

It was Student, a World War I pilot, who infused his men with an intense fighting esprit – an elan that would come to be known in all nations as the “paratrooper spirit”.

On May 11, 1940, the keenly honed *Wehrmacht* airborne arm finally struck with a mixture of fury and surgeon’s skill. The *Falschirm-Pioniere Abteilung* (Parachute Engineer Unit), led by *Oberleutnant* Rudolf Witzig, swooped down by glider on top of Belgium’s Fort Emael, reputed to be the strongest fort in the world. The nine-fort complex was fully manned by Belgian troops, but the Germans, blasting away with satchel charges, captured the stronghold at a cost of only six dead and 15 wounded.

At the same time, 30 gliders carrying 350 Germans crash-landed around three vital bridges over the Meuse River, which were soon captured, and 500 paratroopers bailed out over Holland to seize key airports and bridges.

These spearhead operations permitted German panzers to dash through the Low Countries and into France, where the French Army – thought to have been the world’s finest – was smashed in only six weeks. (Adolf Hitler and his generals had introduced *Blitzkrieg* (lightning war) to the world).

During the 1930s, America’s military brass in Washington, reflecting the popular “keep-out-of-other-nation’s-quarrels” mood of the time, had yawned while Russia and Germany were developing airborne capabilities. “Window dressing” was the general opinion of the new paratroop units in the War Department.

However, there were mavericks with a different view lower down in the U.S. chain of command. These junior officers were mostly disciples of Gen. Billy Mitchell, who had held the nonsensical notion that large bodies of soldiers could be parachuted behind enemy lines. During mid-1930s maneuvers near Fort DuPont, Delaware, Army Air Corps Capt. George C. Kenney had the audacity to violate the static-warfare tactics still in vogue with most U.S. Army brass. He air landed an infantry platoon behind “enemy” lines. There were screams of “foul!”

It was not until the fall of 1939, when Adolf Hitler’s war machine had gobbled up Poland and was gone to war with Great Britain and France, that the dozing United States Army brass began to stir. Early in January 1940, Maj. Gen. George A. Lynch, chief of infantry, appointed Maj. William C. Lee to experiment with the

transport of foot soldiers by air. A native of Dunn, North Carolina, the 43-year-old Bill Lee had seen combat in World War I as a platoon leader and company commander. For the next four years, Lee would drive himself remorselessly in developing airborne doctrine, in creating equipment, and in activating new units. He would become known as the *Father of American Airborne*.

Despite Lee’s hammering at the War Department for improved parachutes, a few aircraft, and a handful of men to carry out test experiments, the Army dragged its feet until the stunning success of Gen. Kurt Student’s airborne troops in Belgium and Holland in May of 1940 shocked the American high command. A “Parachute Test Platoon” was finally authorized.



Almost at once, a bitter squabble erupted between regular Army and Army Air Corps leaders over who would control this “glamour” group. The men would be air grenadiers, so they should be commanded by the air corps, the air generals declared. “Nonsense,” exclaimed the chief of infantry; the parachutists would be infantry soldiers and should be directed by the Army Infantry Board. (Seldom had so many argued so vehemently over so few).

The Infantry Board at Fort Benning, Georgia, prevailed, however.

At the morning formation of June 26, 1940, soldiers of the Infantry School’s 29th Infantry “Demonstration” Regiment were informed of a golden opportunity to volunteer for the elite Parachute Test Platoon, which would be dedicated to exciting adventure and the creation of airborne equipment and techniques. Many eagerly signed up; others blanched at the thought of falling out of flying airplanes.

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had taken in a post movie, a standard Western shootout involving the U.S. Cavalry and the Apache chief Geronimo. Before heading back to their barracks, the four soldiers spent a couple of hours at a beer garden, and one crony needled Eberhardt that he would be too frightened before the morrow's jump to even speak. Nonsense, Eberhardt responded. What's more, he would shout "*Geronimo!*" as soon as he leaped out the door of the Douglas bomber.

