

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

**WE TRY
HARDER!**

2/503d
VIETNAM
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ *newsletter*



April 2011, Issue 26

Contact: rto173d@cfl.rr.com

See all issues 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 Photo of the Month ~



From left, Gene Counselman A/1/503d, Wambi Cook and Les Fuller A/2/503d on the summit of Hill 875, Dak To.



875 REDUX

By Wambi Cook
A/2/503d

In the fall of 2007 I asked our stateside Viet Nam travel agency to try and arrange a stop on Hill 875 during our upcoming April tour. Over 128 173d brothers lost their lives during a horrific 5-day battle in late November of 1967. Details of this conflict is readily available via a quick search of Google, Wikipedia, or any number of other internet links, as well as several superlatively produced documentaries that regularly air on the Discovery Channel affiliates.

Anyway, I thoughtlessly expected a positive retort. It would be the first time back for me and Les Fuller. We both served with Alpha Company, 2/503 from February 1967 through the Tet offensive of 1968. The agency got back to me post haste with Viet Nam's official response: *Access on or near Hill 875 DENIED*. No reason for the rebuff was proffered. All was not lost, however.

We were, however, given permission to venture to the site of the 173d's single deadliest *Battle of the Slopes*. Five months earlier, on a like hill located a few kilometers south of 875, *No DEROS Alpha* was annihilated by an elite NVA force. Outnumbered by as many as 10 to 1, Alpha suffered 76 KIAs and over 30 WIAs before noon that June 22nd. Having been fortunate to survive this affray as well, I was more than content with this alternative.



Wambi, Gene, Les & Billie in Vietnam.



And the battle rages on at Hill 875.

Unfortunately, because of my ongoing recent knee surgery limitations, we could only view the *Slopes* from the banks of the nearby PoKo River just off the Dak To airstrip. Perhaps, if we had employed due diligence and pre-planned appropriately, a trek to "Death Hill" would have been approved by the government.

So when I again requested that Hill 875 be part of our itinerary this time around, I received an unexpected and unequivocal affirmative:

"The luggage will be loaded onto the mini-coach and we will travel to Hill 875. For the journey to Hill 875, passengers will transfer to a four-wheel-drive vehicle. The road is narrow and subject to frequent flooding and landslides. We will stop at the base, where the famous battle took place in November 1967. If guests wish to climb the hill, the round-trip trek will take approximately 4-5 hours, and can be done only if time and weather conditions permit due to the dense jungle terrain. Lunch is included."

Well, I'll be damned...it just might happen. Reality set in. If successful, Les and I could be the first American combatants who actually fought in the battle to set foot on this hallowed ground. The enormity of this potentially historic endeavor was mind boggling.

The scheduled date (2/22/11) of our ascent fell late in our itinerary and just happened to coincide with the date of the Viet Nam war's first and only mass American combat jump -- again by the 173d's second battalion. A good omen? I asked myself.

(continued...)



First things first. For those dispassionate in reading about the remainder of our tour, skip to Hill 875.

We still had the front-end of our ten-day tour to complete. We would begin our excursion in the capitol city of Hanoi, with side trips to the Ho Chi Minh complex highlighted by a "muted" viewing of Ho's open mausoleum, then Tru Bach Lake, VN Army Museum, and lastly the 20th century French-constructed Maison Centrale, home to the infamous *Hoa Lo Prison*, nicknamed Hanoi Hilton by American POWs.



Hanoi Hilton, 1973

Early the next day we flew south to the ancient City of Hue located just below the former DMZ. This segment of our tour included a stimulating expedition through the Imperial Citadel compound where US marines fought 18 days in and around Hue's historic urban streets during the 1968 Tet Offensive. We visited the mausoleum of Emperor Tu Duc (The Last Emperor) and the contiguous Thien Mu Pagoda. The uncomfortable Vinh Moc tunnel system was followed by a stroll over the Hien Long Bridge River, concluding with an evening cruise down the, *not* so fittingly named Perfume River.



Wambi in Vietnam, with the spoils of war.

Our well-outfitted late model Mercedes mini-coach then headed south along Highway 1's bravura coastline paralleling the South China Sea (East Sea to Vietnamese). We made stops in and around charming (Yes, beachfront condos up the Ying Yang) Da Nang, Lang Co Beach (China Beach), and finally on to Hoi An City, the former MACV headquarters.

Our stay in Hoi An was highlighted by an evening of the worst karaoke performances imaginable. We departed Hoi An early the next morning. After five grueling hours of driving on the still infamous Highway 14 (Ho Chi Minh Trail), we finally reached Kontum Province and Dak To. That same day we visited several former US military installations as well as the South's largest Catholic wooden church, and its attached orphanage. Many of the staff and students remembered us from our visit in 2008. The children (ages 6 months to 18 years) genuinely appreciated our presence, and our modest donation of cash and clothing. (Special thanks to Billie Fuller).

For the sake of expedience, I've chosen not to expand further on these venues within this report. You're welcome to view photos and videos on my Facebook site. I don't think you have to be a FB member to access them. I also will make available an HD video that I'll gladly share upon request.

Hill 875

2/22/11



View from the summit of Hill 875.

We loaded into the van at 0730 hrs. We'd talked incessantly about the *Hill* for months leading up to this day, and now the day was at hand. Myself, Les Fuller and his wife Billie, and Gene Counselman (A/1/503) had mentally and physically prepared for this day. So we thought.

(continued...)





173 airborne assault on hill 875.

We'd viewed copious topography gleaned from internet sites, and even brought along an army surplus compass, as well as a state-of-the-art GPS. Nonetheless, as we were about to transfer to the four-wheeler, there arose varied and sundry questions as to whether we were actually at the Hill 875 site? Three-hundred and sixty degrees of like hills to choose from.

Doubts unpredictably emerged. The maps, in particular, just didn't seem to co-ordinate as expected. Nguyen Vinh, our indigenous Bahnar guide, insisted that indeed the mountain some three kilometers due North of where we stood, was without question, Hill 875.

On several occasions over the past three years, he accompanied an assortment of American vets to the base, but poor weather conditions prevented them from reaching the top. He'd also guided several government-sanctioned expeditions via helicopter, but the terrain was too dangerous to land. To the best of his knowledge, we would be the first Americans to accomplish this feat.



Sky Soldier doing his thing during battle at Hill 875.

Our research indicated several trails within close proximity of the *Hill*. There was a nearby negligible side road, but how close it came to the apex of 875 was anybody's guess. The four-wheeler began the first leg of our journey at the base of the narrowest of clay roads imaginable. It soon became apparent that if there were any other vehicles concurrently descending this same access road, a Mexican Standoff was inevitable.

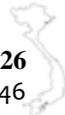
Slowly we elevated the *Hill* overlooking some of the most luscious terrain known to man. Anything can grow on this soil with minimal maintenance. Plant – cultivate - harvest. Simple but so true. As the *Hill's* zenith drew nearer, we wondered aloud how soon it would be before we had to un-ass the Kia and initiate the "hump phase." My mind inexplicably conjured up serious doubts about being physically capable of succeeding. My knees were wrought with arthritis, and the extra pounds I'd put on since my Mother's death last spring were sure to be a monumental hindrance. I dredged for more excuses - the weather in the North was cool and dank. Now inland and farther south, would the all too familiar hot and humid weather prove too daunting for me? Pretext be damned! *I will drive on!*



875. We gotcha buddy.

The surrounding mountain ranges of both Cambodia to the west, and Laos northwest became more discernible the higher we climbed. Then, without notice, we were there! The pinnacle. Our journey had ended. The road took us directly to the *Hill's* summit. No, not where 2nd and 4th Battalions or even the 4th Division contingent had dug-in that fateful November, but within the 'enemies' realm.

