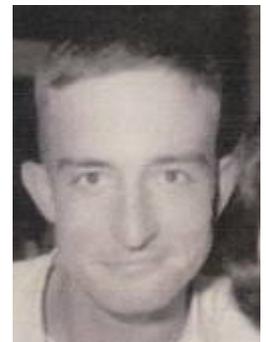
Arriving home that evening with a knee-high cast on my right leg, my German frau opened the door and upon seeing the crutches and cast she couldn't stop laughing. Reggie thought it was a joke! But, the joke was on her, she had married me.

Lew Smith, HHC/2/503d

We Were Once Young

Hey, that's when we were young and dumb and were going to live forever!

Bill Vose



**William C. Vose, Esq.,
1965, prior to his war hero days.
A/HHC/2/503d**

Note: Guys, send in your 2/503d jump stories for future editions of our Newsletter.

THANK YOU FOR FIGHTING THE BAD PEOPLE

News Release: After collaborating with others on four sports books, former Associated Press Michigan Sports editor **Larry Paladino** (B/2/503) recently completed his own book and sports isn't the focus. He has put together a 1,300-page compendium centered around the 800 letters he received and sent when he served as a paratrooper in Vietnam and elsewhere. Through the letters, with commentary added from a perspective of 40 years later, he provides a personalized history that gives a glimpse of both a soldier's life in the Army and what they were thinking about back home as well.

The book is entitled: "**Thank You for Fighting the Bad People**" and its subhead is: "*An airborne infantryman's 1960's time capsule and family history as told through 800+ letters, 1,500 photos, plus documents, essays, and more.*" Its phone book size utilizes larger than usual type to make it easy to read. And with the letters format it is easy to skip over parts that may not interest the reader and quickly pick up somewhere else. The title is the innocent support taken from a young girl's anonymous Valentines card Paladino got when he was in Vietnam.

There are chapters, too, that include various documents, military orders, casualty lists, unit Medal of Honor and Distinguished Service Cross honorees, rosters, and more. What family history he couldn't weave in with the letters he lumps into a couple chapters at the end which encompass post-war education, jobs, and lots of old family pictures.

The limited edition book, which Paladino self-published as, he says, "*a legacy for our grandchildren,*" retails for \$50. and is available through his e-mail address: rto173rd@wowway.com. He will personalize each copy and deliver it personally in the metro Detroit area. To ship there is an additional \$6. charge for the seven-pound book.

Paladino started putting the book together in 2000 after retiring as editor of the *Birmingham Eccentric* newspaper. His career also has included, among other things, serving as *Detroit Tigers Yearbook* editor for 10 years, *Detroit News* bowling writer, plus as editor of a number of other sports publications. His book collaborations were with former Michigan athletic director, **Don Canham**; former Michigan State athletic director, **Clarence Underwood**; former Detroit Lions great and NFL Hall of Famer **Charlie Sanders**; plus *The Lions' 60th Anniversary History Book*.



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9

*When we started our 2/503d Vietnam Newsletter, we did so with the understanding its pages would not be used to promote products, sell ad space or commercialize it in any way. We've since decided books written by members of our battalion about their Vietnam War experiences, however, should be the one exception, and Larry's written history establishes this decision. I was one of the first to receive my copy hot off the press. Larry did an exemplary and sensitive job describing his war time with the 2d Bn, as well as his life since. He honors countless of his war buddies in this work as well as our battalion, while capturing much of our shared history which could otherwise have been lost forever. I highly recommend all Sky Soldiers request a copy of "**Thank You For Fighting The Bad People**". As a self-published work, I'm sure there are only a finite number of copies available, so you might want to get your request in asap. Ed.*

**Thank you for fighting
the bad people'**

An Airborne Vietnam veteran's 1960s time capsule & family history as told through 800+ letters, 1,500 photos, plus documents, essays, and more

Lawrence J. Paladino

AIRBORNE

Forwards by
Ranger Hall of Famer
Roy Lombardo
and
Silver Star recipient
Robert Warfield

THE THINGS THEY CARRIED

(Excerpts from the book by the same title,
sent in by Roger Dick, C/2/503)



They carried P-38 can openers and heat tabs, watches and dog tags, insect repellent, gum, cigarettes, Zippo lighters, salt tablets, compress bandages, ponchos, Kool-Aid, two or three canteens of water, iodine tablets, sterno, LRRP-rations, and C-rations stuffed in socks. They carried standard fatigues, jungle boots, bush hats, flak jackets, and steel pots. They carried the M-16 assault rifle. They carried trip flares and Claymore mines, M-60 machine guns, the M-70 grenade launcher, M-14's, CR15s, Stoners, Swedish K's, 66mm Laws, shotguns, 45 caliber pistols, silencers, the sound of bullets, rockets, and choppers, and sometimes the sound of silence.



Jerry Hassler, carrying a bridge too far.

They carried love for people in the real world, and love for one another. And sometimes they disguised that love: *"Don't mean nothin'!"*



Jack Ribera, carrying stress and water.

They carried C-4 plastic explosives, an assortment of hand grenades, PRC-25 radios, knives and machetes.