WWII Demonstration Team

Two hundred men volunteered for the Test Platoon, and 39 were selected. Lt. William T. Ryder, who had graduated from West Point four years earlier, was appointed platoon leader, with Lt. James A. Bassett as his second-in-command. Thus was established the paratroop concept "every man a volunteer."

Civilian Conservation Corps cleared an area to the south of Benning's Lawson Field to serve as a landing zone for the Test Platoon (and thousands of paratroopers who would follow). Almost at once, this patch of Georgia landscape was given the name Cactus Field; it seemed as though every prickled plant in Georgia had been brought in to welcome descending paratroopers.

On August 16, 1940, Lt. Bill Ryder made the inaugural jump, from a Douglas B-18 bomber, thus gaining enduring fame as "American's first paratrooper." The enlisted man who, by a drawing, was to leap out behind Ryder, "froze" in the door of the bomber, so the next man, Pvt. William "Red" King, leaped out, thereby becoming the nation's "first enlisted paratrooper."

On the night before the Test Platoon's first mass jump, tall, lanky Pvt. Aubrey Eberhardt and three comrades



LT Bill Ryder
"Airborne No. 1"

Eberhardt kept his pledge, and other Test Platoon men bailed out with Indian war whoops and shouts of "*Geronimo!*"

In the future, Test Platoon men called out the Apache chief's name on each practice jump, and later newly formed parachute units would adopt the yell. "*Geronimo!*" became the battle cry of American paratroopers, and with a heavy media focus on the yell, much of the civilian population associated the cry "*Geronimo!*" with the nation's paratroopers.

Two months after the Parachute Test Platoon was formed, the U.S. Army's first airborne tactical unit was activated – the 501st Parachute Infantry Battalion. Leader of this pioneer formation was Maj. William M. Miley, who for two years had served as Benning's athletic officer. At 42 years of age, "Bud" Miley was old for a parachute battalion commander, but he had been a star gymnast at West Point, he kept himself in superb physical condition, and he would handle the rigors of being a sky soldier without difficulty.



Bud Miley

These pioneer American paratroopers were viewed by others in the army with varying degrees of resentment. Early paratrooper Lou Varrone recalled that era:

(continued....)



“Almost from the start, we sensed a bureaucratic animosity and misunderstanding of these newly incubated soldiers. Due to our distinctive deportment, jump boots, and bloused trousers, we were considered to be swaggering, cocky, overbearing, and arrogant. But these views were grossly mistaken, for the qualities of self-esteem, a strong sense of destiny, supreme confidence, arduous training, a mystical camaraderie, and the pioneering spirit of a challenging new frontier, were what we were all about. How were super-elite troops supposed to act – like we had an inferiority complex?”

Hard on the heels of the army’s airborne birth, the Marine Corps launched its paratroop program; in October 1940, the first group of “Leathernecks” assembled at the Naval Air Station, Lakehurst, New Jersey. The parachute trainees included Lt. Walker S. Osipoff, Lt. Robert C. McDonough, and 38 enlisted men. None of these eager and adventurous Marines knew anything about training paratroopers, but no one else in the Corps did, either.



Day Minse One. June 6, 1944. General Eisenhower with 101st Troopers

Back in 1927, Marine brass showed a fleeting interest in the concept of dropping soldiers behind enemy lines. At that time 12 Leathernecks had made a mass jump from a transport plane over Anacostia in Washington,

DC. Ten years later, another airborne spark flickered in the Marine Corps high command when parachutists were used in 1937 during fleet-landing exercises on islands off California. However, Corps brass considered the concept of dropping Marines behind enemy lines by parachute to be a sideshow, a carnival attraction.

Three years later, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox shared the shock of most American military leaders at the stunning success of Adolf Hitler’s airborne forces, and directed the Marines to form similar units. It was planned to train a battalion of each regiment as an air-landing force. Including a company of paratroopers for each Marine division to “conduct raids, reconnaissance, and other independent operations.”