(continued....)





875. Hang on brother. Help is coming.

I immediately ran some 15 or so meters and urinated. Not to desecrate nor consecrate this hallowed ground -- I drank a full liter of water on the ride up, and my bladder just took charge.

Les and I simultaneously determined that something just didn't look right. I remembered distinctly the ravage wreaked at the time. The NVA's entire laager was zapped totally of any flora or fauna between 1/19 and 11/23, the day we took the *Hill*. Days of steady bombardments from nearby firebases, along with strategic air strikes laid waste to this non-descript piece of earth. Every tree, bush, bamboo cluster, and blade of elephant grass was destroyed. No species of plant or animal survived this obliteration. Yet before our eyes lay thousands of precisely planted pine trees rimming not only the *Hill's* outer slopes, but the adjoining hills' peak-to-peak as far as the eye could see.

Of course we didn't expect things to look so easily recognizable, but this sight took a moment or two to ponder. After gathering our thoughts, we individually proceeded to reconnoiter the expanse. I quickly came upon overgrown enemy trenches and holes that were

obviously, at one time, one-man gun positions. We chose not to meander too close to the berm for the down slopes still appeared deceptively steep, and probably just as perfidious as they were in 1967. The irony of dying due to stupidity didn't make good sense.

I walked a reduced perimeter with the video camera. I stood and attempted to mentally transport myself to this same place some 43 years past. So many "brothers" I'd lost. Even today, it's hard to accept so many lives sacrificed for so little. I became eerily unnerved, and decided my mental well being would be best served once off this mound of dirt. I'd relived the time all too often over the years and enigmatically wanted off and out of there sooner than later.

Our guide voluntarily answered some of our lingering queries about the *lay of the land*. A dozen or so years prior, this particularly rich land region was designated by the government as an ideal location to start the "Reforestation of Viet Nam."

(continued....)





No place to land on Hill 875.

It contained some the most idyllic soil, water, and weather conditions for such a prodigious project. Their defiance over the years in forbidding outsiders access to this particular region was not because of their concern regarding the hazard of unexploded ordnance as most had speculated. They'd long since "cleared" the area of such peril. This communistic government's reason for not allowing entry was purely capitalistically economical -- a paper mill was built, and these trees would supply premium pulp for years to come -- why let the general public have easy access and possibly hinder their progress and profit.

After another 15 minutes of reflection (and several sandwich baggies full of rich souvenir red clay) we headed toward Hill 882 -- two thousand meters due north. Gene's company (A/1/503) was also engaged with a formidable VC force at the same time as 875, and our maps indicated a strong possibility of fulfilling his dream as well. We got within 150 meters of his goal, when "official types" shooed us away. Something was off-limits to our purview. No reason given. We chose prudence over valor and descended at a deliberate, but casual pace.

As soon as we began our descent, I thought perhaps I had not demonstrated fitting reverence towards this momentous point in time. I came to the realization that no amount of introspection would ever be adequate at that moment. As time passes, I'm certain a host of salient feelings of this incredible journey will continue to resonate in our hearts and minds for years to come.

For those readers who may now consider undertaking a comparable journey -- I suggest you make it sooner than later. Who knows what Viet Nam's fickle regime has in store for the *Hill's* future? Our quest to Hills 875 and 882 could possibly have been the last for outsiders, especially American veterans.

I must also thank Robert Frazier, Counselor for Management Affairs, and his staff and colleagues at the US Embassy in Hanoi, who allowed us unprecedented access to the embassy offices for a 'state of affairs' briefing. In addition, a huge hand of gratitude to Angela Dickey, Deputy Consul General, and her staff with the US Consulate who personally acted as our guide through the grounds of the Consulate in Saigon.

The emotional scars many of us continue to bear from our Viet Nam experiences will probably remain until we leave this kingdom. However, I personally have long forgiven in my heart, mind, and soul, any malevolence I held toward the innocent populace of Viet Nam. The past will never overwhelm my future.

We dedicate this voyage to those brave souls who never made it off any *Hill*.

"Sweet is war to those who have never experienced it"



A Hill Too Far

In Wambi's report you read he mentions they also attempted to scale Hill 882 where the 1st of the 503d battled at Dak To, yet authorities kept them from reaching the summit. They did make it partway up that Hill. Ed



This photo is of Hill 882. If you look over my right shoulder you can see the Vietnamese flag. We made it to where the car is.

Gene Counselman

A/1/503d



CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Amidst Greatness

By Connie Walker

I am elated to write the Chaplain's message for the 2/503d Newsletter. I'm Chaplain Conrad (Connie) Walker, COL, Ret., and I served with the Herd from April '66-'67. I humped it with the 2nd Battalion for about six months until Chaplain (Father) Charlie Watters and Chaplain Robert Crick arrived and I was called up to serve with Brigade. What an honor to walk and serve amidst greatness, the phenomenal Sky Soldiers of the 2/503d Battalion!



The Leapin' Deacon

Psalm 33:8-9, 12 "Earth – Creatures, bow before God; world-dwellers – down on your knees!"

Here's why: He spoke and there it was, in place the moment He said so.

"Blessed is the country with God for God; Blessed are the people He put in His will."

An awesome moment, a crucial moment, a prayerful moment penetrated the entire Constitutional Convention of 1787! A most serious and hostile debate was taking place over representation, generally small states against larger states and interests. The situation became ugly and extremely hostile. The UNION was about to break up. It was that bad! Shockingly and surprisingly, something very unexpected happened as the UNION was about to split and some delegates had already packed up and departed, to include New York. Eighty-one year old honored servant of our beloved Nation, Ben Franklin, rose to speak, all sat at their seats' edge to focus and carefully LISTEN.

"In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for Divine protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of superintending Providence in our favor.... And have we now forgotten this powerful Friend? Or do we imagine we no longer need His assistance?"

I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?"

We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this. I also believe that, without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel; we shall be divided by our little, partial local interests; our projects will be confounded; and we ourselves shall become a reproach and a byword down to future ages.

And what is worse, mankind may hereafter, from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing government by human wisdom and leave it to chance, war or conquest.

I, THEREFORE, BEG LEAVE TO MOVE THAT, HENCEFORTH, PRAYERS IMPLORING THE ASSISTANCE OF HEAVEN AND ITS BLESSING ON OUR DELIBERATION BE HELD IN THIS ASSEMBLY EVERY MORNING BEFORE WE PROCEED TO BUSINESS."

