



Contact: rto173d@cfl.rr.com

January 2011, Issue 23

~ 2/503d Photos of the Month ~ 45 Years Ago, January 1966

Dust Off of wounded 2/503d trooper on 2 January 1966, Operation Marauder in the Mekong Delta.



Bn CO, LTC George Dexter with RTO Connelly at LZ Wine, 2 January 1966.



Jan '66. C/2/503d CO, Capt. Tom Faley with Capt. Bencer, Sgt. Belcher and men inspect captured enemy materiel.

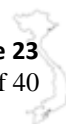
You can see all issues of our newsletter to date at either of these web sites:

www.firebase319.org/2bat/news.php or http://corregidor.org/VN2-503/newsletter/issue_index.htm



2/503d **VIETNAM** Newsletter / January 2011 – Issue 23

Page 1 of 40



New Year, New Beginning

By Rev. Dr. Ron Smith
1LT, FO, B/2/503d

The month of January is named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings. Janus was symbolized by a man with two faces--one looking back, and the other looking ahead. Some people have trouble looking ahead with hope, because they keep looking back and moping over mistakes of the past. Their outlook for the future is dim and their enthusiasm is dampened. But there is no use "crying over spilled milk". History is likely to repeat itself if we keep on groaning over failures of the old year, or continue complaining about the injustices that we have suffered in the past. Nothing is ever gained by continually grieving over the past.



The heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the astonishing statement that,

"In Christ we have a new beginning".

Read again how Paul presents these wonderful words of a fresh, new beginning:

"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against him."
[II Corinthians 5:16-19^A]

January is a great time to make a fresh start.

Competitors in track and field or swimming events want to avoid a "false start". If one individual comes off the block or the diving platform early, then all of the contestants are called back to line-up for another attempt. A "false start" is called when one participant "jumps the gun" to have an unfair advantage. Too many "false starts" will disqualify the competitor from the race.

Each of us has had "false starts" in life. There have been times when we have started out in a certain direction and wished we could turn back and make a fresh start. Too often, however, we simply stumble on seeking to make the best of a poor beginning.

At the beginning of a New Year, we often make feeble attempts to get on the right track. "New Year's resolutions" is our name for those usually aborted efforts. What is needed, of course, is a brand new start--a clean slate.

There is a proven way to erase our "false starts" and actually begin again with a new life. Jesus Christ explained that fresh start to a distinguished teacher who had come to visit him, making this startling statement:

"I tell you the truth; no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again." [John 3:3]

Jesus says a new life requires an unmistakable, radical transformation--a new start that compares with birth.

You may have wondered about your erratic past and been dissatisfied with a spotty record. If only you could make a new start. Some of us want to "quit smoking." Others might want to "quit drinking." A few might want to "quit using profanity." For some of us, we want to "quit viewing images of individuals in erotic, suggestive poses or video screens." For others, we want to "begin anew with a better relationship with our spouse, or perhaps our parents or even our children." And many of us might want to "shed ten, or twenty, or thirty pounds." The goal is to stop eating certain foods and exercise more.

The gospel is not just an opportunity to simply quit a bad habit or start some new, good habits--it is an entirely new life. It is like being born all over again. It is a real fresh start. To anyone who will acknowledge that his or her life has been marred and unworthy, God offers a possibility of a fresh start, a new birth and a new life. This takes place when you admit your need and trust Jesus Christ, who died for your sins, and receive Him in your life as your new chief executive officer. A few verses later in John, chapter three, we have the most famous verse in the entire Bible, John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

That new start can be yours at the very moment you trust Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul, writing about this, says in II Corinthians, 5:17:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!"

We can erase all of the false starts by placing our lives in the hands of God through Jesus Christ. A truly fresh start and Happy New Year comes from Jesus Christ.





VA Launching New Personalized Veterans Health Benefits Handbook

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is piloting new, personalized Veterans Health Benefits Handbooks. The handbooks are tailored to provide enrolled Veterans with the most relevant health benefits information based on their own specific eligibility. In essence, each handbook will be written for the individual Veteran.

“These handbooks will give Veterans everything they need to know and leave out everything that doesn’t apply to them,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. *“Our Veterans will now have a comprehensive, easy to understand roadmap to the medical benefits they earned with their service.”*

In addition to highlighting each Veteran’s specific health benefits, the handbook also provides contact information for the Veteran’s preferred local facility, ways to schedule personal appointments, guidelines for communicating treatment needs and an explanation of the Veteran’s responsibilities, such as copayments when applicable.

“Enhancing access isn’t just about expanding the kinds of services VA provides. It also includes making sure we do everything we can to ensure Veterans have a clear understanding of the benefits available to them so they can make full use of the services they have earned,” Shinseki said.

The new handbooks will initially be available only to certain Veterans in Cleveland and Washington, D.C. areas.

Following the pilot phase, full implementation is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2011 for across the country.

Additional information, go to va.gov/healtheligibility or call VA’s toll-free number at **1-877-222-VETS (8387)**.



Hooking Up

This is Jake Singer. I was with A Company 2/503d from '67 to '69, and am looking for Cpt. Michael R. Jennings at that time.

singerjake@hotmail.com

Who are these three sharp lookin’ Sky Soldiers from Bravo?



Chargin’ Charlies’ Guidon

Charlie Company guidon listing names of NCOs and officers of C/2/503d who presented it to then Capt. John “Jack” Leide, MG (Ret), in 1967.



Can Anyone Help Our CAV Brother?

I was told by a member of the Association that you might be able to guide me in the right direction to find this 18"H x 24"W photo of the 173d Abn Bde flag with streamers. I was presented this from another Sky Soldier many years ago and he has since passed on. While recently moving, I busted the glass-framed picture and scratched the color film very badly. I would like to replace it since it has a lot of sentimental value to me.

Joseph Socie, E-Troop, '67-'68

grnbrt@zoominternet.net



2/503d **VIETNAM** Newsletter / January 2011 – Issue 23

Page 3 of 40

The Military Coalition VETERANS Committee Legislative Goals for 2011

Tuesday, December 21, 2010

Legislative Goals for 2011

from Paul Sutton

http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-4139756/TMC-Veterans-committee-legislative-goals.html

TMC VETERANS Committee Legislative Goals For 2011

Presumptive Service-Connected Eligibility for Agent Orange Exposure, Blue Water Navy

- * Monitor Institute of Medicine's (IOM) independent review of research of "blue water" Vietnam veterans' health and Agent Orange-related diseases.
- * Blue Water Navy Agent Orange Legislation. Support introduction of legislation, if necessary, to award presumptive service connection for veterans who served off the coast of Vietnam during that conflict.