Lakehurst was a Navy facility, so after several classes of Marine paratroopers graduated, the Corps set up its own parachute schools at Camp Gillespie, California, and New River, North Carolina. By early 1941, tiny cadres for Leatherneck companies and battalions had been formed.

On July 29, 1941, Marine Capt. Robert A Williams and what the newspapers would describe as “40 heavily armed young gentlemen of the Marine Corps almost disrupted the activities of 17,000 soldiers of the U.S. Army’s new Caroline County maneuver area near Fredericksburg, Virginia. Williams, who had joined the paratroopers after a stint as aide-de-camp to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and his high-spirited men had hatched a plot to stage a surprise parachute attack on the unknowing Army troops.

At the appointed hour, a Douglas transport plane, marked with Marine Corps’ globe-and-anchor insignia, roared over the Nottingham airport, dead in the center of the Army’s maneuver area. Used as a military field, the airport was the Marine paratroopers’ objective. At 750 feet, Bob Williams jumped, followed by 10 other paratroopers. A second transport then flew over the field, 10 more Leathernecks jumped, and finally two more Douglasses appeared, and 20 other men leaped.

All of the Marine paratroops wore a uniform that had been modeled after the one used by German *Fallschirmjaeger* – knee-length overalls and a new crash helmet. Army men looked up in amazement as these “living bombs” (as the paratroopers would be described by the media covering the maneuvers) suddenly appeared in the sky.

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The unexpected touch of airborne *Blitzkrieg* created an uproar, for it was the first major employment of parachute troops in United States maneuvers. Staff cars and umpires' vehicles raced to the airport, which has been "captured" by Captain Williams and his Leathernecks. Colonels, majors, and captains scrambled from the vehicles and demanded to know what in the blankety-bank was going on. Army officers were far from happy – especially after they learned the interlopers were *Marines*!

Not to be outdone, the Army's airborne arm pulled a similar caper a few weeks later at the big Army war games in Louisiana. A force of 127 paratroopers was deposited by the Blue army behind the Red army lines. There were loud cries of "foul!" from Red army commanders, who had been caught with their map cases down. By prior agreement, all the paratroopers were to surrender if not captured within 20 hours of landing. When the time expired, more than half of the parachutists were still on the loose, slashing Red army telephone wires and generally creating havoc – a technique that would be duplicated for real in the battles that were to come.



The 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment was activated at Fort Benning, Georgia on March 2, 1942. The regiment was shipped overseas via the Panama Canal Zone where it was joined by the 501st Battalion, which then became 2nd Battalion, 503d PIR. (Photo from Jim Mullaney collection).

On December 7, 1941, Japanese bombs at Pearl Harbor sent America's pacifist leaders and unilateral disarmament "experts" scurrying for cover. The United States had literally been blasted into a global war. Along with the rest of the Army, America's airborne units began to mushroom. The Airborne Command was set up at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, with Bill Lee, now

a one-star general, as its boss. Five new parachute regiments were rapidly formed – the 503rd, 504th, 505th, 506th, and 507th.

At this point, in the late spring 1942, the War Department planned to airborne unit larger than a regiment, but that view changed in mid-August, the 82nd Motorized Division, based at sun-baked Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, was split in half and became the 82nd "All-American" Airborne Division and the 101st "Screaming Eagle" Airborne Division. Each outfit would have 8,321 men (compared with the 14,000 in a conventional ground division).

Steadily, paratroopers were gaining widespread fame among American civilians, who were curious to know what made these crazy guys tick. At a Washington press conference on paratroopers, Maj. Gen. Lesley J. McNair, commander of Army Ground Forces, remarked:

"The [the paratroopers]...are our *problem children*. They make a lot of money, and they know they're good. This makes them a little temperamental, but they're great soldiers." McNair's tone was one of thinly concealed

admiration, much like the mood of a doting father whose offspring brings home all A's for achievement on his report card but flunks deployment.