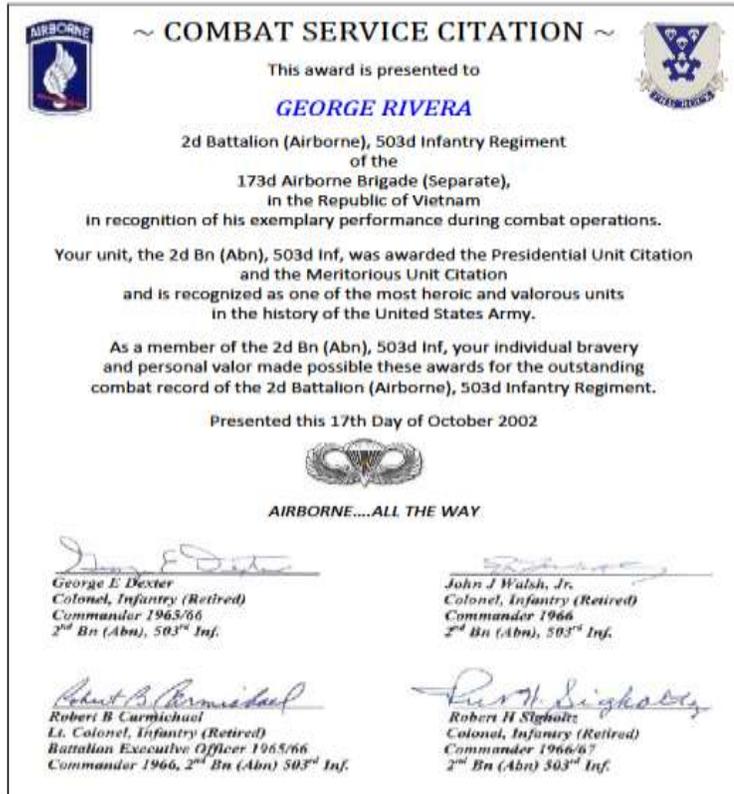
WOW! What a Proclamation! Things settled down, selfishness waned, they returned to business at hand, crafting and declaring a new Constitution and Bill of Rights under Washington's aegis. These cherished documents work beyond the Framers' fondest dreams, as do our prayers in our Almighty God, Savior Jesus, and Winsome Holy Spirit's Name. Amen



Chaplain Connie Walker
"The Leapin' Deacon"
National Chaplain Emeritus
173d Airborne Association and
Military Order of the Purple Heart



The following note from George Rivera was sent after he received his *2/503d Combat Service Citation* issued and signed by four of our former battalion commanders, Cols. Dexter, Carmichael, Walsh and Sigholtz, in recognition of and appreciation for his service in combat with the 2/503d. If you served with the 2/503d during any time in Vietnam and have not received your Combat Service Citation, please send a note to rto173d@cfl.rr.com Ed



~ A Heartfelt Note of Thanks ~

Yes, I have received the letter of gratitude and the certificate as well. Very many thanks to the officers who conceived this welcomed acknowledgment of our participation in a none too popular war. An additional special thanks to the officers who endorsed them. I am very grateful for this award.

I also would like to mention the unknown Air Force Fighter Bomber Pilots who flew so close to us that I could at times see their white helmets as they flew between the ridges below us and so close over us that I could make out their tail numbers. Many of us who were there are here because of their gallant attacks against an enemy determined to kill us. On two separate occasions I was under Spooky, Shadow and Scepter protection overnight. I want to acknowledge and thank them as well.



COL Dexter



LTC Carmichael

I am here because they were there over there guarding us all night.

When I say *I*, I speak collectively, not of myself -- I was not alone. There were many of us there trying to stay alive. I sometimes think of actions where young men performed acts of bravery and received no awards of recognition even though they deserved them. This certificate of recognition helps seal that wound. God bless all the survivors and have mercy on the departed. I am so proud to have served with them. I had never, except during the past two years, worn any military gear, but two Veterans Day's ago a close friend, Johnnie H. Williams, said to me, "*George, why don't you wear your colors? Are you ashamed of the your service?*" I said, no, but secretly I was.

I have a friend, Johnny Santiago, who is a vendor of military paraphernalia who gave me a 173d cap to wear. Everywhere I go people recognize the The Herd. Two years ago during Fleet Week in New York City, I was aboard a guided missile cruiser just wandering around. A young soldier came up to me and said, "*Sir, thank you for service. You have been a great inspiration to us all. The 173d is still recognized as the top frontline unit in the Army.*"

I almost cried right there, but I saved it for home. Then I cried. It was the first time that anyone had said anything like that to me -- it has been repeated very often.

People know who we were, and respect who we are. I am very proud to have served with such a fine group of officers and men under such austere conditions, and prevailed. Thank you Lord.

And, an Airborne Thanks to Colonel George Dexter, Colonel Bob Carmichael and Colonel Walsh for your leadership and support during a difficult period in all of our lives. A spiritual thanks and gratitude as well to Colonel Sigholtz and Colonel William B. (Wild Bill) Hornish and all those who have gone before us. I must mention that as I was an artillery observer, I was rotated between 2/503d Companies. I wish to acknowledge the officers and men of all the companies of the Second Battalion for having helped as many as they did get home. All the Way Sirs!

George L. Rivera
2/503d Artillery Observer
E/2/503d Recon (Wildcats)



COL Walsh



COL Sigholtz



CHALLENGE COIN RULES

(173d Coin Check)

Note: A "Coin Check" consists of a Challenge and a Response.

1. RULES:

A. The challenge is initiated by drawing your coin, holding it in the air by whatever means possible and state, scream, shout or otherwise verbally acknowledge that you are initiating a coin check. Another, but less vocal method is to firmly place it on the bar, table, or floor (this should produce an audible noise which can be easily heard by those being challenged, but try not to leave a permanent imprint on the bar top). If you accidentally drop your coin and it makes an audible sound upon impact, then you have just "accidentally" initiated a coin check. (This is called 'paying the price' for improper care of your coin).



B. The response consists of all those persons being challenged drawing their coin in a like manner.

C. If you are challenged and are unable to properly respond, you must buy a round of drinks for the challenger and the group being challenged.



D. If everyone being challenged responds in the correct manner, the challenger must buy a round of drinks for all those people they challenged.

E. Failure to buy a round is a despicable crime and will require that you turn-in your Coin to the issuing agency.

2. WHEN - WHERE:

A. Coin checks are permitted, ANYTIME, ANY PLACE.

3. EXCEPTIONS:

A. There are no exceptions to the rules. They apply to those clothed or unclothed. At the time of the challenge you are permitted one step and an arm's reach to locate your coin. If you still cannot reach it -- SORRY ABOUT THAT!



4. A MILITARY COIN IS A COIN.

5. A coin on a belt buckle is a

BELT BUCKLE (see #4 above) and does not count.

6. A coin on a key chain is a KEY CHAIN (see #4 above) and does not count.



7. A coin in a holder worn on a chain around the neck *IS* a COIN! (see #4 above).

The foregoing is used with permission of and thanks to CoinForce.com!

New Rule: Any sailor, Marine or airman in the presence of a Sky Soldier must always buy whether or not they have a coin. Try it, it might work!

[Sent in by Col. Tim Cloonan, 173d Bde Surgeon, LZ English, who was caught coinless one night at the Cocoa Beach VFW, and should be carefully read by Cowboy chopper pilot Tony Geishauser, another woeful coinless victim]



~ Correction ~

In last month's issue of our Newsletter (Page 23), we stated this Saber captured on Corregidor by 503rd trooper Chuck Breit, was on display in the National Infantry Museum at Fort Benning, GA...it is not. Instead, it was donated to the 503rd Assault Group in Korea in care of LTC Christopher B. Pritchett, CDR, 1/503 Inf. on 1 May 1995, for their Regimental Room.



"The God of War hates those who hesitate."