From George Claxton

Ever since the initiation of the "Agent Orange/Dioxin" problem, thousands of studies have been undertaken to prove and disprove the dilemma that science has been burdened with. When one study is introduced that shows a positive connection between Agent Orange/Dioxin, another study is published to deny the suggestion.

The projected reality of this type of conjecture is confusion and a perception that the problem cannot be alleviated either way. It would be incredible to believe that these poisons (dioxin like) do not rake havoc on veterans and other gullible victims. After all the International Agency for Research on Cancer has said that 2,3,7,8-TCDD, PCB 126, and 2,3,4,7,8-Pentachlorodibenzofuran are all HUMAN CARCINOGENS. There is one consistency, however, and that is a correlation of negative studies from the people whom have the most to lose by seeing the poisons banned.

DOW Chemical Company is one manufacturer that created products that contain dioxin like compounds. They (DOW) have done many studies on these products or by-products. I think you have the right to judge on the motives behind these studies. Therefore, I suggest to you that you walk over to your computer and look on the Internet for a blog titled "DIOXINSPIN"

(http://www.dioxinspin.com/flawed_science.htm.)

After you have printed it all out, I'm sure that you will be sadly awakened to the reality of the massive problem in the world concerning dioxin like poisons.

Faithfully submitted, George Claxton

[Sent in by Roger Dick, C/2/503d]

HAPPY 90th BIRTHDAY TO COL. "RAWHIDE" BOLAND COMMANDING OFFICER 1/503d



Colonel Boland in Yuma, AZ.

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We are saddened to report the passing of Nora Sinclair, wife of our buddy, Cowboy chopper pilot, Tony Geishauser.



Tony, our thoughts are with you, Nora and your family.





173d REUNION ITINERARY

(Tentative, subject to change)



June 22 -- Wednesday

1200 - 2000 Registration
1300 - 0100 Hospitality Room
1300 - 2200 Vendors
1800 - 2000 President's Reception



June 23 -- Thursday

0900 - 1200 Board of Director's Meeting
1000 - 1700 Registration
1000 - 2200 Vendors
1300 - 2400 Hospitality Room

June 27 -- Friday

0730 - 0900 Gold Star Reception & Breakfast
0900 - 1500 Registration
1000 - 2400 Hospitality Room
1000 - 2200 Vendors
1000 - Board buses for trip to Fort Sam Houston
1030 - 1500 Tour Fort Sam Houston
1700 - 2300 BBQ, Mariachis, Dance at Maverick Plaza



June 25 -- Saturday

0900 - 1100 Registration
0900 - 1200 General Membership Meeting
1000 - 1200 Ladies' Brunch
1000 - 2200 Vendors
1000 - 1200 Hospitality Room

BANQUET DINNER

1815 - 1850 Cocktails
1900 - 1910 Post Colors
1930 - 2035 Dinner
2035 - 2130 Speakers & Awards
2130 Retire Colors
2135 - ??? Entertainment & Dancing

Maverick Plaza

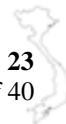
June 26 -- Sunday

0830 - 1000 Continental Breakfast
1030 - 1130 Memorial Service, Arneson River Theater
1130 - Reunion closing. Depart or stay and see more of San Antonio.



The Alamo

Reunion web site: <http://www.skysoldiers.com>





173d AIRBORNE BRIGADE ASSOCIATION ~ REUNION 2011 ~



22 June – 26 June 2011, San Antonio, TX

Hosted by Texas Chapter 13

Name _____ Phone (____) _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail address _____

Unit served with in the Brigade _____ Dates served _____

Circle Shirt Size: S M L XL 2XL 3XL Male/Female _____

Exact hat size _____ (Note: A cowboy hat will be given to the 173d member above if Registration Form and hat size are received by March 1, 2011.

Guests:

Circle Male or Female and Shirt Size for each guest

Name _____ Relationship: _____ M / F size S M L XL 2XL 3XL

Name _____ Relationship: _____ M / F size S M L XL 2XL 3XL

Name _____ Relationship: _____ M / F size S M L XL 2XL 3XL

Registration/ Event Fees

- ___ \$173.00 per Association Member
- ___ \$125.00 per Guest
- ___ \$125.00 per Gold Star Family Member
- ___ \$ 75.00 per Active Duty Soldier (Not on Orders)
- ___ FREE Active Duty Soldiers on Orders (i.e., Command, Color Guard)
- ___ \$ 75.00 per Vendor Table
- ___ FREE Gold Star Brunch – 173d Gold Star Families
- ___ Brunch Ladies Brunch (Included with registration)
- ___ Please check if planning to attend.
- ___ \$ 15.00 Trip to Fort Sam Houston per person
- ___ \$ 15.00 Sky Soldier Adoption Program “Have a meal on me” for active duty soldiers



Hilton Palacio del Rio, San Antonio, Texas

\$ _____ Total Enclosed

Make Checks Payable to: [Texas Reunion 2011 – 173d Airborne Brigade](#)

Mail Checks to: John Rolfe, 100 Oleander Road, Comfort, TX 78013



For Hotel Reservations: Hilton Palacio del Rio, \$119 + tax per night. Call 1-800-HILTONS and request the group rate for The 173d Airborne Brigade Association, Inc., or use the unique group code ABA.

Overflow Hotel: Menger Hotel, \$119 + tax per night, Call:1-800-345-9285 and request the group rate for the 173d Airborne Brigade Association.

To Register Online, visit www.texasskysoldier.org/reunion2011



The Battle of Dong Tre, RVN

December 27, 1967

Hello my Dustoff Friends. It has been 43 years ago today, December 27, 1967, since the fierce battle at Dong Tre, Vietnam, II Corps, BQ 899792. The 173d Airborne, A, B and D companies of the 3rd Battalion, 503rd Infantry began a helicopter combat assault. They landed next to a battalion of North Vietnamese Regulars that were dug in on the hill above the LZ. I, medic SP4 Neal Stanley, was flying with Dustoff90 Aircraft Commander 1LT Jerry Roe, pilot WO1 John Lama, and crewchief SP5 Levander Watson. Flying "first up" that day, we were returning from another mission when we heard our 50th Med Det (Hel-Amb) commander, Dustoff96 Major Ron Jones, radio Dustoff Operations telling of the severe situation and to get all the Dustoff crews out to the SF camp at Dong Tre, which was five miles from the battle. Major Jones' crew was pilot 1Lt. George Wiles, medic SP5 Gerald Sterns and crewchief PFC Hugh Howell. Dustoff98 with aircraft commander WO2 Clifford Watson, pilot CPT Ron Porta, crewchief SP4 Russell Wright, and medic SP4 Ric Painter made one pick-up and took two bullets into the chin bubble of the aircraft.