Meanwhile, around the war-torn globe, the Allies were taking a severe licking at the hands of the Japanese, Germans and Italian. In an effort to stem the tide, American Army and Marine units, many of them half-trained and lacking adequate weapons and equipment, were being rushed overseas. In early June

1942, the U.S. Army parachute battalion was shipped to England, and a day later the Marine 1st Parachute Battalion set sail for the Pacific. They were American's airborne vanguard.

Thanks to Chuck Breit, WWII 503rd PRCT trooper for providing us with this report (photos added).



US Army Suspends New Parachute Model After Soldier's Fatal Plunge

Published : Wednesday, 13 Jul 2011

(NewsCore) - The US Army has suspended the use of its new style of parachutes following the death of a soldier during a training jump, the *Fayetteville Observer* reported Wednesday.

Staff Sgt. Jamal Clay, of the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, died at Fort Bragg on June 25 when his T-11 parachute malfunctioned during a training exercise.



SSGT Clay

Fort Bragg, an army base in Fayetteville, N.C., 60 miles south of Raleigh, began using the square parachutes two years ago after tests showed they provided a more slow and stable descent than their mushroom-shaped predecessors.

According to an internal army memo, investigators found that Clay's death was due to *"potential packing, inspection, quality control and functionality problems"* with both his main and reserve parachutes. *"The observations are significant and pervasive enough to indicate potential systemic shortfalls,"* the memo said, according to the *Observer*.

Following the incident, Secretary of the Army John McHugh ordered the suspension of all use of the T-11 parachutes until a thorough safety investigation has been completed and any problems with the system have been corrected. Internal investigations into Clay's death are also being conducted, the paper said.

The accident is the first fatality with the new parachute, which was first used at Fort Bragg in 2009 after testing showed it to be safer than the traditional rounded parachutes. The T-11 chute is also designed to support the bulkier load of today's soldier, which can be up to 400 lbs. with equipment.



The T-11 parachutes are expected to take the place of the older, T-10 parachutes in about five years. The 82nd Airborne Division currently uses the T-10 model.

Courtesy of: FayObserver.com



Local D-Day paratrooper a popular veteran on return trip to Normandy

SUGARCREEK TWP., Greene County -- World War II veteran James H. "Pee Wee" Martin cannot get over the reception he received when he returned to Normandy for a six-day visit in June to sites he fought at on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and after.



Photos with German Troopers

"People over there mobbed us everywhere," Martin, 90, of Sugarcreek Twp., said. Everyone wanted his autograph and picture.

"Some of the women came up and hugged me and cried," he said. *"They were little girls back then, and said we released them and got their freedom."*

Martin, a member of the 101st Airborne Division, parachuted into Normandy over Utah Beach on D-Day, then went on to fight the Nazis in Holland and at Bastogne, the Battle of the Bulge, earning a Purple Heart and Bronze Star. His return to Normandy this June was as a representative of the 101st Airborne Division.

"I don't want anyone to view us as heroes," he said. *"We were just doing our job, what we were trained to do. We knew the risks. A hero is someone who does something out of character, like saving someone from a burning car. We may have been brave, but we're not heroes."*

Martin traveled to D-Day celebrations with Doug Barber of Bellbrook, a Centerville middle school history teacher, and two other WWII veterans and their friends and family on a trip organized by New Albany resident Mark Easton, vice president of sales for IBM.

Easton is a friend of Max Cleland, a former Georgia senator, now secretary for battlefield monuments. Cleland and President Barack Obama invited Martin and the other D-Day veterans as VIPs to the rededication of the newly repaired Point du Hoc monument above Normandy Beach. President Obama was not at the rededication, but Cleland and Sen. John Kerry were, Martin said.

Barber has been helping document Martin's WWII participation at Normandy. He said he knew WWII veterans were held in high regard by the French people, *"but I was taken aback by the outpouring of gratitude expressed when we were in Normandy."*

The two visited Paris, Omaha Beach and areas the 101st Airborne helped liberate.

While in Normandy, he met people he had corresponded with for years. Also, *"I got to meet two of the Germans, Heinrich Laufert and Gerd Schwetling, I fought against, and we're now friends,"* he said.