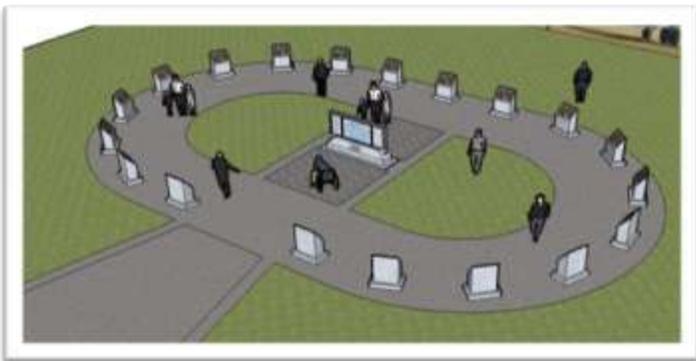
- Euripides 480-406 bc



The Airborne Battle Memorial



Presently under construction (Jan 2011) on Eubanks Field, the Memorial is just 100 feet from the Airborne Walk at the US Army Airborne School, Fort Benning. The opening ceremony is to be on April 8, 2011 during the Airborne Awards Festival. This project has been in planning since 2003, when first suggested to Don Lassen, President of the Airborne Historical Association by LTC Aidis Zunde, 1/507 PIR (Airborne School) commander. The AHA is the official sponsor of the Airborne Walk: the graduation and ceremonial area of the US Army Airborne School. The AHA is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization founded by Donald D. Lassen in 1980. It built the Airborne Walk in 1986 and has managed it ever since. It is funding this new memorial through donations and sale of personalized pavers.



The **Sloped Top** contains: bronze plaque with primary unit, date, location, operation name. The **Vertical Front** contains: all units of company level and higher that inserted by parachute or glider.

[Sent in by Ken Smith, A/D/2/503d]

Helping Mates Down Under



My Brothers:

I'm sure you are all aware of our situation with the devastating floods here in Australia; our country is underwater requiring much needed help and money. Over the years we, as a small 173d Chapter, have helped in every way we possible could to honour our 173d brothers and their families. There are so many poor souls with their entire world gone underwater and forever, even losing family relics which had been passed down through history.



A.B.

Whole families have lost everything!! My heart goes out to these people.

I would be honored if you can help in some way. I don't know how you could, but we need your help. This easily could have been me and my family, or yours. Our Australian brothers and families need all the help they can get and from all over the world.

I am personally organizing Harley rides to raise donations for flood victims. I have also enlisted the help of radio stations, and they are making regular announcements and appeals for financial aid. I did this same thing for the tragic fires of a couple of years ago.

We were able to rally about 30 bikes and raised money to help our people. If you can, you can, if not, you will always be my brothers. Thank you for any amount you are able to contribute to this worthy cause.

[Internet Banking to:](#)
Premier's Disaster Relief Appeal
BSB: 064013 Account No. 1000-6800
Swift Code: CTBAU2S

Thanks for helping! *Airborne, All The Way!!*



A.B. Garcia, HHC/2/503d, '65/'66

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\$3.3M FOR WORLD'S FIRST VIETNAM VETERAN'S EDUCATION CENTRE IN US

Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Warren Snowdon, today launched the Australian Government's commitment of \$3.3 million towards a world-first education centre in Washington DC honouring Vietnam veterans.

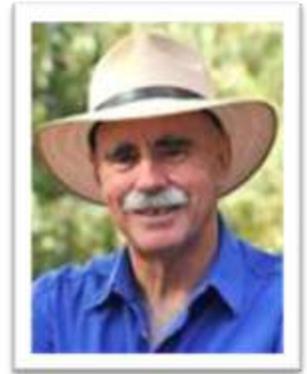
The Prime Minister said the Vietnam Veterans Education Centre will be a state of the art digital education and exhibit facility located on the Mall in Washington, dedicated to educating visitors about the Vietnam War.

The project was initially announced last year as part of a Labor election commitment.



Prime Minister Gillard

- \$1.5 million for interpretive material for permanent display and development of displays for special occasions such as Anzac Day, Long Tan Day and other commemorations.



Minister Snowdon

The Government is pleased to support this unique opportunity to honour the 60,000 Australian servicemen and women who served in the Vietnam War, more than 35 years ago.

In time the Centre will become a place of quiet pilgrimage for our veterans and their families, and for any Australian who wants to pay their respects.

To mark the announcement, three Vietnam veterans accompanied the Prime Minister and Minister Snowdon to Washington DC to visit the site of the Centre: Mrs. Terrie Ross, the Hon. Graham Edwards, and Mr. Arthur Francis, CSC, OAM.

We cannot thank our Vietnam veterans enough for their courage and sacrifice. This remarkable undertaking will be a source of pride to them, and their families, and represent our ongoing commitment to recognising their service to Australia.

The Vietnam Veterans Education Centre is expected to cost US \$80 million. While the project is currently in its infancy, as it is developed Ex Service Organisations and the Australian War memorial will be consulted.



Our participation in this project is a powerful opportunity to explain the Australian contribution to the Vietnam War to the American people and to further strengthen our long-standing relationship with the United States.

Australia's funding commitment currently comprises:

- \$1 million to ensure Australia's input in shaping the plans for the Centre including Australia's footprint within the facility;
- \$0.52 million for a 'Wall of Faces' – a photographic image display of 520 Australian War Dead from the Vietnam War alongside their US comrades;

Construction is planned to commence in 2012. For more information on the centre including a virtual tour visit www.buildthecenter.org. Artists' concepts of the Centre and images of the veterans travelling to Washington are available on the DVA Media Centre.

Veteranweb Network
raypayne@veteranweb.asn.au

[Sent in by Ray Payne, 1RAR & Ken Smith, A/D/2/503d]



BEERS AIN'T BEERS

During the northern summer of 2004 my family and I were traveling around the USA and Canada, and in July of that year I celebrated my 60th birthday while in New Jersey, staying at my brother-in-law's home.



It had always been a bit of a dream for me to see a real live professional baseball game in America. As part of my birthday gifts my nephew, Andrew, gave me and my youngest son, Alexander, who celebrated his seventh birthday the day after mine, tickets to see a ball game at Yankee Stadium.

On this particular day the Yankees played the Tampa Bay Devil Rays and we had the choice of sitting up in the stands behind home plate or down on the third base line, three rows back from the field, so naturally we chose the third base seats.

It only took a short while before Alexander was into the game as much as I was and we were having a ball. He thought it was great the way the blokes walking around threw hot dogs and popcorn to people in the seats and how the money was passed along, and I was enjoying not having to get up to go for a beer as it was brought around for the fans. However by the end of the 6th inning the beer was getting a little warm for me to enjoy and when the seventh inning stretch came, I went up to buy a cold one (couple actually) and that's where the fun started.

The lady at the beer booth was a smallish black lady, probably a bit younger than I, and she was a real joy with her good nature and pleasant attitude. I was looking at the beers on display but they all looked the same to me and I was trying to make up my mind and asked her which the best brew on sale was. She looked at me and said; "Oh, you would want a Foster's and I don't have that, I'm sorry." I answered her in mock tones of disdain: "Do you know that none of us drink that at home?" She said; "Why not, it's Australia's best beer?" to which I answered; "No it's not, we only sell it to you folks here in America, Britain and China." She asked me how this was so I told her: "Well, we don't want the rest of the world to know what are our best beers as, otherwise, they would all come taking it and we would find it hard to get a decent beer". When she asked me what were the best beers I told her, Carlton Draught in Victoria, XXXX (they can't spell beer up there) in Queensland, and Coopers in South Australia, which are all OK but not as good as my home state beer.

She then asked me what was my home state beer and I whispered to her "Tooheys," and that we have two types; a very heavy 'OLD' type which we call BLACK that we Novacastrians drink at the pubs around my home area of Newcastle and the Hunter Region, and a pale ale we call 'NEW' which is much lighter that we drink at home or at Bar-B-Qs and such.