They shut down at Dong Tre to examine the damage to the aircraft. With air support from F-100 jets and helicopter gunships, Dustoff96 and Dustoff90 crews made multiple trips into the hot LZs to rescue the wounded. We took them to the airstrip at Dong Tre



Neal with his Dust Off, 1967.

where they were off-loaded onto our other choppers for the longer trip to the 91st Evac Hospital at Tuy Hoa. Thirty-nine men were wounded and twelve were killed that day.

Two years ago I researched the 173d Airborne website to find the names of the twelve men who were killed that day. Below is a poster that I place at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, The Wall, in Washington DC every day that I am there. I have been a National Park Service Volunteer at the Wall the past three years and have met many men of the 173d Airborne who remember the battle of Dong Tre.

Please raise a toast and say a prayer for these brave men.

Neal A. Stanley
nastanley@aol.com



A tribute to the men of the 3rd Bn, 503rd Inf, 173d Abn Bde who were killed and wounded in the fierce battle at Dong Tre, II Corps. December 27, 1967

Panel 32E

PFC John R. Arrington -- Columbus, IN....Line 68
SP4 Richard N. Eddy -- Buffalo, NY....Line 74
PVT Michael D. Fuller -- Des Moines, IA....Line 72
PFC Francis D. Greenwood -- Oxford, IN....Line 72
SP4 Bruce Hall -- Midland, TX....Line 72
PFC Mose Hegler, Jr. -- Magazine Point, AL....Line 72
CPL Ted D. Holliman, Jr. -- Greensboro, NC....Line 73
PFC Dan T. Klindt -- Astoria, OR....Line 76
PFC Irville J. Knox -- Sturgis, MI....Line 76
CPL Michael J. Minor -- Columbus, OH....Line 79
SGT Ben Owens -- Indianapolis, IN....Line 79
CPL Gary R. Schwellengbach -- Chico, CA.... Line 81



DAPPER ED



Dr. Ed Carns, Recon/Alpha Co., 2/503d, '66-'67

In last month's issue of our newsletter, we asked, *"Who is this dapper 2/503d trooper?"* Here's what you said:

"Ed Carns, MD, former Platoon Leader in A/2/503 is the be-spectacled, suited individual about which you seek an identity."

Roy Lombardo
B/2/503d

Roger that Roy. You're the first in, you win the prize!! You get to buy me a rum and coke the next time we hook up. Congratulations Ranger!! Ed

The photo in question is Ed Carns, he was my platoon leader in HHQ Recon in '66-'67. Great guy. He is now a doctor and living in Ft Sill, OK."

Pat Bowe
Recon/2/503d

"Ed Carns was my platoon leader in Recon in 1966. He was a big reason a lot of us made it home. Much to our regret he was promoted to Captain and put in charge of a line company. He was a great leader and a greater person. It was an honor to have known him. He is a medical doctor now."

Joe Lamb
Recon/2/503d

"That's Ed Carns. His birth date is Dec 12. He was born at West Point, NY. His father was a Calvary officer there. Toward the end of Junction City I, we were doing long sweeps every day going out of the fire support base at the same area. On our return one day just as we were in sight of the FSB, Ed called a company formation. Everyone is WTF? He ripped us a new asshole for getting loud and sloppy. I first saw Ed at a reunion in Chicago during the eighties. About six or seven guys from A Co. were talking to him and I reminded him of that day. When I quoted him verbatim, he got a good laugh as did we all. *'How many times have we been down that fucking trail? You think you own that fucking trail? You think your fucking asses are golden?!'* The wrath of Captain Carns! I was in the back of my Platoon and I can tell you the pucker index was intense. Shit, we thought Charlie was bad, don't piss off Carns! As we ended our meeting, I said to Ed, *'I know I speak for all of us...we would have followed you anywhere!'* The look on his face in reply was priceless and a reinforcement of the honor to have served with him. He was a great CO. He was wounded April 12th or 13th when we went into a hot LZ. He spent a few months in the hospital in Japan. Eventually he was medically discharged and put himself through med school. For many years he was a E.R. MD and has spent two or three weeks a year going to third-world countries volunteering on medical missions. We are fortunate to have people like Ed in our ranks."

Bill Nicholls
A/2/503d



Ed Carns, second from right, in company formation at Camp Zinn.





173d Airborne Brigade Memorial DVD



The 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation DVD of the memorial dedication at Fort Benning, GA held June 1, 2010, is now available for purchase. Order early for Christmas! What a great gift to give a Sky Soldier buddy, the family of a Sky Soldier and those who served with the 173d.

All monies raised from the sale of DVD's will go to the perpetual care of the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial. This is not the power point slide presentation which was circulated, but a video, in DVD format, which is over one-hour long and covers the entire dedication ceremony.

If you need further information please contact Craig Ford, Treasurer, 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation, email: cford1503@frontier.com or call Craig at: [425-422-7976](tel:425-422-7976)

~ DVD Order Form ~

Please send check or money order to the address below and
payable to the:

173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation
(please print)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Country: _____



Number of DVD's ordered ____ at \$20.00 per DVD: \$ _____

First Class shipping for one or two DVD's is \$2.00 total:* \$ _____

Priority Mail shipping for three or more DVD's is \$5.00 total:* \$ _____

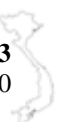
Check or money order enclosed for this total amount: USD \$ _____

(Please email Craig for postage rates to outside North America)

Please mail to:

173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial Foundation 17207
76th Avenue, W., Edmonds, WA 98026 U.S.A.

~ Please allow two (2) weeks for delivery ~



ELEANOR GRACE ALEXANDER

Captain, Army Nurse Corps
85th Evacuation Hospital at Qui Nhon

Alexander was born Sept. 18, 1940. She grew up in Queens, New York and moved with her family to River Vale in Bergen County. She graduated with a nursing degree from D'Youville College in Buffalo in 1961. She worked as an emergency room nurse in upstate New York and as an emergency room supervisor in New York city. Her friends knew her as Rocky.

She decided in 1967 to join the service and go to Vietnam as a nurse before she had any family obligations.

Rocky interviewed with all four branches of the service before deciding on the Army Nurse Corps. Only the Army would guarantee her a tour of duty in Vietnam. After six weeks of training at Fort Sam Houston in Texas, she was shipped to Vietnam on June 6, 1967. She left behind a cedar chest with Fieldcrest towels and a gown, for the wedding she hoped to have one day.



Rocky

Alexander was assigned to work as a surgical technician at a 250-bed hospital on the outskirts of Qui Nhon, in the Central Highlands.