Some carried napalm, CBU's, and large bombs; some risked their lives to rescue others. Some escaped the fear, but dealt with the death and damages. Some made very hard decisions, and some just tried to survive.



Freddie Parks, carrying his M-16.



They carried memories!



Joseph Riley (KIA), carrying sweat and a too short life.

They carried malaria, dysentery, ringworm's, and leeches. They carried the land itself as it hardened on their boots. They carried stationery, pencils, and pictures of their loved ones real and imagined.



Dale Olson, carrying a letter from home.



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9



For the most part, they carried themselves with poise and a kind of dignity. Now and then, there were times when panic set in, and people squealed, or wanted to, but couldn't; when they twitched and made moaning sounds and covered their heads and said, "Dear God," and hugged the earth and fired their weapons blindly, and cringed and begged for the noise to stop, and went wild and made stupid promises to themselves and God and their parents, hoping not to die.

They carried the traditions of the United States military, and memories and images of those who served before them. They carried grief, terror, longing, and their reputations.



They carried the soldier's greatest fear, the embarrassment of dishonor. They crawled into tunnels, walked point, and advanced or flew into fire, so as not to die of embarrassment. They were afraid of dying, but too afraid to show it. They carried the emotional baggage of men and women who might die at any moment. They carried the weight of the world, and the weight of every free citizen of America.

THEY CARRIED EACH OTHER



They carried their buddies home.

At the 173d Ft. Worth reunion years ago, Cowboy chopper pilot Tony Geishauser was made an *Honorary Member* of our battalion in recognition of his



“intentionally having his Huey shot down by bad guys at LZ Zulu-Zulu so he could live his life-long dream of fighting in ground combat with the 2/503d, while spilling our hot A’s of powdered eggs in the process.” © While speaking to a gathering of 2d Bn troopers at that reunion, Tony proudly stated, *“We Cowboys may be late sometimes, but we always deliver!”* Upon which he presented to all gathered there 300 coupons for free breakfast at McDonald’s. Here is his presentation to veterans and guests on *Veteran’s Day 2009* in Austin, Texas. Ed.



Tony’s downed chopper at LZ Zulu-Zulu

A COWBOY’S MESSAGE ON VETERAN’S DAY

By
Tony Geishauser
Major, US Army (Retired)

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918 the Germans signed the Armistice that ended World War I. Veterans Day used to be called Armistice Day and was first proclaimed as such by President Woodrow Wilson on November 11, 1919. The actual Armistice Day bill was signed into law on May 13, 1938.

Years later, the Emporia, Kansas Chamber of Commerce lobbied to have the day renamed to include “All Veterans Day”. President Eisenhower signed the Veterans Day bill into law on May 26, 1954.

The last time the United States was under direct attack by a foreign country was in World War II when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Our very existence as a free country was at stake by an aggressive and anti-democratic axis of countries – Japan, Germany and Italy.



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9



Every American was engaged in the war effort as a uniformed member of the military or as a defense worker or in simply supporting the war effort in any way they could through rationing, buying war bonds, etc.

Since WWII, we have been engaged in significant military actions in Korea and Vietnam. We had a “cold war” going with the Soviet Union for years until the Soviet Union simply fell apart under the weight of its own bureaucracy and inability to keep up the arms race with the United States.

We are currently involved in two undeclared wars in Iraq and Afghanistan against “terrorists” that are not part of either of those countries. Our military has gone from a draft that ended in 1973 to an “all voluntary” military service.

I’m glad Americans seem to love their military these days ... unlike when we were fighting in Vietnam. As a combat veteran, I want you to know what most combat vets think. Almost all of us go to war for patriotic reasons, but once we get there, we wake up and smell the coffee that often smells like napalm or a roadside bomb. Real war is nothing like it is in the movies; nothing like you thought it was going to be.



Tony G and Joe McHenry, the shot down Huey pilots.

People – some whom you know – get killed and others have their limbs blown off. You don’t have a clue what it’s like until you see that, smell that, hear that, and experience that. Your personal mission changes as soon as you see your first action. It’s no longer for some lofty statement some politician back in Washington said this war was about. What it’s about now is to do the job you were trained to do and to watch the back of your fellow soldiers and have them watch your back, so as many of you as possible can make it home in one piece.



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9



Tony Geishouser



Tony Geishouser, Sr.

If you love and appreciate the Patriots (not heroes) who have signed up for the military to protect us, you will make sure you do what you can to protect them. You must demand from your members of Congress and your President that these Patriots have a clear mission, are properly equipped, have superior leadership and above all have a clear exit strategy.

We can all understand a Patriot dying to protect his country, but it is almost criminal for an American to die because the leadership doesn't know what it's doing and has no end game in sight. Regardless of political affiliation, make sure you be a Patriot in your own way and insist that our military be used for a legitimate mission and they are not being asked to do things they are not trained for and for a mission with no end in sight.

Those of us combat vets living and dead would appreciate you getting a little bit involved in this life and death situation on this Veterans Day!

Today, on Veterans Day, my message to you is simple: Thank you. Thank you for your selfless service, for your valor, and for your strength of purpose that make all of us proud to be Americans.