She said; "Tooheys, I ain't never heard of that," to which I replied; "Yes, we keep it a secret so you people from the north side of the equator won't come down and drink it all on us!" Her answer was "Oh, you Aussies!" and she was still laughing as I walked away with the two beers I bought from her. But, if you offered me \$100. I couldn't tell you what they were now, I just remember that they were nice and cold and I got back to my seat to watch the game, which, incidentally, the Yankees won by about 5 runs or so.

Sky Soldiers, come on down and I will buy you one or three.

**John Arnold
1RAR**



Hey Mate, it's fun being an Aussie.

Thanks John, but I think I'll stick with Bud Lite. Ed

**"Surrender? Don't be
bloody silly.
We're Australian."**

- Anonymous



NEWS FROM...HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS - RANKING DEMOCRAT MEMBER FILNER

Contact: David Tucker at (202) 225-9756

<http://democrats.veterans.house.gov/>

Congress Must Act Now to Restore Earned Benefits to All Vietnam Veterans - Including "Blue Water" Vets!

Washington, D.C. – House Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Democratic Member Bob Filner (D-CA-51) announced the introduction of the Agent Orange Equity Act, H.R. 812, a bill that would restore equity to all Vietnam veterans that were exposed to Agent Orange.

"We owe it to our veterans to fulfill the promises made to them as a result of their service," said Ranking Democratic Member Filner.

"If, as a result of service, a veteran was exposed to Agent Orange and it has resulted in failing health, this country has a moral obligation to care for each veteran the way we promised we would. And as a country at war, we must prove that we will be there for all of our veterans, no matter when they serve. The courts have turned their backs on our veterans on this issue, but I believe this Congress should not allow our veterans to be cheated of benefits they have earned and deserve."

H.R. 812 would clarify the laws related to VA benefits provided to Vietnam War veterans suffering from the ravages of Agent Orange exposure. In order to try to gain a better military vantage point, Agent Orange, which we now know is a highly toxic cocktail of herbicide agents, was widely sprayed for defoliation and crop destruction purposes all over the Vietnam War Battlefield, as well as on borders and other areas of neighboring nations.

Currently, VA requires Vietnam veterans to prove a "foot on land" occurrence in order to qualify for the presumptions of service-connection for related illnesses afforded under current law. This issue has been the subject of much litigation and on May 8, 2008, the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals upheld VA's overly narrow interpretation and the Supreme Court later denied certiorari essentially affirming this ruling. However, Congress clearly did not intend to exclude these veterans from compensation based on arbitrary geographic line drawing by VA. Many stakeholders agree.



Bob Filner

H.R. 812 is intended to clarify the law so that Blue Water veterans and every service member awarded the Vietnam Service medal, or who otherwise deployed to land, sea or air, in the Republic of Vietnam is fully covered by the comprehensive Agent Orange laws Congress passed in 1991. *"Time is running out for these veterans,"* concluded Ranking Democratic Member Filner...

"Many are dying from their Agent Orange related diseases, uncompensated for their sacrifice. There is still a chance for America to meet its obligations to these noble veterans. This is not a partisan issue and I hope the new Chairman of the Committee will join me in working work with our colleagues to provide the earned disability benefits and health care to the thousands of veterans and survivors that earned this care for their selfless service to our nation."

[Sent in by Bob Madden, B/2/503d]



Memories of the 4/503d

When the 4/503d arrived in RVN in June of 1966, and we went out on a major operation in Aug. 1966, PFC Paul Epley, 173d PIO Photographer and Henri Huet had been "hanging around with us" in the field. Henri Huet interviewed and took photos of former French Foreign Legionnaire and Paratrooper, SP4 Ruediger Richter of HHC 4/503d and LTC Michael D. Healy's "bodyguard".

On 14 Aug. 1966, PFC Daryl R. Coreman, A/4/503d, was killed by a mortar round. PFC Epley and Henri Huet were standing next to me when they were taking the photos of "Rudy" Richter and SGT Daniel Spencer who was later KIA with the 5th SF on 12 Nov. 68. Spencer was a CPL when KIA.

Henri Huet took an award winning photo of the body, Rudy Richter and Daniel Spencer and a Far East Press Award was given to Henri Huet. Rudy Richter was looking up at the sky through the smoke and the sunlight was coming down on Rudy, boy what a photo!

The University of Southern California had a big week long session about Viet Nam many years ago, and the famous photo by Henri Huet was on display at USC, but no story about the photographer. I told one of the students overlooking the photo display that I wanted to talk to the Journalism Professor who put together the photo collection and chew him out for not giving Henri Huet the credit that was due. A few years ago, I wrote to USC and tried to see if they had stored the famous photo by Henri Huet but they could not locate the photo. I know someone in New Jersey who has a copy of the famous photo and I will try and get a copy made for me and forward you a copy.

Paul Epley's photo was entitled "the Agony of War" and was used in books, magazines and in other events. When the 4/503d shipped out from the Oakland Army Terminal on 6 June 1966, aboard the USNS General John Pope, PFC Reed Cundiff was assigned to HHC and Bob Stowell was also assigned to the 4/503d. A few months after we were in Viet Nam, the 173d Long Range Patrol Platoon was looking for some new members. SSG Kaiama, 2LT Bob Stowell, PFC Laszlo Rabel, PFC Reed Cundiff, PFC Raul Santiago and a few others from the 4/503d volunteered for the LRRP's.

Laszlo Rabel was KIA on 13 Nov. 68, and he was already a hero from Budapest, Hungary, and he helped save some young kids by helping them leave Hungary during the revolution against the Russians. He joined

the US Army to fight the communist again and he received the Medal of Honor.

In 1987, I attended the 173d reunion in Orlando, FL, and I met Sid Smith and we talked about Laszlo Rabel and I lent him some photos of Laszlo Rabel, and I'm still waiting for those photos!

Ray Ramirez
Recon/4/503d



The Agony of War, Photo by Paul Epley, Bde PIO

Note: See the March 2010, Issue 13, Page 5 of our newsletter for background story on Paul's photo. Ed

"The Year of the Pathfinder"

2011 Convention

*Sponsored by the
National Pathfinder Association*

**Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino
Las Vegas, Nevada**

July 19-23, 2011

nationalpathfinderassociation.com



4th / 503d



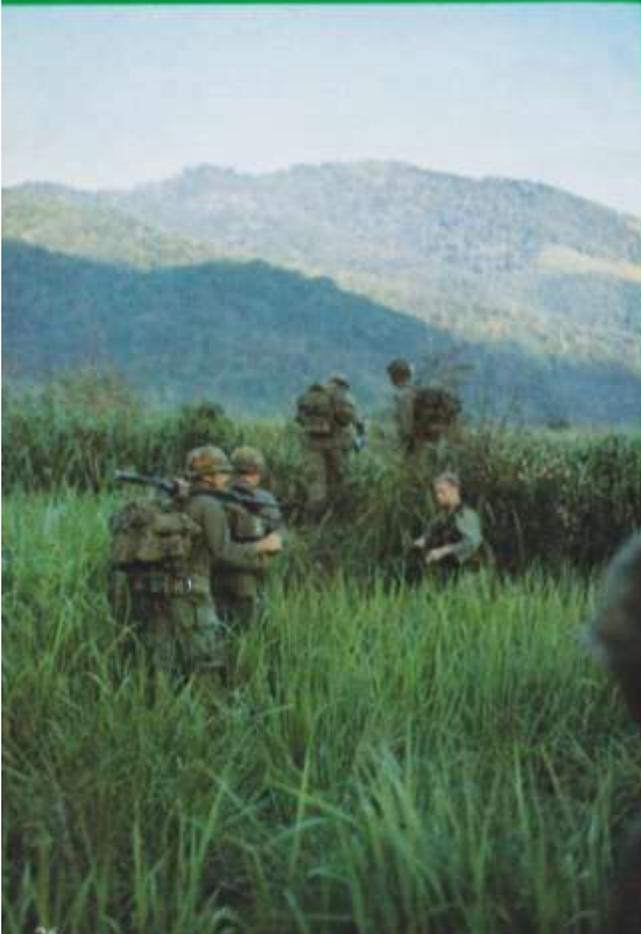
The close of 1970 brought with it an end to the concentrated pacification efforts of the 4th Battalion. On Jan. 6, 1971, the Geronimo Battalion relinquished control of LZ North English and the installation was turned over to ARVN Forces.