Like him, they were paratroopers, members of Fallschirmjager 6 (regiment), a German airborne infantry.

"There is a bond between airborne people that transcends ideology and political boundaries," Martin said. *"We can talk to each other and forget all the bad stuff. It was a wonderful trip. I enjoyed it very much. Meeting and talking with the people was the best part,"* he said.

Courtesy of Editor and Katherine Ullmer
kullmer@DaytonDailyNews.com



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Honors at the Memorial



"We're here today to live these words: 'The Fallen Will Never Be Forgotten.'" With this message, Retired Brigadier General Jim Yarbrough set the tone for the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation's *"Honors Ceremony"* conducted on 11 June at the Brigade's Memorial on the National Infantry Museum's *"Walk of Honor."*

From a warrior/commander's perspective, Jim spoke to the audience about the quality of the Sky Soldiers who served in the Brigade throughout the unit's existence, the pride that each took in serving in this great unit, and the willingness of warriors to sacrifice for each other when demanded by circumstances.



The Honors Ceremony had opened with a Sky Soldier Color Guard composed of warriors from the 198th Infantry Brigade presenting the colors to the nearly 150 participants and spectators present at the Memorial. Foundation Board Member Don Dali, the moving force behind the design and construction of the Memorial, discussed its design and symbolism, and acknowledged the many talented contractors who made the structure a reality.

The first fallen warrior to be honored at the ceremony was Clinton A. Cook, who fell on 28 April 1970 in the Republic of Vietnam. His name had been omitted from the granite panels during the initial dedication ceremony. Foundation Board Member Craig Ford silently removed the strip of cloth to reveal, 41 years after his death, the name of this fallen warrior.

His mother, Alma Cook, flew from Alaska to be present at the ceremony and was joined by her other son Bruce. When Clinton Cook fell in 1970, Alma was never made aware of the circumstances of his death. It was not until this ceremony that she met with Sky Soldiers who served with her fallen warrior, learned about his service with the Brigade, and obtained closure on this unresolved portion of her life.

Following the unveiling of Clinton Cook's name, Master of Ceremonies Bob Wolfgang, the Foundation's Director of Heraldry, directed the audience's attention to the granite panel honoring the fallen from OEF X. Foundation Board Member Floyd Riester removed the black cloth covering the names of nine Sky Soldiers who fell in Afghanistan in 2010.



On a segment of a granite panel designated for the OEF X fallen, the names of Lucas T. Beachnaw, Nicholas S. Cook, Russell F. Madden, Matthew R. Hennigan, Louis R. Fastuca, Vinson B. Adkinson III, Raymond C. Alcaraz Jr., Matthew E. George, and James A. Page were revealed. Consistent with the Foundation's policy, rank and titles are not listed on the panels because the lives of all the fallen are deemed to have been of equal value.

Following the unveiling of the OEF X fallen, the focus of attention shifted to the Memorial's granite panel containing the names of Sky Soldiers who have been awarded the Medal of Honor.

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Foundation Board Member Karen Riester removed a cloth covering the name of Salvatore A. Giunta, the fourteenth Sky Soldier so honored by the nation as Foundation Board Member Ray Ramirez read the Citation accompanying the Award of the Medal of Honor.



Although not scheduled to participate in the Honors Ceremony, SSG Giunta asked to speak to those assembled at the Memorial. In moving words, he spoke of being honored to have served with Sky Soldiers of the quality and caliber of those whose names were added to the list of the fallen, and of the sacrifices of the families who had lost their sons.

Following the presentation of a wreath by Sky Soldiers and Gold Star family representatives, the firing party rendered final honors and taps echoed across the grassy knoll on which the 173d Memorial stands.

In addition to Alma and Bruce Cook and SSG Giunta, the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation Board of Directors was honored to have in attendance Donnie and Bridget George and seven members of their extended family. Their son Matthew fell on 31 August 2010. Alma Murphy's son, Ray Alcaraz Jr., fell on the same day as Matthew George. Alma Murphy, accompanied by her husband Paul and her other Sky Soldier son, SFC Lucas Gonzalez, also honored the Foundation by their presence. Martin Madden, father of Russell Madden, along with his wife Pamela and daughter Lindsay, were also present for the Ceremony. Russell fell on 23 June 2010.