In November 1967, she volunteered to go with other medical personnel from the 85th Evac to Dak To, a town 60 miles north. American troops were involved in intense battle there. Alexander and the others worked long days patching up the wounded.

Alexander became the first and only New Jersey woman killed in Vietnam on the last day of that month, when her work in Dak To was through. On completion of their duties they were returning to Qui Nhon in a C-7B Caribou. During approach into Qui Nhon, the pilot was advised the airfield had gone below landing minimums due to low clouds, rain and limited visibility. The pilot accepted a divert to Nha Trang but crashed into a mountain-side about 5 miles south of Qui Nhon. Everyone aboard the aircraft died, including 4 air crewman and 22 passengers.

She was awarded a Purple Heart. The top nursing medal at her alma mater is named for her. So are a football field and a street in her hometown.

Alexander is buried in a family plot in St. Andrew's Cemetery in River Vale.



Thanks Ladies, Wherever You Are

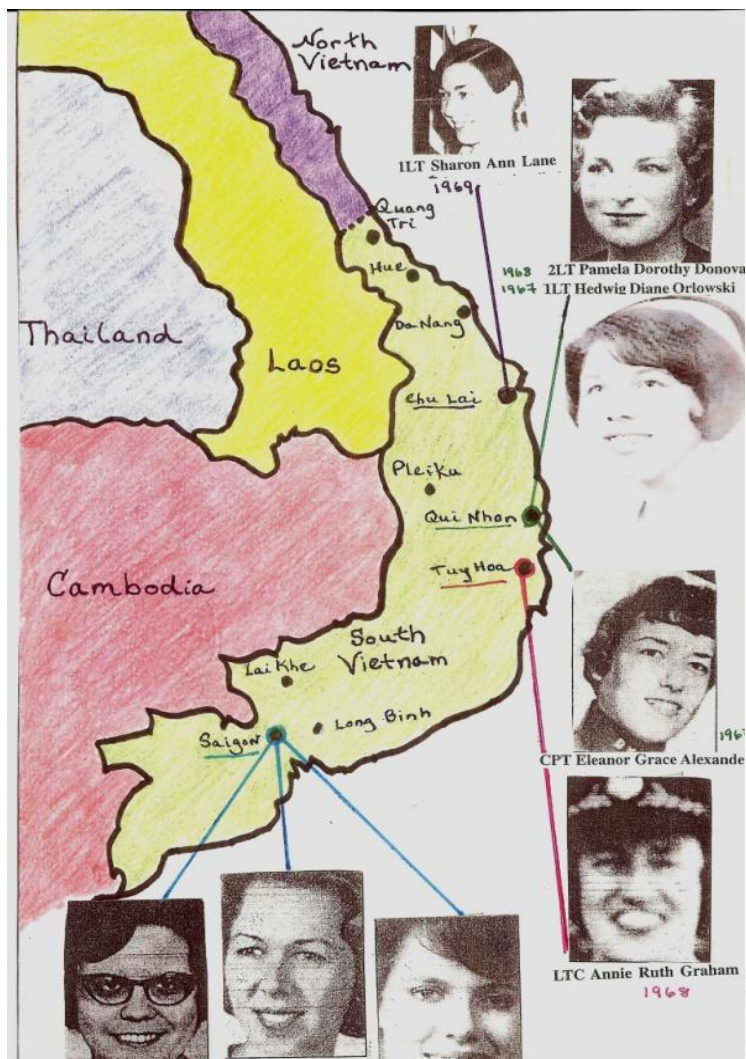
Years ago Bill Vose, A/HHC/2/503d, '66-'67, and I were traveling to the Tampa area early one morning to attend the funeral of 2/503d Command Sergeant Major, Ed Proffitt. We had time available so we decided to stop for breakfast at a Denny's. We were both wearing our 173d ball caps.

Sitting a few tables away were two ladies in our age group dressed in military nurse's attire. We all exchanged smiles, and they soon finished their meal and left.

Shortly thereafter Bill and I called the waitress over and asked for our check. The young girl told us, "Those two ladies paid for your meals."

Thanks ladies, wherever you are, and, Welcome Home sisters.

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



AIRBORNE MUSEUM NEW LOOK

If you have not recently visited the Airborne and Special Operations Museum located in Fayetteville, NC, you will probably not recognize its entrance. Thanks to the Airborne and Special Operations Museum Foundation and the City of Fayetteville, the Museum has a new look!

As you emerge from the Museum's front door, you will see two newly emplaced statues and surrounding the area, a new Veterans Park. Part of an initiative to "spruce up" Fayetteville, the Park is part of a major face lift being applied to the area.

Anyone who has been stationed at or visited Fort Bragg should easily recognize the first statue. The venerable "Iron Mike" has left the Post and now proudly resides in front of the Museum. At a greater distance in the Veterans Park is a newly sculptured rendering of General Hugh Shelton, donated by Ross Perot. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Shelton is one of our own, having served in the Herd in Vietnam.

Engraved pavers similar to those located on the front and rear patios of the Museum may be purchased through the Museum Gift. The Gift Shop also has a wide array of Airborne items that are suitable for gifts year round.

A trip to the Airborne Museum is a "must make" to see the Herd Vietnam era diorama as well as Sky Soldier artifacts from the Vietnam and Iraq/Afghanistan eras. The Museum itself is a remarkable structure that will be enjoyed by Sky Soldiers and family members of all generations.

Ken Smith
A/2/503d



"Wartorn 1861-2010"

New Documentary Chronicles Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder from Civil War to Iraq & Afghanistan



A new documentary, *Wartorn 1861-2010*, airing on HBO, chronicles the lingering effects of war on military veterans throughout American history, from the Civil War through today's conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Directed by Jon Alpert and Ellen Goosenberg Kent, *Wartorn* addresses the issue of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the psychological damage inflicted by combat on a number of levels - first, that the problem of PTSD isn't new and is far more pervasive than officially acknowledged. Second, that treatment is challenging, and third, escaping some kind of psychological impact may be impossible for anyone who sees combat.

Wartorn traces the history of the malady that has been known variously as "insanity," "melancholia," "shell shock," and "combat fatigue" since first being identified in the 19th century. From the Civil War right up through the current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, families, the military, veterans' organizations, physicians, psychiatrists and psychologists have struggled to deal with the consequences of soldiers' experiences in combat and the effect those experiences can have on their minds.

The film focuses on the current controversy within the military and civil society over the existence, effects of, and treatments for PTSD. The filmmakers interview military officials, doctors, vets and their families, focusing in particular on the current wave of suicides within the ranks of veterans of the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

[Sent in by Christine McMillan,
wife of Mike McMillan 4/503d]



This is an extract from **Military.com** and should go a long way to help our troops when they can see a 2 Star has PTSD and dealt with it.