The battalion relocated at LZ English and the infantry companies moved into the treacherous enemy strongholds of Phu My, Hoi An, and Hoi Nhon Districts.

The troopers conducted combat and reconnaissance-in-force missions seeking to destroy the ever elusive enemy. Miles of foot trails were covered and many grueling hours under the scorching rays of a tropical sun were spent before that search paid off in large numbers.

In April 1971 the paratroopers were rewarded for their intensive searches. An element of the 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry engaged a large force of North Vietnamese Regulars. The Geronimo troopers were called upon to reinforce their sister battalion in a battle that was to span an eight day period.

The men of the Geronimo Battalion, aided by elements of the 2d Bn., 503d Inf. fought gallantly against a determined enemy. Massive air strikes and a multitude of artillery barrages served to rout many of the NVA soldiers from their fortified positions. During the action the combined forces accounted for more than 100 enemy soldiers killed as well as capturing a variety of weapons and munitions.



Sent in by Richard Pasillas, D/4/503d





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

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



The Alamo

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.

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.

Register online:

www.texasskysoldier.org/reunion2011



Terrence "Terry" L. Boggs E/3/503d

Terrence "Terry" L. Boggs, 61, of Blain Highway, Waverly, Ohio died January 1, 2011 at the V.A. Medical Center, Chillicothe, Ohio. Terry was born April 29, 1949 in Ross County, Ohio, son of the late Arnold Boggs and Esther Leann (McQuay) Boggs.



Surviving are two children, Jacob T. Boggs (Teresa Quitugua) of Washington D.C. and Adrienne Boggs Glandon (Mike) of Chillicothe, Ohio; his canine companions, LG and Obama; a brother, Robert Boggs (Mona) of Chillicothe, his significant other, Phyllis Dunsiet and close friend, Bob Tennant. I feel another person bears

mentioning in my dad's obituary - my brother, Brent Payne. Although my parents divorced almost 25 years ago, dad still regarded Brent as his stepson.



In addition to his parents, two sisters, Geraldine Park and Sandra Boggs Best, a brother, Wallace Boggs, canine companion, Patches preceded Terry in death.

Terry was a retired electrician with Chilpaco in Chillicothe, Choir Director at the Paint Grill, U.S. Army Veteran of the Vietnam Era receiving the bronze star in 1970, and a member of the Chilpaco Union. He was also a life member of 82nd Airborne Division Association and the VFW Chillicothe Post 108, a member of the Society of the 173d Airborne Brigade, Eagles



Lodge in Waverly, American Legion Post 62, Chillicothe and Associate Member of the 503rd RCT, WWII



Memorial Contributions may be made to the Wounded Warrior Project.

Rest easy Trooper.



Our Dog Handlers and Their Wonderful Partners

From the beaches of Vung Tau, to the jungles of the Iron Triangle, through the rubber plantations surrounding Da Lat and Tay Ninh, sweeping the Ia Drang Valley west of Pleiku, then north, taking the NVA held mountains above Dak To, protecting the highly vital highway 19 corridor, and finally, securing the An Lao valley and the Bon Song coastal plains. For five years the Scout Teams of the 39th always were out in front. *"We're moving out! Dogman, take the point!"*



Ran Him Ragged...

We had a scout dog with us one day. Tired that poor old boy out in the high ground -- he worked very hard. The handler (a guy named Jim from the Pittsburgh area) had to carry the dog back across his shoulders.

Jerry Sopko
D/4/503d

We Came to Love and Trust Those Dogs...

I was part of a 5 man point squad who pulled this duty everyday for our company in Dak To for five straight months leading to 875. We came to love and trust those dogs. I believe we abandoned everyone of them when we left Vietnam. The only dog I ever owned was a German Shepherd many years later. She lived for 13 years and was an incredible dog.

Roger Dick
C/2/503d

(continued....)



Doggone Dog...

This is not a 173d dog story, but happened in March '66 on Operation Silver City. 1RAR and E/17 Cav were securing the 'other side' of the river bank while the HQ and guns were on the LZ side. 2/503d moved through us. The VC had been sneaking up and setting off their claymores towards E/17 Cav. One of our small ambushes saw a bunch of these guys tippy-toeing along and opened fire. There was a ginormous explosion as the big claymore detonated. In the follow-up I came to the spot where the explosion was – 35 paces across, no leaves left, blood and mince splattered all over and up in the trees. From somewhere an ARVN dog team arrived. The dog was a good-natured pooch and frisked around. We left the company position with the intention that the dog would pick-up the trail of the survivors and take us to them. Well, we walked to the explosion site with not a sign from the dog, out for a stroll with these new friends. He walked right through the blood-spattered scene, nary a sign but happiness. Our enthusiasm started to fade. About 100 yards past the scene, suddenly the dog perked up. Tail bristled, up went the ears; the dog halted...now it was a military dog! Then it spun around, looked back at the bomb scene and indicated 'enemy!' – pointing right at Sergeant Smudger Smith, platoon sergeant! We reverted to human tracking and put the dog at the rear.

Lex McAulay
1RAR



Good Job...

The above photo is of a scout working with 2nd Platoon, B/2/503d. I think it was in 1966. It was a good team. Those guys did a good job and relied on the dog to protect them too! I took the photo below sometime in 1966.

Dave "Griff" Griffin
HHC/B/2/503d

The Wounded Handler at LZ Zulu-Zulu...

(Notes from 9/24/2002)

His name was Arron or Orin Johnson and he was medic'd, insisted his dog must go with him on the chopper but the CO was standing there and said the dog would take up too much space....needed it for the other wounded. When we were finally extracted some days later, the dog was left behind on the LZ. Never heard anymore about it or Johnson. And we never used scouts or their dogs again while I finished my tour. I don't know if it was because of that incident or the forthcoming situations just never figured their services worthwhile. I know for a fact tho that Johnson's dog kept us from walking into an ambush a couple of days before the shit hit the fan on the 16th.