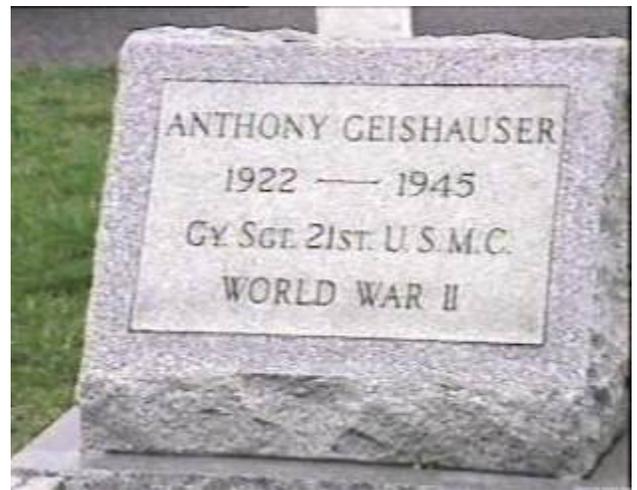
Today, Americans will pause amidst a great conversation about the future of our nation to take a moment and recognize your service to our democracy -- a service that guarantees us all the liberty to engage freely in that conversation, no matter what our views may be.

We know that we owe you a debt that cannot be repaid. But we can and will fulfill our nation's promise to stand by you and your loved ones. That is why we've worked hard for better care for our veterans, and why we provided the largest increase in Veterans Administration funding in history.

Today, we honor those Americans past and present who've served on battlefields from Lexington to Antietam, Normandy to Manila, Inchon to Khe Sanh, Ramadi to Kandahar. You have defended our freedom on land, and at sea, and in the air.

You reflect the diversity that makes this America. You share a patriotism beyond question. And you share the same unflinching courage, selfless compassion, and uncommon camaraderie that -- when faced with the tragedy of a despicable and heartbreaking attack -- the soldiers and civilians of Ft. Hood humbly revealed to the world.

You and your loved ones are the patriotic men and women we honor today, Veterans Day. And you are the men and women we shall honor every day, in times of war and times of peace, so long as our nation endures. Thank you.



The gravestone of Tony's dad who gave his life for his country at Iwo Jima.

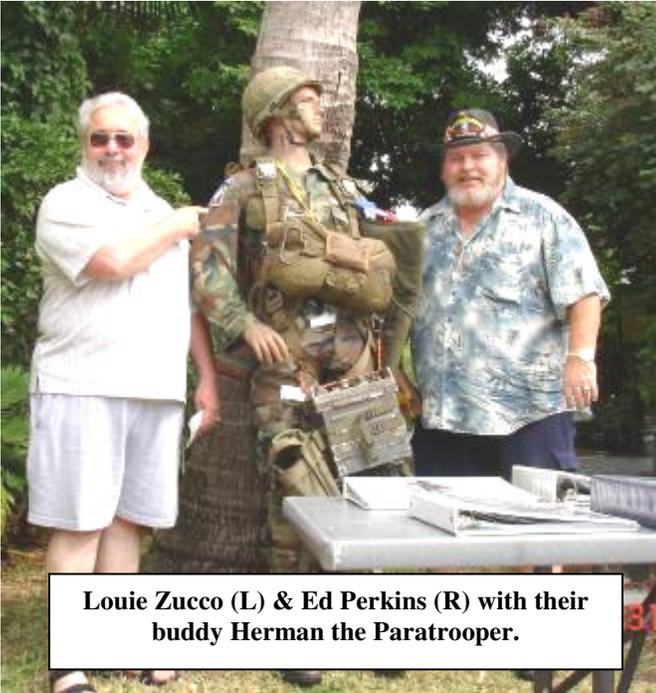
THE YEAR WAS 1919



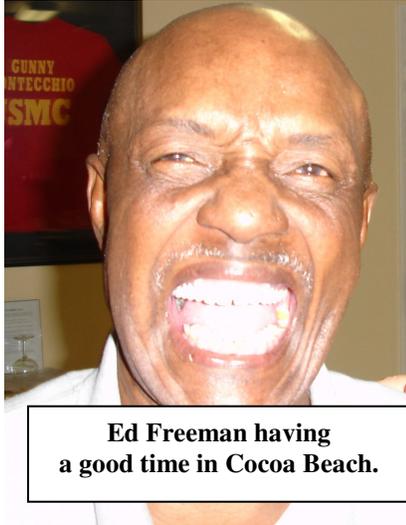
"Someone give me a drink! Quick!!! And I don't care if I don't have a chute on....push me out the door!!!"



FUN PHOTOS.....2/503d REUNION IN COCOA BEACH, FL 2006



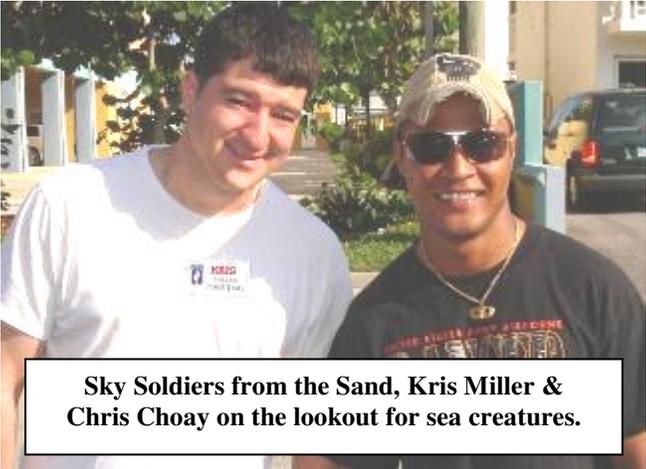
Louie Zucco (L) & Ed Perkins (R) with their buddy Herman the Paratrooper.