[Sent in by LTC Scott Fairchild, PsyD, 82nd Abn (Ret)]

General Speaks Out About His PTSD Battle



Maj. Gen. David Blackledge

While everyone else danced at a New Year's celebration to start 2008, Maj. Gen. David Blackledge couldn't stop picturing a suicide bomber blowing up the ballroom. After nearly losing his life twice during consecutive deployments, Blackledge rarely felt safe. He couldn't shake the nightmares. He couldn't control his temper. He couldn't focus.

"I started to think, well, this is just the way it's going to be," Blackledge said.

But later that year, after his routine physical, he described his symptoms to a doctor.

Classic post-traumatic stress disorder, the doctor said. He sent Blackledge to behavioral health, where he saw a psychiatrist and a psychologist. They confirmed the diagnosis and told the general they could help.

Now Blackledge -- commander of the Army's Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command -- is

speaking publicly about his invisible wounds to let other warriors know their reactions to combat are normal.

PTSD is one of the signature injuries of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A 2008 Rand Corp. study estimated that as many as 300,000 veterans of those wars suffer from PTSD or depression. Yet it remains difficult to persuade troops to get the help they need.

Reluctance

An Army report released this summer said Soldiers who need mental healthcare the most are the least likely to seek treatment. They worry it will hurt their career, or they will appear weak.

Blackledge was unsure how speaking to a psychiatrist would affect his career. He said his first psychiatrist promised to be careful when taking notes so the sessions wouldn't come back to haunt the general.

Now, five years later, he's defying the culture of military silence and openly talking about his own troubles.

"We have our warrior ethos. Sometimes that can get in the way of helping us recognize that we need some help," Blackledge said.

"War is an abnormal event and it's a traumatic event. These kinds of issues are normal reactions. If you're struggling with that and it just doesn't seem to be getting better, there's help available."

Leaders have taken steps to reduce the stigma of seeking mental healthcare, including adding counselors to primary care clinics and embedding them into units with the troops.

But personal experiences shared by someone with Blackledge's stature will be a necessary part of changing the military culture, said Kathy Beasley, a retired Navy nurse who now works with the Military Officers Association of America.

"We've put a lot of energy into those campaigns. But I think leaders who have actually experienced it, and are able to come out and talk about it, to me is the most powerful tool that we have," Beasley said.

"It's going to take people like him at those levels to assure others, particularly junior Soldiers, to be comfortable to come forward and express the fact that they might need help."

(continued....)





MG Blackledge, a trooper ready to blast.

Iraq invasion

Blackledge was part of the invading force that went to Iraq in 2003. Ten days before his 14-month tour was set to end, he traveled in a three-truck convoy on a mission to meet tribal leaders. The convoy came under attack, and Blackledge said his interpreter was shot in the head. The truck rolled over several times, breaking Blackledge's back.

He and another Soldier crawled out of the truck and into a firefight, using a ditch for cover. As Blackledge returned fire, he said, he saw the last truck in the convoy explode. It had been shot in the gas tank. Blackledge escaped and spent 11 months recovering from the broken back and other injuries.

Almost immediately, Blackledge said, he had trouble thinking about anything besides the ambush.

He spoke with a psychiatrist several times at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The psychiatrist told him to think of the event as a movie, and to turn the movie off in his head. But the bigger focus, Blackledge said, was on healing his body.

Three days after a medical board cleared him for duty, Blackledge learned he was going back to Iraq. *"In my case, it didn't give me the mental recovery time to really get past the post-traumatic stress I'd experienced,"* he said.

During the next deployment to Iraq, Blackledge said, he was in Jordan to meet with a team of Soldiers there.

He and the team had just eaten dinner at their hotel in Amman. As they were walking through the lobby, Blackledge said, a suicide bomber set off his blast close

enough to knock the general off his feet. The bomb killed dozens and wounded hundreds. Blackledge had a whiplash-type injury that took months to heal.

Blackledge said he had thought he was safe outside Baghdad, but the explosion taught him otherwise. It added another layer of stress. *"It just made you kind of feel like you weren't safe anywhere,"* he said.

Not even at a party years later, in the United States, on New Year's.

"It wasn't really until I came back from that tour that I realized this stuff really isn't going away," Blackledge said.

He'd become outraged in traffic, or in arguments with his wife. The anger, he said, would be disproportionate to the problem. Blackledge, an avid reader, couldn't finish a book. His attention span wouldn't allow it.

And the nightmares persisted

Since Blackledge mentioned his problems to a doctor in 2008, he has undergone therapy with psychiatrists and psychologists. Blackledge said he still deals with some of the symptoms of PTSD, but he knows now how to handle them.

Soldiers and their families should treat the emotional damage of war as seriously as a broken leg or a bullet wound, he said.

Blackledge said he hopes his story can help Soldiers get past the stigma and realize it's OK to ask for help.

"No one's going to think less of you," he said.



~ THE FACES OF PTSD ~

General Blackledge is just one of the faces of PTSD. The following article, *Heal the Warrior*, is an interesting and telling report about our country's combat veterans and, for many, their struggle with Post Traumatic Stress. For more than 30 years I viewed those claiming the illness as mostly scowflaws, guys looking for a free ride. "Get over it! The war is over." We've heard this from our civilian friends and even relatives, and sometimes other vets who believe they have steel balls; yet we know for too many of us the war is never over even though we want it to be over. That was my view until one day, and seemingly out of nowhere, that devil of an illness bitch-slapped me big-time. Our war returned and returned to my doorstep with a vengeance, and I've yet to be able to shy it away. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of our friends from WWII and Korea tell us of their lifelong battle with the illness (shell shock, battle fatigue, whatever the hell they called it then), most, unfortunately, having gone without treatment their entire lives. And many of you, as did this old RTO, remain in denial, needing help yet not knowing help is needed or available; as you move from one job to the next, one marriage to the next, one nightmare or sleepless night to the next, or one lost relationship with a friend or son or daughter to the next....you know the drill. Throughout the following report you'll see faces, mine and those of our buddies, all PTSD survivors. Thanks to these warriors for allowing us to include their images as testimony by men who walk with PTSD every day of their lives, yet men who've confronted that devil and through treatment and often the caring understanding of a spouse or partner or good buddy have found some peace with their souls. The faces you see here are the faces of PTSD, from the unwashed to Field Grade officers – their faces no different than yours. As Jack "Jackattack" Ribera so aptly pondered, "Putting a face on the monster makes him less powerful. In unity there is strength." Brothers and sisters....you ain't alone, and help is available. Ed

"In war, there are no unwounded soldiers."