Tom Wallace
A/2/503d

Damn. That's the first bit of hard evidence I've heard about the kid since that fateful day. Another little piece of the puzzle has been found....he was on the "A" Co. line. I imagine he and his dog were attached to us on Silver City (March '66), and not being a regular that may be the reason no one recalls him. If he was conscious and worried about his dog while being put on the Dustoff, it sounds like there's an excellent chance he survived.... sure hope so. Too bad about the dog, he didn't leave his master even tho' bullets were flying by his ears...dumb and loyal, kinda like PFC's and husbands! Stuff like this kinda grabs you in your gut. During the battle I crawled over to him, someone had already put a makeshift bandage on his gut wound. He was lying on his back with his head propped against a tree, his shivering dog at his feet. He couldn't speak, but just looked at me through helpless eyes. I held his hand for a moment and told him he'd be o.k. and we'd get him out of there, but I thought to myself there's no way he's going to survive. There was no way to move him during the fight and I had to leave him there. Thanks for the news on Johnson, Tom, I've thought of him off and on for over 36 years, you made my day.

Lew "Smitty" Smith
HHC/2/503d

Note: If anyone knows Johnson the dog handler please hook me up with him, thanks. rto173d@cfl.rr.com



Kennel area at Bien Hoa, August '66. 39th IPSD website.

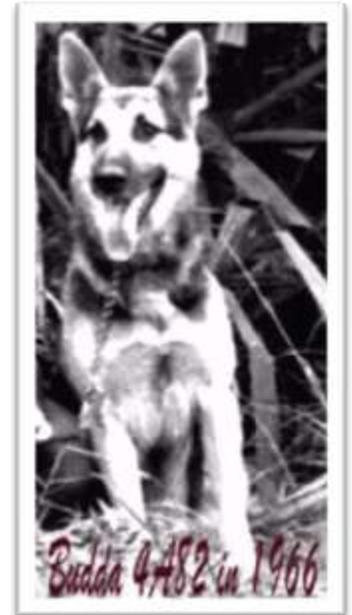


~ If Only I Could Talk ~

By: **R. "Pete" Peters**
39th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog)

My military career began in late 1965 or early 1966.

I cannot be sure of the exact date because as a civilian I had no use for calendars. My life consisted of sleeping and waking up whenever I felt like it, getting fed, and having the run of the house. I had it made and I knew it. I would gladly have gone through my whole life there with my job title of "Pet". But that was not to be. My life was to drastically change.



One day two strangers appeared at my house. I had never seen people dressed exactly alike before, and I guess that made me a little uneasy. My natural instincts were to be wary of them so I raised the hairs on my back just enough to make them aware of just who was boss here. It didn't go unnoticed, but nothing was said. After signing a bunch of papers, my owner was given a leather, basket-like contraption that I had never seen the likes of before. When he held it out and called "*Here, Budda*". I went to him eagerly to get what I thought was a new toy.

I will never forget the shock of that thing going over my face and being buckled in place. This was the first time I had ever been muzzled. To make matters worse, a silver chain was put in place over my head and my old leather collar with the brass name and address plate on it was removed and discarded.

Immediately after that I was led out the front door of the only home I had ever known, never to return. I was led to the street and placed in an aluminum box with air holes in it. If I could only talk I would have let them know that this must be some sort of mix-up or something. The box was then placed in the back of a truck, and away I went to my new life in the military.

(continued....)



A dedicated young man and his dog.

I served from Feb. 69 till Sept. 69. The battalion rotated the scout dogs in and out on several occasions. The photo above is from one of those times. I was always glad to have them with us because they could definitely alert on things we could not hear. The young man in my photo was such a nice kid. I always felt for them as they were moved around and never really had a HOME unit. On Easter day 1969, our platoon, 3-C/Lima, was the reactionary platoon to go in for a platoon that was overrun by an element of a NVA battalion. Of the platoon I know there were 100% casualties and we recovered 12 or 13 dead and one scout dog. I'll never forget that day as some of the dead had ring fingers cut off and others were shot in the head that probably would have lived from their initial wounds. I never determined if the kid in my photo was one of the KIA's. The best I could determine in this photo the handlers' name was Boyer or Boyder. He was a dedicated young man and I was glad to have him with us. I do not know but hope he was one of the few that got out that night. AATW

Robert Will
C/3/503d



I was taken to the K-9 Processing Center at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas where I met many others who had met the same fate as I. We were constantly poked, prodded, measured, and weighed during this period of our induction. The guys in the uniforms called it "physical and emotional profiling". I called it "BS"!!! They wrote in my records that I had an "attitude problem".

After a couple of weeks of this it was determined that I was physically fit, and had the required attributes to remain in the military and become a Scout Dog. I wish I could have told them my thoughts on the subject, especially about what the veterinarian did with that thermometer. *Ouch!!!* Next, it was back into the aluminum crate and off to basic training.

The flight to Georgia was uneventful and lasted only a couple of hours. Upon our arrival there we were assigned to the 39th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog). This unit had seen action in the Philippines in WWII and in Korea. Now, in March 1966, they were being reactivated for Vietnam and I was to be a part of it all. Sgt. Bob Brown was assigned to be my handler.

We had loads of conflicts over just who was to have control over whom. Eventually we came to the understanding that for the time being we would merely tolerate each other and hope for the best. After all, he was the one who fed and cared for me.

Basic training was the pits. We were green dogs being trained with and by, equally green handlers. What a circus! It was day after day of nothing but "circle training". We had a steady diet of "NO", "HEEL", "SIT", "STAY", and "DOWN". The only one I had a problem with was "NO". It just wasn't in keeping with my nature. If I could only talk I would tell them that this was all BS, and they could send me back home any time.

Then one day we didn't do that circle thing. Sgt. Brown strapped me into a leather harness and removed my choke chain. Then he took me for a walk down a narrow path through the woods. Not too bad so far. He kept saying things like "SEARCH", and "EASY". I had no idea what he was talking about at the time, and was unable to ask. Suddenly I sensed that we were not alone there. I had caught a whiff of someone else, and that made me nervous. My natural instincts took over, causing me to raise my head slightly and smell into the wind to detect whoever was there. My ears perked up and rotated forward to detect any sound that might help

me pinpoint this person. As I was unsure of his intent, my muscles tensed and the hairs on my back stood up. Sgt. Brown quickly moved forward, kneeling just behind me and with both arms outstretched pointed in the same direction that I was looking.

He began patting my shoulder and said "*Attaboy Budda, attaboy*". Then we advanced upwind and suddenly somebody burst from the bushes and ran away. We both gave chase, but I guess Sgt. Brown was a bit slower than me because I couldn't quite catch up with the decoy because the leash restrained me.



If I could talk I would have said "*Damn, this is FUN*". But all I could do was bark and jump around. We did this a few more times and it finally sank into my hard head that this was what we were supposed to do. Hey, this is easy. And the more we did it the easier it was. I was having fun, and suddenly Army life didn't seem too bad.

This all went on until July of 1966. Then one day as we were taken out in the morning we saw a line of those aluminum crates again. There were 27 crates in all, one for each of us. I knew we would be traveling again. I had no idea that I had a one way ticket to a combat zone.

The platoon had three 2 1/2 ton trucks, a jeep, and a utility trailer. We, in our crates, were loaded into two of the trucks. Our rations, water cans, veterinary supplies, tents, and other gear went into the trailer. The remaining deuce and a half was for all of our handlers and their duffel bags. We set out from Fort Benning bound for Warner Robins Air Force Base near Macon, Georgia. The 80 mile convoy trip was hot in those darned crates. If I could talk I sure would have told them a thing or two. I was really tired of this crate business! But we all thought we would be out of them now that we were here. **WRONG!**

Our little convoy split into two groups and they drove right onto the flight line and right up the rear ramps on the two C-141 Starlifters that were waiting there for us. As soon as everything was chained down and secure, we took off. This was a far longer trip than any of us had expected. After a 2 hour refueling stop in Alaska and another in Japan, we finally landed at Tan Son Nhut airbase in Vietnam after 27 hours. Damn, did those planes ever stink by then!