Ed Freeman having a good time in Cocoa Beach.



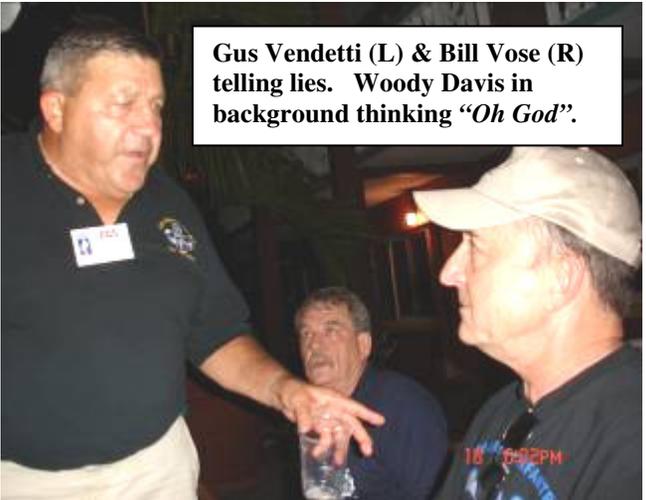
3/319th trooper Jim Stephens, lost his sleeves at golf.



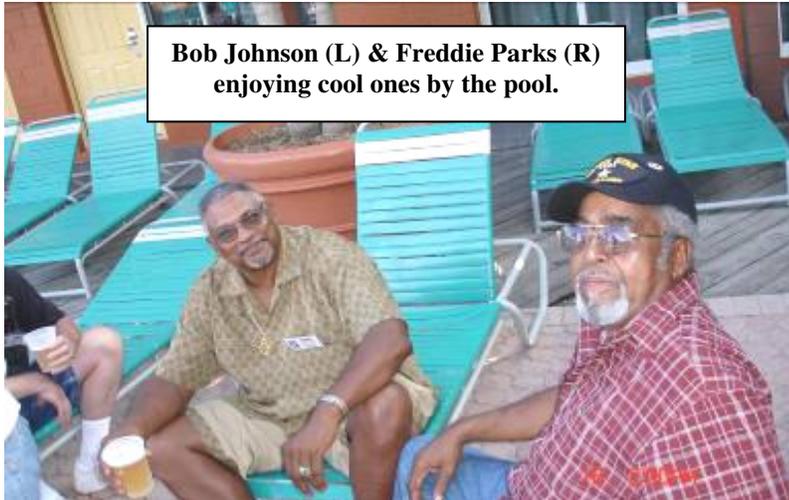
Sky Soldiers from the Sand, Kris Miller & Chris Choay on the lookout for sea creatures.



True story: After the landing on the beach by these Vietnam Vets, two, young bikini-clad lasses walking away where heard to say....*"Where are the young paratroopers?"* No Shit.



Gus Vendetti (L) & Bill Vose (R) telling lies. Woody Davis in background thinking "Oh God".



Bob Johnson (L) & Freddie Parks (R) enjoying cool ones by the pool.

Medal of Honor

Alfred Rascon

Specialist Fourth Class (Captain, retired), U.S. Army
Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry,
173d Airborne Brigade (Sep), Republic of Vietnam, 16 March 1966



Citation:

Specialist Four Alfred Rascon, distinguished himself by a series of extraordinarily courageous acts on 16 March 1966, while assigned as a medic to the Reconnaissance Platoon, Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate). While moving to reinforce its sister battalion under intense enemy attack, the Reconnaissance Platoon came under heavy fire from a numerically superior enemy force. The intense enemy fire from crew-served weapons and grenades severely wounded several point squad soldiers. Specialist Rascon, ignoring directions to stay behind shelter until covering fire could be provided, made his way forward. He repeatedly tried to reach the severely wounded point machine-gunner laying on an open enemy trail, but was driven back each time by the withering fire. Disregarding his personal safety, he jumped to his feet, ignoring flying bullets and exploding grenades to reach his comrade. To protect him from further wounds, he intentionally placed his body between the soldier and enemy machine guns, sustaining numerous shrapnel injuries and a serious wound to the hip. Disregarding his serious wounds he dragged the larger soldier from the fire-raked trail. Hearing the second machine-gunner yell that he was running out of ammunition, Specialist Rascon, under heavy enemy fire crawled back to the wounded machine-gunner stripping him of his bandoleers of ammunition, giving them to the machine-gunner who continued his suppressive fire. Specialist Rascon fearing the abandoned machine gun, its ammunition and spare barrel could fall into enemy hands made his way to retrieve them. On the way, he was wounded in the face and torso by grenade fragments, but disregarded these wounds to recover the abandoned machine gun, ammunition and spare barrel items, enabling another soldier to provide added suppressive fire to the pinned-down squad. In search for the wounded, he saw the point grenadier being wounded by small arms fire and grenades being thrown at him. Disregarding his own life and his numerous wounds, Specialist Rascon reached and covered him with his body absorbing the blasts from the exploding grenades, and saving the soldier's life, but sustaining additional wounds to his body. While making his way to the wounded point squad leader, grenades were hurled at the sergeant. Again, in complete disregard for his own life, he reached and covered the sergeant with his body, absorbing the full force of the grenade explosions. Once more Specialist Rascon was critically wounded by shrapnel, but disregarded his own wounds to continue to search and aid the wounded. Severely wounded, he remained on the battlefield, inspiring his fellow soldiers to continue the battle. After the enemy broke contact, he disregarded aid for himself, instead treating the wounded and directing their evacuation. Only after being placed on the evacuation helicopter did he allow aid to be given to him. Specialist Rascon's extraordinary valor in the face of deadly enemy fire, his heroism in rescuing the wounded, and his gallantry by repeatedly risking his own life for his fellow soldiers are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.