~ José Narosky ~

HEAL THE WARRIOR, HEAL THE COUNTRY

Breaking the cycle of war making: our country will not find peace until we take responsibility for our wars.

By Edward Tick

Guilt, shame, slaughter without purpose, alienation from homeland and life itself—this was the legacy that Günter passed on to his son Walt from his World War II combat service in Hitler's Wehrmacht. Walt, "the only child born in freedom," was born in the United States shortly after his parents emigrated here from Germany. Growing up in the Cold War 1950s, Walt longed to be an All American boy, but was always the Indian to his friends' cowboys and the "Kraut" to their G.I. Joes.

When he turned 18, Walt enlisted and volunteered for Vietnam. "I wanted to finally be one of the good guys," Walt said. "Service in the American military in a righteous cause would expunge my family's past and earn our place in society." He could not know



Jerry Wiles
B/2/503d



Jack Ribera
A/2/503d

that, instead, he would return with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), feeling less than ever like "one of the good guys."

The Warrior's Path

Our troops do not enlist because they want to destroy or kill. No matter the political climate, most troops seek to serve traditional warrior values: to protect the country they love, its ideals, and especially their families, communities, and each other. If they must kill or be killed, they need transcendent reasons to do so.

Throughout history, the only reason for fighting that has survived moral scrutiny is a direct attack with real, immediate threat to one's people. PTSD is, in part, the tortured conscience of good people who did their best under conditions that would dehumanize anyone.

Almost all cultures, past and present, have had warriors. They have also had complex stories and rituals to help them recover from combat and guide them through the life cycle.



Mike Sturges
A/2/503d



Jim Stephens
B/3/319th

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The occurrence of warriors is so universal that depth psychologists understand Warrior to be one of our foundational psycho--spiritual archetypes.

In traditional cultures, boys and men studied a "warrior's path." In these societies a warrior was not the same as a soldier; not merely a member of a huge, anonymous military institution used for the violent execution of political ends. Rather, warrior was one of the foundational roles that kept societies whole and strong. Warriors were fundamentally protectors, not destroyers.

People respond to the same call today. Michael, a Marine who served in Afghanistan, proudly declares that at age 18 he was the first in his state to enlist after 9/11. Nick, an army officer who served in Iraq, enlisted because of a lifelong desire *"to be like Hector defending the gates of Troy."*

Warriorhood, however, is not so valued or nurtured in modern society. "Warrior" is not even a recognized social class. A veteran, especially one with disabilities, appears to many, and sometimes to him or herself, as a failure in terms of normal civilian identity. Michael fears that, as an experienced combat veteran, the only place on the planet he now fits is in the French Foreign Legion.

The Echoes of War

War abroad fosters war at home. When we go to war, we inevitably bring its violence and horror back to our homes and streets. We cannot help it.

Rather than feeling that he had restored his family's honor, Walt spent years ravaged by nightmares, homeless, abusing drugs and alcohol, and sitting with a shotgun in his mouth trying to find the will to end it all. He married and had children, then divorced and neglected



Craig Ford
C/1/503d



Mike McMillan
A/4/503d



Bob Clark
5th Special Forces



Jim Dresser
A/HHC/2/503d



Larry Paladino
B/2/503d

his kids. He could not keep a job. He could not come home.

War echoes down the generations. Known or hidden, we all carry the wounds of war. Walt was wounded by his father's history. His children were wounded by his.

When a veteran has PTSD, his or her entire family and community are inevitably affected. The individual symptoms of PTSD—sleep disturbances, substance abuse, depression, and problems with intimacy, employment and authority—are the same symptoms that are epidemic in our society. When we take a close and unprotected look, we see: we are a nation and a planet of wounded warriors, their offspring, and their neighbors.

Cleansing the Warrior

War poisons the spirit, and warriors return tainted. This is why, among Native American, Zulu, Buddhist, ancient Israeli, and other traditional cultures, returning warriors were put through significant rituals of purification before re-entering their families and communities. Traditional cultures recognized that unpurified warriors could, in fact, be dangerous. The absence of these rituals in modern society helps explain why suicide, homicide, and other destructive acts are common among veterans.

In Viet Nam Walt had exhumed bodies of enemy dead from mass graves and reburied them. He felt like he had dirtied and damaged his soul. Nick declared that, though he had wished to be a great champion of his people, *"all they gave me was this dirty stinking little Iraq War."*

In traditional cultures, warrior cleansing was often guided by shamans, and particular shamans presided over "warrior medicine."



Don Rockholt
A/2/503d



Rick Fred
HHC/2/503d



Wambi Cook
A/2/503d



Lew Smith
HHC/2/503d



Among his many offices and honors, for example, Sitting Bull served as Medicine Chief of the Hunkpapa Warrior Society, responsible for overseeing the spiritual lives and well-being of the society's warriors. Sitting Bull considered this to be the most important of all the offices he held. Walt entered individual and group psychotherapy for combat veterans. It helped to tell his stories, have his feelings and losses confirmed by other vets, and receive honor as part of a brotherhood. But he was in search of more cleansing, blessing, and soul healing than traditional therapy could provide. He eventually partnered with a Native American woman. He studied her culture, and participated in sweat lodges and other traditional rituals. He attended a Pow Wow where he was honored as a returned warrior. He was accepted by the Native community far more than he had been by mainstream America.

I annually lead healing journeys back to Viet Nam, and there, too, vets report feeling more welcomed and honored by their former foes than they have ever felt at home.

A Double Wound

Sitting Bull and his warriors, and other bands from innumerable traditional cultures, were never plagued with self-doubt about the value of their mission, as many of our soldiers are today. In order to do battle with a whole heart, the danger and threat to one's home must be real, and the people must experience it as immediate and about to threaten their total existence; there must be no alternative. A people and their warriors must be in unity.

The effect of that unity shows in Nguyen Van Tam, known as Mr. Tiger, a robust, friendly, and serene man of 87 living in Viet Nam's Mekong Delta. He is a veteran of wars against the Japanese, French, and Americans. Though at war for a quarter century, he has no disturbing symptoms. *"We Vietnamese,"* he says,



Vic Marciano
Recon/D/1/503d



Dave Glick
B/2/503d



Harry Cleland
HHC/B/2/503d



Dale Olson
A/2/503d



Gary Prisk
C/D/2/503d

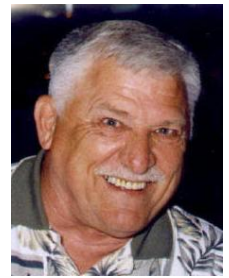
"do not have PTSD because we never hated Americans. We only fought to protect our families and homes from invaders."