(continued...)



Our arrival date was July 26, 1966. We stayed there at "tent city B" for a couple of days and then our orders came down. We were being assigned to the 173d Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa. When we got there, our area was just a clearing in the woods, just inside the perimeter. The squad tents went up for our handlers, and we were staked out next to our crates. Construction of my new home was started almost immediately. We were attached to the Engineer company and they had the materials, equipment, and know-how to build my kennels and the hooches for the men. Items that we couldn't get through normal channels were gotten either by trading out some extra dog food, or by a "midnight requisition". I think that was how the emergency fire pump appeared behind the kennels one morning. It was just the thing for washing down our runs each day. A little over-kill though.

My first combat mission was during Operation Toledo in August, 1966. When we returned to the kennels after the 28 day operation where all of the handlers were awarded their Combat Infantryman Badges. Although we dogs were not eligible for military awards or decorations, many of our handlers passed them along to us in appreciation of a job well done.

There was little rest for us at the kennels. Dogs needed to be worked on a daily basis to maintain their sharpness and physical conditioning. New training was initiated to pass on what was learned during the previous missions.

There was a 30 acre area adjacent to the kennel area that was all woods and a stream. This made an excellent training area to run our practice patrols. We got some deactivated VC mines and "potato masher" grenades from the EOD team to help us. They were either buried in a pathway or rigged with tripwires attached to a rat trap for us to detect. Probably due to this continual training between missions, no scout teams from the 39th were injured by booby traps during my first year in country. Many were detected though.

My life became a whirlwind of missions. Brownie (as I now referred to Sgt. Brown) and I had become inseparable buddies. We each trusted each other completely. That bond was our means of survival. We made it through Operations Sioux City in Xom Cat, Attleboro in Minh Than, Waco around Bien Hoa, Cedar Falls in the Iron Triangle, Big Springs in war zone D, and Junction City in war zone C near Tay Ninh. I felt

honored in March of 1967 when Brownie and I were selected for a very special secret mission. Out of all the Scout Teams in country, we had been selected to go TDY with the 5th Special Forces Group and be attached to one of their A Teams. I liked to think we were chosen due to my skills and temperament, but I guess Brownie's security clearance level may have helped a little. I never told anyone where we went or what we did. Hey, I couldn't talk anyway!

After returning to our kennel at Bien Hoa I got the shock of my life. Brownie would be going home in July when his DEROS date was up. After all we had been through together the team was being broken up. My handler for the past 15 months was now under direct orders to stay away and have no further contact with me. They said it was to prepare me to accept Brownie's replacement.

Since we had all come over as a unit at one time, all of the other dogs were in the same position. How could the military screw us dogs like that?

Our tour of duty had changed into a life sentence. My old "attitude problem" returned. From here on I would do my job, but I didn't have to like it or be nice to anybody. It's probably good that I couldn't talk then. Article 15 for sure. But I knew that they had to feed and water me, and since we had no rank or pay that could be taken away, I really didn't give a damn.



IPSD Scout Dog Platoon, November 1966. From left to right, standing: Mike Medlen, Bob Halbrook, Pete Peters, Bruce Hartman, Carl Dobbins, Bob Payne, John Kregel, Mike Voorhees, Wayne McLeister, Duane Simpson and Dennis DeWindt. Kneeling: William Powell, Jim Rade, Kenneth Crouse, Bob Brown, Gerry Mortensen, Vaughn Payne, Rich Cortez, Joe McNally and Clyde Pyatt. Not present is Melvin Cobb who was WIA two weeks earlier.

(continued....)



My next handler was an OK kind of guy, as were all of those that followed. One, Rick Hovis, even gave up his platoon clerk job to become my handler! We all worked hard, but the personal chemistry just wasn't the same. Brownie would be a part of me forever.

The summer and fall of 1967 were especially rough. The 173d was moving north into II Corps to intercept the NVA that were coming in from Laos and massing in the central highlands. I worked in Pleiku Province, sweeping the Ia Drang Valley. From there we moved farther north into Kontum Province. It was here in the hills above Dak To that we were in the middle of some of the most vicious fighting of the war. Many of my friends and their handlers became casualties there. I still had my attitude problem, and the hand to hand fighting had shown me just what I was really capable of doing to whoever I felt was an enemy.

The entire Brigade was now set up at An Khe and a break in action was what we all needed. I was just getting used to kennel life when the Tet Offensive began. The remainder of 1968 and '69 was split between patrolling near Highway 19, the main artery into the western sector of the highlands, and then going east to the coastal plains at Bong Son.

Next we were back in our crates again. The Brigade was moving again. This time to a place called LZ English, located just north of Bong Son. We all hated those crates. It seemed that each time we were moved in them, our whole world sort of fell apart. Everything was always completely different when we got where we were going. Dogs prefer familiar places, faces, and routines. I was tired of all the changes, and my attitude got worse.

Long days on point left me tired that night and stiff the next morning. I was grumpy and the platoon all knew it. It was determined that it was time for me to retire. It was unofficial of course, but I was not assigned to another handler, therefore I had no more missions. Life was easy around the Kennel area. I had regular meals and spent much of the day sleeping in the shade. The platoon Sergeant, SFC Kelly, took a liking to me and would take me out for walks and some exercise. I only bit him once. After all, I still had an image to maintain. I was a seasoned veteran and a survivor. I felt I deserved the praise I got.

When handler Don Bradley went up for the 173d Airborne Brigade's coveted "Sky Soldier of the Month" award, he was asked which of the dogs was most famous. Without hesitation he answered "with such a long list of accomplishments, plus many confirmed enemy kills, that could only be Budda". But by now I

was a little overweight and turning slightly gray. It didn't worry me though. Most of the handlers would be in similar shape by the time they retire.

Then one day in July of 1971, I noticed a different mood around the kennels. Many of the other dogs were being put into their crates and loaded into a truck. I eagerly followed because I was tired of Camp English. Since most of the handlers had left we might even be going home. That would be great. We deserved a break after all we had done.

It wasn't a very long trip. We were taken to a nearby Air Base and there were many dogs there from all over the country. There were Scouts, Trackers, and Sentry dogs all together here. I guess we really are being sent back home! Maybe they will ship me to Brownie. I wonder if he thinks about me as often as I have thought of him.

Does he remember all we went through together? I am so excited that I can hardly stand still.

In the Veterinary Clinic I can't understand why everyone is crying. Just give me my DEROS shots and get me on that plane and I'll finally be getting out of here. I can hardly wait! In all of my excitement I barely felt the needle. I was used to them anyway. It feels just like the tranquilizer shot that we got before we left on the plane ride over here back in July of '66. I feel a little sleepy all of a sudden. I think I'll lie

down and rest right here. It seems to be getting darker. Will Brownie remember me? I feel numb! I think I'll rest for awhile and think of what it will be like to be home.

I'm tired. I - ZZZ ZZZ Z Z Z.....

NOTE - Robert Brown went on to retire from the Army and is presently residing in New Jersey with his civilian canines. He has become an accomplished artist.

Budda (4A82) bravely served his country for the "human equivalent" of over 40 years. During his time in Vietnam he had eight handlers, all of whom survived to return home. He was wounded five times. He had five confirmed enemy kills in close combat. He protected and saved the lives of uncountable numbers of American servicemen. For all of this, the military leadership awarded him the death penalty.