“THE BAKER CLUB”

In early January 1966, we went up against the enemy again.



2/503d VIETNAM
NEWSLETTER
December 2009 / Issue 9



Front line watching air burst, 2 Jan 66, Mekong Delta

This time in the rice paddies of the Delta where, they told us before departing Camp Zinn and Bien Hoa, we would be going into a very HOT landing zone (LZ), where some 1500 enemy were waiting to greet us. And, let me tell you this for a fact, all of them were accounted for!

We caught hell going into that LZ, to the point where the choppers had no choice but to pull back and go around to allow the Big Boys to pepper that area again with all the artillery they had to pound them with. Following the arty barrage our choppers again approached the LZ and we hit the ground running. Soon after we noticed one of our “Birddogs” had flown into the path of incoming arty and was hit. “C” Co. was ordered to recover the body of the pilot and any weapons and ammo, plus maps as well, while “A” and “B” Companies were taking fire from every direction you could possibly dream of. We were pinned down for some time and it felt like forever; and believe me, being totally exposed in the middle of those rice paddies was no picnic! To say the least, it was pure “HELL”.

After gaining fire superiority we attempted to continue to move forward against the enemy, however “Charlie” was so well dug in whatever we threw at him he’d come back at us with more fire, forcing us to keep our heads close to the ground. We were there for what seemed a

lifetime, then we started to get the upper hand on things and began moving forward again, only to take on a large amount of small arms fire.

The Platoon Leader in front of my Weapons Platoon was hit rather hard, and if I’m not mistaken, he was **1st Lt. Coleman**. **Platoon Sergeant, SFC Newman**, was also hit with small arms fire, and I directed them both to the rear to get on a Dust Off, as they were losing blood fast. They were refusing to leave their men in the middle of the battle, but I ordered them to exit the area while telling them their men will respect them for what they did that morning and for being the great soldiers they were, and still are!



2 Jan '66, Operation Marauder

I then took over the Platoon and we continued to fight on for several more hours.

During our attacks several more of our men were killed as we pushed forward, yet in the end we came out victorious. By late morning Charlie had been cleared of the area, yet not one of the enemy were to be found.



Top Jim Dresser at Baker Club

When "A" Co. returned to base from that particular mission, which was "Operation Marauder," I was transferred to Headquarters Company, and CSM Mish asked me if I'd like to take over the NCO Mess Hall and turn it into an NCO Club. The CSM and I went back together many years and I told him, "I can do anything!"

The very next day I began selecting those I wanted to work with me, and we started planning and getting organized. A few weeks later we jumped into our plan and we worked day and night until we had things going very nicely, until CSM Mish came to me and said, "Dresser, there's an engineer down here wanting to know if you stole all of his #1 roofing". Hell, I don't lie or bullshit the troopers or my leaders so I answered, "Yes, I took it and there was right much of it there, but I did leave some".



CSM Eddie Mish

Photo by Don Rice

"You've got to give it back,"

Mish said, "as that was special stuff for a large project".

I told the CSM, "Isn't my project a special project?" He said, "Yes, but this has to go back to them". I told him "The men of all our Companies who are out there fighting and getting their asses kicked are the folks who are special to me!" He agreed, and told me the engineer would give us all the regular corrugated metal we needed if we'd just return this special metal to him. I said, "You



2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

December 2009 / Issue 9

got a deal!" We went to work like little bees, and when we were finished, you could ask any of the men who stepped into my Club, if it wasn't the baddest place in the country of RVN. We later voted on the name from a list of KIA's, naming it "The Baker Club", after Sgt. Wallace E. Baker of "B" Co., who had been killed a few weeks earlier. We partied, raised hell, laughed, and just as many times, we cried together. I'm sure as God made little green apples, it was a great place to unwind after coming back from a mission.

The men knew SFC Dresser had many different items cooking on his BBQ Grill to welcome them home. And, once their weapons were cleaned and fresh ammo was issued, it was then "Party Time" at the Baker Club!