When, to the contrary, wars are based on false pretenses, a moral vacuum results. As Martin Luther King, Jr. observed, troops then experience *"not simply the brutalizing process that goes on in any war,"* but also *"cynicism to the process of death, for our troops must know after a short time that none of the things we are fighting for are really involved."*

Walt explained, *"I didn't realize until it was too late that I was just like my father—a good man fighting on the wrong side for the wrong cause."* Moral trauma is at the core of PTSD. An idealistic and sincere young soldier discovering that he is in fact fighting for false or distorted political, economic, or historical agendas can experience deeper and more complicated psychic wounds than those traditional warriors experienced.

The severity and extent to which veterans suffer with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a direct response to our culture's blindness about war's true cost. PTSD is the expression of the anguish, dislocation, and rage of the self as it attempts to cope with its loss of innocence, reformulate a new personal identity and cultural role, and awaken from massive denial. Veterans with PTSD are people whose belief systems have been shattered. We can better understand PTSD as an identity disorder and soul wound rather than a stress and anxiety disorder, as it is presently classified. War dehumanizes anyone it touches, but especially a veteran who questions the cause he served.

Most conventional therapies teach healers to avoid talk of morality. But war is inherently a moral enterprise and veterans in search of healing are on a profound moral journey.



Jim Healy
A/2/503d



Bob Fleming
A/D/2/503d



Bill Metheny
HHC/4/503d



Don Kamandulis
173d Bde S-1

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Healers and communities must walk with them. As a society, we must honor those wounds in ways that recognize their depth and degree of psychic suffering.

Lifting the Burden

Warriors in traditional societies served the need for protection, and all that was done was done in the tribe's name. They had rituals transferring responsibility for actions during warfare from veterans to the entire culture. Ultimately leaders, not ordinary troops, were held responsible for the results of battle and for the deaths that occurred.

Our veterans cannot heal unless society accepts responsibility for its war making. To the veteran, our leaders and people must say, *"You did this in our name, because you were subject to our orders, and because we put you in untenable and even atrocity-producing situations. We lift the burden of your actions from you and take it onto our shoulders. We are responsible for you, for what you did, and for the consequences."*

Walt received this acceptance from Native American communities. In my seven trips to Viet Nam, and with every veteran and civilian I have met who has visited Viet Nam since the war, the Vietnamese people have offered such acceptance and forgiveness to any American returning to the country to reconcile. In contrast, since Afghanistan, Michael says, *"I still love America, but America does not love me."*

Without this transfer of responsibility, the veteran carries war's secret grief and guilt for us all. Too many veterans collapse into a silent suffering disability and thus serve as our broken scapegoats while the rest of us proceed with "business as usual." In contrast, during my healing retreats, veterans tell their stories, civilians speak of their lost loved ones, and everyone shares their damaged values and broken dreams. Finally, our vets enter the center of our circle



Gary Davidson
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Ted Thompson
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Dennis Begley
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and civilians pledge to accept responsibility for any harm done in their name and to help carry the veterans' stories for the rest of their lives. By sharing this burden we become a community united in service to war-healing.

Healing for All

We wish, as the gospel song says, *"to study war no more."* But scholars count over 14,600 wars in the last 5,600 years of recorded history. War is so epidemic in its occurrence, devastating in its impact, and lasting in its aftermath, that we must study it and tend to it and treat it. If we are to return war to its proper place as a last defense when absolutely necessary, we must heal the wounds of our soldiers and communities. We cannot achieve peace-making without first achieving **Dominick Cacciatore** true and comprehensive war-healing. **More faces?**

Walt finally put away his shotgun and quit drinking. He enjoyed a successful relationship with his new partner and was adopted by her tribe and its warrior society.



Leo Pellerin
A/2/503d



A.B. Garcia
HHC/2/503d



Dominick Cacciatore
A/2/503d

GENERATIONS OF VALOR



More faces?

(continued....)





Korean War. "I'm here for you buddy."

He took up a spiritual path that restored his belief in the goodness of life and order of the universe. He volunteered with more disabled veterans, visiting the infirm at his regional V.A. hospital and helping create annual veteran reunions. Both in therapy and beyond, we created rituals that allowed this soldier to find healing. The Native American and veteran communities helped support and bring this warrior's wandering spirit home. In turn, Walt became a devoted advocate for other veterans more wounded than he. The disabled veteran became an elder warrior.

But war completed its damage. Only in his 50s, Walt died of Agent Orange-related cancer last year.

We cannot heal from war without involving the entire community and society, and without invoking transpersonal help. We must develop modern rituals that acknowledge the additional wounds caused by war fought for non-defense reasons. Much as we might disagree with a war, our rituals must include purification, public storytelling, and community acceptance of responsibility for what the soldier has done.

These war-healing rituals and practices serve us all. They bring home to us the need to break the cycles of war-making and violence both within the individual soldier and within the society. When we return to our veterans their silenced voices, when we accept our true

responsibility as individuals and communities, we will no longer see war as an adventure or a legitimate tool of power politics. Then, perhaps, we may see that all over our country and world, we share the same legacy of war-wounding. When we join together to address those wounds wherever they appear, we will finally "study war no more."

I asked Walt's permission to tell his story during our farewell visit in the hospital where he was dying of Agent Orange cancers. He was surprised at first, but finally said, "I was afraid my life was worthless. But please tell my story. Please make it mean something. Maybe it can help some other poor souls avoid my fate."

About Edward Tick

Edward Tick wrote this article as part of *A Just Foreign Policy*, the Summer 2008 issue of *YES! Magazine*. Mr. Tick is author of *War and the Soul* and three other books. He has worked with veterans for three decades and is director and senior psychotherapist of *Soldier's Heart: Veteran's Safe Return Initiatives*.

ABOUT YES!

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[This article was sent in by Dr. Scott Fairchild, PsyD, Baytree Behavioral Health.]



NOTE: We've given this tale by the young, daring Captain some coverage in a couple of earlier issues. But, given the special reports on PTSD herein, this book review is timely and is being included in spite of that Dogface still owing me 10 rums and coke!!! Cap, let's call it an even eleven. Ed

Digger Dogface Brownjob Grunt

By Capt. Gary Prisk
C/D/2/503d

A book review by Francisco Auet, M.D., Psychiatrist,
Panama City, Panama

Digger Dogface Brownjob Grunt is an exceptionally well written book about the psychology of surviving. Disturbing on many levels, tender yet chaotic, *Digger's...* backdrop is the war in Vietnam, and yet *Digger...* is not as much a war story as it is a compelling tale of the survival of man's spirit in the chaos of the lowest levels of war.