Jam session at Baker Club

After taking care of the NCO's, it was time for me to make my move. I would gather up all the left over meat, and good valuable meats too I might add, and carry it to the EM Club, as I loved all of them as brothers too. To be honest with you, the only part of that entire time frame I'd change would be that none of our brothers were killed in action – then, it would have been a great tour of duty.

I am proud and honored to have been part of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep). And, if I had to return to this world in 100 years from now and were asked if I'd like to go into the service, my answer would be "YES!" and it would truly have to be with the 173d Airborne, as our brotherhood is the strongest of any unit I've ever served with.

Now, over 40 years later, I'm still in contact with many of the troopers who were in my Company, but the nicest thing is, there are so many of them who were in my very own Platoon. I'm so proud of all of them and love seeing them from time to time. I'd stand beside any of them anytime I was to be called into battle, and I would stand there proudly.

**SFC Jim (Top) Dresser
A/HHC/2/503d**



SKY SOLDIER FACES



CAMP ZINN



In 1966, LTC Bob Carmichael (then Major) went to Long Bien Hospital to visit with some of our wounded. One of the 2/503d troopers there had posted this note at the foot of his bed:
SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH. IF YOU DON'T, I'LL KILL YA!



SKY SOLDIER EXTRAORDINAIRE

It is our honor to recognize 2/503d trooper



SP-4 ROGER DICK

Specialist Fourth Class Roger Dick served with Charlie Company of the battalion from April 1967 to March 1968, as a 11B2P combat infantryman and RTO. Awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge (CIB), and numerous Vietnam service medals, as a "Chargin' Charlie" Roger saw action throughout the Central Highlands of Vietnam over his year-long tour of duty with the 2/503d. Along with his close Vietnam War buddies Walter Bills and Sam Stewart, he and they are but a few from his platoon who survived the war. When asked what was most memorable about his war time experience, Specialist Dick responded, "A day does not go by without my thinking about all the friends we lost in Vietnam and wondering how their lives would have turned out had they been the survivors." After completing paratrooper jump school at Ft. Benning, Georgia, Roger was immediately deployed to Vietnam during what would be the height of the war. This Sky Soldier fought gallantly in numerous battles alongside his fellow troopers, and is proud to be among the ranks of the 173d Airborne as his comrades are proud to have served with him. Roger is a life member of the 173d Airborne Association and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and member of the Sigholtz Chapter of the 173d Airborne in Washington, DC. SP-4 Dick devotes much of his personal time to *Families of the Wounded Fund*, where he serves as a director. In this capacity Roger supports family members of military service men and



women who have either been wounded in combat operations or injured as the result of in-line-of-duty activities in support of combat. More often than not, you will find Roger at hospitals where he regularly visits wounded military personnel. Born in Connecticut in 1948, Roger married his high school sweetheart, the former Ms. Kathy Scarpelli, in 1969. Roger and Kathy are the proud parents of two children, Jason (Cain) and Alison, and the proud grandparents to Bexley and Tanner. Roger was graduated the University of Bridgeport in 1976, with a degree in business marketing. Following the war he held senior industrial sales positions which afforded him the opportunity to travel throughout North and South



Roger & Kathy Dick

America and Europe. Today he is enjoying retirement in Virginia. We are honored to salute Sky Soldier Specialist Roger Dick for his honorable service to his unit and country during war, and his ongoing commitment to helping our wounded warriors and their families today.

Airborne! Chargin' Charlie!

Send in your nomination for [2/503d Vietnam Sky Soldier Extraordinaire](#) to rto173d@cfl.rr.com



Featured Airborne Unit



**2/503d VIETNAM
NEWSLETTER**

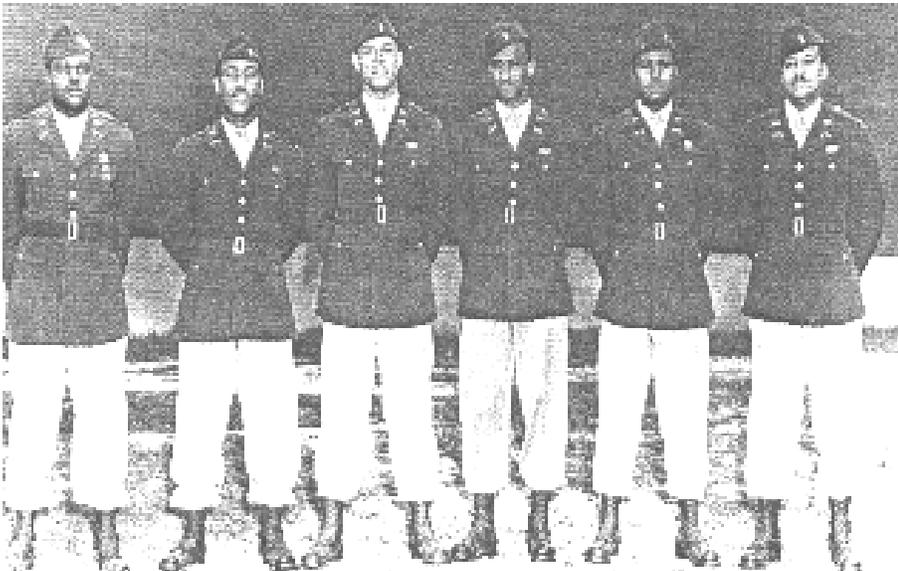
December 2009 / Issue 9

“THE TRIPLE NICKLES”
The 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion
1944 ~ 1947

Many years before “black pride” became a popular slogan, a small group of black American soldiers gave life and meaning to those words. This is their story. Born within an army that had traditionally relegated blacks to menial jobs and programmed them for failure, the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion, or “Triple Nickles,” succeeded in becoming the nation’s first all-black parachute infantry test platoon, company, and battalion.

segregated sections of theaters, and got out of his way to avoid confrontations with racist police. Black officers continued to find post officers’ club closed to them. But they endured, and proved themselves as airborne troopers -- “as fine a group of soldiers as I have ever seen,” in the words of the notoriously fussy General Ben Lear.