A truly extraordinary story told by a narrator with a powerful voice, *Digger...* steadily builds on a matrix of conflicting emotions and psychological conflicts—the making of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

A chronicle of the systematic decay of the human spirit, of being too long in the throes of combat, *Digger...* should be read and studied by all mental health professionals currently helping patients with PTSD and those who may deal with PTSD in the future.

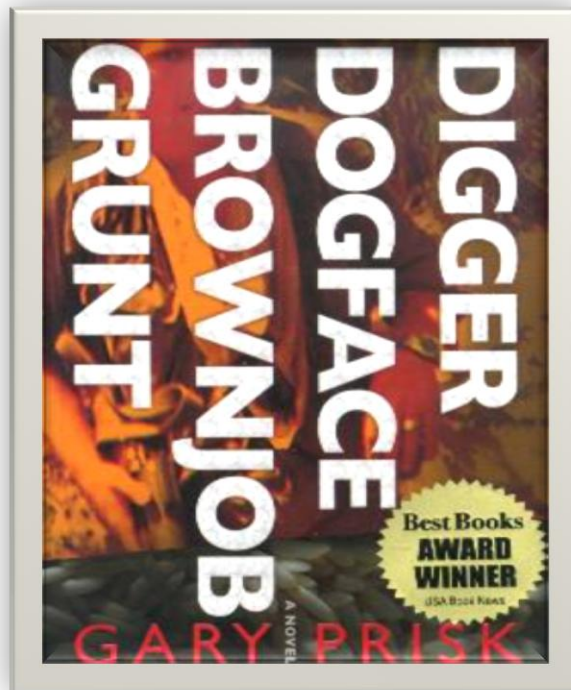
A primer sought after by psychiatrists and resident psychiatrists, *Digger...* should be mandatory reading for undergraduate and post-graduate medical students.

Gary Prisk has written a layered narrative that shows rather than tells a story about an Army Infantry Lieutenant, Lieutenant Edward Hardin, who uses his caring spirit, as if an arm he wraps around his men, to push his men forward and protect them while he relies on that same caring spirit to simply survive.

From the carnage his unit suffers before he enters the hospital with a fever-of-unknown-origin (FUO) to the end of his brutal existence, page by page the reader becomes immersed in the chaos of war. In and out of the vines, Lieutenant Hardin grows closer to his men. Scene by scene the reader follows the morphing of Hardin's resolve as he questions and replaces traditional measures of war's success and boils his own measure down to one consuming purpose—the survival of his men. Even when a recurring fever-of-unknown-origin gives him a medical pass away from the war, he cannot abandon his men. Their survival had become his reason for being.

With the facility few writers possess, Gary Prisk introduces the reader to characters so deeply mired in the mud of yet another war, the reader begins by resisting the true nature of these men. Initially, *Digger Dogface Brownjob Grunt* is not easy to read. The story seems chaotic until the reader realizes Lieutenant Hardin's war was chaotic.

Somehow the author has created a story with the sensibility of a poem, or testament—a picture of the vivid, tumultuous reality of war for those who were not there.



At times the reader will laugh and then a few short sentences later cry. Careening from scene to scene, at times the reader will wish the story line was less frenetic, less realistic, or more comfortable. But that's part of the beauty and the genius of this book.

Challenging the reader to understand how an infantryman adjusts his measure of success, the author shows the reader why the infantryman gives his last full measure trying to find substitutes for his reason for being.

Those who have the pleasure of reading *Digger Dogface Brownjob Grunt* will gain life-saving insights into mental survival in times of chaos or challenge.

Reading this book will be a catharsis for the reader's soul. #####

Available on www.Amazon.com



THIS TIME WE WIN: REVISITING THE TET OFFENSIVE

By James S. Robbins
Encounter Books

Reviewed by Gary L. Larson



Two U.S. military policemen aid a wounded fellow MP during fighting in the U.S. Embassy compound in Saigon, Jan. 31, 1968, at the beginning of the Tet Offensive. A Viet Cong suicide squad seized control of part of the compound and held it for about six hours before they were killed or captured.
(AP Photo/Hong Seong-Chan)

Commonly held misconceptions about the Tet Offensive, a series of attacks by Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese forces during the Vietnamese holiday of that name in 1968, have credited it as a pivotal victory for the communists in the Vietnam War. But was it indeed a win for the enemy?

Conventional wisdom holds that Tet was the turning point in public perception of this war, as its purposefulness to our geopolitical interests was called into question. That might well be so, but a public presumption that Tet was a triumph for the enemy is mightily challenged in "This Time We Win," (amazon.com) a groundbreaking new book by James S. Robbins.

Mr. Robbins, editorial writer on foreign affairs at *The Washington Times*, painstakingly retraces the bloody clashes and their aftermath, shredding the notion that the offensive was a victory, other than Pyrrhic, for the VC and its allies, the regulars in PAVN (the People's Army of North Vietnam). Using the enemy's postwar documents, Mr. Robbins maintains that Tet weakened it to the point of near collapse, severely wounding the insurgents' infrastructure.

That is not how it was portrayed in American media. In reality, Tet was a desperate push to foment revolt among the South Vietnamese to kick out those American "lackeys," Mr. Robbins asserts. Ironically, that failed strategy became a rallying point for anti-war sentiment on the U.S. home front. Tet rekindled enemy hopes for a crack in American resolve, leading to the United States' abandoning its "imperialistic aims" and South Vietnamese allies.

A depleted force of VC, wracked by desertions from disastrous asymmetrical warfare, was reeling after Tet. A dispirited PAVN, far from home, with supply lines stretched, was losing men faster than replacements could be sent down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Attacks were aimed at taking, if not holding, key defense posts in the South, including, notably, a takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. There, a ragtag attack was thwarted in the courtyard by U.S. Marine Corps guards and Army military police. Death was dealt to all attackers. Yet one report had the embassy "breached."



First Lt. Gary D. Jackson of Dayton, Ohio, carries a wounded South Vietnamese Ranger to an ambulance Feb. 6, 1968 after a brief but intense battle with the Viet Cong during the Tet Offensive near the National Sports Stadium in the Cholon section of Saigon. (AP Photo/Dang Van Phouc)

Mr. Robbins recites case after case of such off-the-mark reporting: Tet was not, as depicted, a surprise attack. There was no "intelligence failure." Battle plans had been captured. High-level PAVN defectors and VC turncoats put even defenders on alert. Such readiness set the stage for horrific blood losses to attackers, counted in waves in futile frontal attacks that failed utterly. (Of an estimated 84,000 attackers, more than half - 45,000 - perished in Tet, according to postwar records).

Truong Nhu Tang, VC war minister, called Tet a "staggering loss." It was a "major irony," he wrote, that such a defeat "was transformed by our propaganda into a brilliant victory."

(continued....)