True, these black pioneers were exceptional men, specially selected for the task. They were former university students and professional athletes, top-notch and veteran noncoms. A major element in their success was that, unlike other black infantry units officered by whites, they were entirely black, from commanding officer down to the newest private.



**The Officers of the test platoon (1944), Left to Right:
1st Lt. Jasper E. Ross, 2nd Lt. Clifford Allen,
2nd Lt. Bradley Biggs, 2nd Lt. Edwin H. Wills,
2nd Lt. Warren C. Cornelius, 2nd Lt. Edward Baker.**

In the frosty Georgia winter of 1943-44, soldiers and officer candidates traveling to and from Fort Benning often saw the sky filled with white parachutes. Most of them assumed that the faces beneath the chutes were also white. The black soldiers they knew drove their trucks, waited on them in mess halls, or hauled their ammunition; they rode in the back of the bus to and from Columbus; they gathered at their own separate clubs or the fort.

Some of the faces beneath those chutes, however, were black. As such they were also pioneers, blazing new trails for countless black soldiers to follow. It wasn’t easy. A proud black lieutenant, sergeant, or private, with polished boots and paratrooper wings, still had to use the “colored” toilets and drinking fountains in the railroad stations, sit in

In fathering the 3rd Battalion, 505th Infantry Regiment, the 80th Airborne Anti-aircraft Battalion, the 503rd Airborne Battalion, and the 2nd Airborne Ranger Company, and serving the in 82nd, 101st, 11th and 13th Airborne Divisions, the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team, the 188th and 511th Airborne Infantry Regiments, the Airborne Center and

Special Forces, the Triple Nicklers served in more airborne units, in peace and war, than any other parachute group in history.

Though combat-ready and alerted for European duty in late 1944, the changing tides of the war resulted in a different assignment -- jumping over the blazing forests of the American northwest searching for Japanese balloon bombs, a job requiring exact skills and special courage. In this unusual role, the 555th also confronted a new dimension in warfare involving the use of biological agents that could destroy woodlands and crops, but not humans.

***AIRBORNE BROTHERS!
ALL THE WAY!!***



NOTE

Sitting on the patio the other night I heard my wife, Reggie, take a phone call. It was **Dr. Scott Fairchild** on the other end. The Doc calls me occasionally just to chat, to see how I'm doing with my PTSD, and to bring me current on some of his activities involving his work helping vets. But, this call was not for me; he was checking up on my wife who will soon undergo surgery. His call to my bride was totally consistent with who this man is.

A couple years ago, by bold ass luck, I came across this retired 82nd Airborne Lt. Colonel. I learned the All American had conducted much of the early research on PTSD for the army at Walter Reed Army Hospital, and he's a nationally recognized authority on the illness. Thanks to the Doc I'm not living under a bridge today because of the initial and ongoing treatment he's affording me and my wife.

Scott has dedicated his life to helping vets; not just his work life, but his life. While his own project of importance, Baytree Behavioral Health in Melbourne, Florida, serves to aid vets and their family members impacted by the vet's participation in war, with a strong emphasis on the affects of PTSD, the trooper spends much of his time and a great deal of his personal resources outside the office. If there's a vet rally, you'll find this paratrooper there. If there is a vet in need (including the time he visited me in the hospital), he'll be there with a helping hand and words of encouragement. If there is a death in a vet's family or the death of a veteran, this devout man will be there to comfort souls.

Learning of my personal experience with Scott and how he has helped me and my wife, numerous Sky Soldiers from throughout the country have made their way to Florida to meet with the All-American. These airborne troopers represent all battalions and all years of service in Vietnam and the Middle East. From Privates to Colonels he's helped them confront and beat back their war demons, and together he helps these veterans find understanding and peace with themselves.

Doc Scott was to attend the Daytona Beach reunion earlier this year to conduct free PTSD clinics there. Family matters, however, kept him from going. His associate, **Colonel Judy Mathewson**, did conduct PTSD sessions for 173d wives in Daytona. My understanding is a number of them and their husbands are now seeking help for PTSD as a direct result. Thank you Colonel Judy.

In our Newsletter we've written much about PTSD. You may be surprised to learn the greatest number of veterans suffering from and finally seeking help for their PTSD are Vietnam vets. I urge you to re-read some of the earlier issues pertaining to the illness. And if you'd care to contact Dr. Fairchild, I can't recommend him enough. Doc Scott's phone number is 321-253-8887.

Smitty Out



"Serving those who served." Scott Fairchild, left, Judith Mathewson and Nathan Thomas of Welcome Home Vets help troops to readjust after their deployment.

WELCOME HOME VETS

BY JENNIFER SANGALANG
FLORIDA TODAY

It's all in the name. "Serving those who served" is the motto for Welcome Home Vets, an organization that does exactly that — welcomes troops home — but so much more.

When military members return after deployment, it can take time for them to readjust. Nathan Thomas and his peers wanted to help.

Thus was the start of Welcome Home Vets, which has been nominated for Organization of the Year in FLORIDA TODAY's Volunteer Recognition Awards.

"Troops come back and realize that things are not the same. And so do families," Thomas said. We "try to help them with the ability to readjust."

Part of that process includes teaching about post-traumatic stress disorder, offering classes on couples communication and providing emergency funding for vets in need.

"We realized that they were not getting the support they needed as far as

The organization

What: Welcome Home Vets
Address: 1370 Bedford Drive, Suite 106, Melbourne
Mission: "Serving those who served," helping military veterans and their families, working to educate the public about the immediate needs of military veterans
Why volunteering is important: Welcome Home Vets helps veterans and their families "by providing a hand up, in place of a hand out."

counseling services, financial problems," said Judith Mathewson, vice president of the organization and a founding member.

"Sometimes, the families had had a crisis when the military service member was gone."

Welcome Home Vets also delivers donated supplies to the children of fallen service members. ■

A Different Christmas Poem
(Sent in By George "Scotty" Colson, 2/503d)



2/503d VIETNAM
NEWSLETTER
December 2009 / Issue 9



The embers glowed softly, and in their dim light,
I gazed round the room and I cherished the sight.
My wife was asleep, her head on my chest,
My daughter beside me, angelic in rest.
Outside the snow fell, a blanket of white,
Transforming the yard to a winter delight.

The sparkling lights in the tree I believe,
Completed the magic that was Christmas Eve.
My eyelids were heavy, my breathing was deep,
Secure and surrounded by love I would sleep.
In perfect contentment, or so it would seem,
So I slumbered, perhaps I started to dream.

The sound wasn't loud, and it wasn't too near,
But I opened my eyes when it tickled my ear.
Perhaps just a cough, I didn't quite know, Then the
sure sound of footsteps outside in the snow.
My soul gave a tremble, I struggled to hear,
And I crept to the door just to see who was near.

Standing out in the cold and the dark of the night,
A lone figure stood, his face weary and tight.
A soldier, I puzzled, some twenty years old,
Perhaps a Marine, huddled here in the cold.
Alone in the dark, he looked up and smiled,
Standing watch over me, and my wife and my child.

"What are you doing?" I asked without fear,
"Come in this moment, it's freezing out here!"
Put down your pack, brush the snow from your sleeve,
You should be at home on a cold Christmas Eve!"
For barely a moment I saw his eyes shift,
Away from the cold and the snow blown in drifts.

To the window that danced with a warm fire's light
Then he sighed and he said, "Its really all right,
I'm out here by choice. I'm here every night.
"It's my duty to stand at the front of the line,
That separates you from the darkest of times.

No one had to ask or beg or implore me,
I'm proud to stand here like my fathers before me.
My Gramps died at ' Pearl on a day in December,"
Then he sighed, "That's a Christmas 'Gram always remembers."
My dad stood his watch in the jungles of ' Nam ',
And now it is my turn and so, here I am.

I've not seen my own son in more than a while,
But my wife sends me pictures, he's sure got her smile."
Then he bent and he carefully pulled from his bag,
The red, white, and blue... an American flag.
"I can live through the cold and the being alone,
Away from my family, my house and my home.

I can stand at my post through the rain and the sleet,
I can sleep in a foxhole with little to eat.
I can carry the weight of killing another,
Or lay down my life with my sister and brother.
Who stand at the front against any and all,
To ensure for all time that this flag will not fall."

"So go back inside," he said, "harbor no fright,
Your family is waiting and I'll be all right."
"But isn't there something I can do, at the least,
"Give you money," I asked, "or prepare you a feast?"
It seems all too little for all that you've done,
For being away from your wife and your son."

Then his eye welled a tear that held no regret,
"Just tell us you love us, and never forget.
To fight for our rights back at home while we're gone,
To stand your own watch, no matter how long.
For when we come home, either standing or dead,
To know you remember we fought and we bled.
Is payment enough, and with that we will trust,
That we mattered to you as you mattered to us.

This poem is credited to a Mr. Michael Marks. Snopes.com

Throughout the Christian world, the Christmas season is a time of joy and spiritual inspiration. Despite separation from our families and the hardships imposed by war, those of us in Vietnam will still share the traditional Christmas spirit this year. We can enjoy the spiritual satisfaction that comes from giving. As fighting representatives of the Free World, our gift is the help we give the Vietnamese people to secure their future freedom. Each of you gives a part of this gift and deserves the satisfaction of having increased the happiness of others -- the true Christmas spirit.



My best wishes to each of you and your families for the Christmas season. May you enjoy good fortune during the coming year.

W.C. WESTMORELAND
General, U.S. Army
Commanding