The Board of Directors of the 173d Memorial Foundation extends its thanks to the serving Sky Soldiers from the 198th Infantry Brigade and the leadership of the National Infantry Museum who provided support for this Honors ceremony.

Ken Smith, COL Inf. (Ret)
A/D/HHC/2/503d



INCOMING!!



Mark Carter, 173d LRRP extraordinaire

Once again the 2/503 Newsletter turns out to be more than a simple newsletter. Our guys are compiling good history. I read the *Battle of the Slopes* issue last week. I spent a couple of days more or less stunned. This month's issue (July) was not any less compelling. This is priceless testimony from the mouths of the men who were there.

I have some info about the RRU's that you may find interesting. These guys were for the most part Army Security Agency troops. They performed DF missions, as well as COMSEC missions. During the early to mid-60's the Dept. of Defense claimed that no ASA troops were in Vietnam....a joke among the classes of ditty boppers at Fort Devens who were in training.

The order of battle in those days put the ASA (and NSG, AFFSS) under Department of Defense; these units were all formed as collections services for the NSA—COMINT, ELINT, and so on. In the mid 70's, they were dissolved, and INCSOM was formed to handle these tasks. Some of the MOS's were attached directly to brigades, and others were sent into the bowels of the puzzle palace at Fort Meade.

During the Vietnam war, some ASA troops were part of SOG operations, and some of the AFSS units operated the Lima stations, set up in Laos and Cambodia, which helped guide air strikes in North Vietnam.

I was in the ASA from '68-'71, as a super-REMF in northern Japan. I was a telemetry signals analyst. Let me know if you'd like to have a few PDFs about this stuff.

Mark Carter
173d LRRP & E 17th

~ The Wall That Heals ~

Hello-

My name is Steve Quesinberry and I am the History chair at Newnan High School just south of Atlanta. I also teach an elective class about the Vietnam War and the 1960's. I am involved in bringing the VVMF "Wall that Heals" to Newnan for the first time this October. As part of that effort, I was asked to gather information on each of the young men from our county (Coweta) whose name is on that wall. Total number is 23.

I have been working on this project for the last 6 months. The reason that I am writing you is because one of the men was KIA on Hill 875 with the 173d AB. I am hoping that you could possibly send me in the direction of some of your comrades that might possibly know him.

His name was Thomas "Tommy" Huddleston. He was in C Company on the hill.

I would appreciate any assistance you could give me and I thank you for your service.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Steve

<http://www.cowetaschools.org/nhs/quesinberry/ssweb/index.htm>

http://cowetacova.org/Home_Page.html

Thomas Pate Huddleston
Specialist Four
C CO, 2ND BN, 503RD INFANTRY, 173RD ABN
BDE, USARV
Army of the United States
Newnan, Georgia
September 04, 1946 to
November 19, 1967
THOMAS P HUDDLESTON is on the Wall at
Panel 30E Line 027



THE SON OF A SHARECROPPER

~ ROY P. BENAVIDEZ ~

Rank and organization: Master Sergeant, Detachment

B-56, 5th Special Forces Group, Republic of Vietnam

Place and date: West of Loc Ninh on May 2, 1968

Entered service at: Houston, Texas June 1955

Born: August 5, 1935, DeWitt County, Cuero, Texas.

Citation:

Army Master Sgt. Roy P. Benavidez (center) is flanked by United States Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger (left) and President Ronald Reagan at his Medal of Honor presentation ceremony in 1981.

Master Sergeant (then Staff Sergeant) Roy P. Benavidez United States Army, who distinguished himself by a series of daring and extremely valorous actions on 2 May 1968 while assigned to Detachment B56, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, Republic of Vietnam. On the morning of 2 May 1968, a 12-man Special Forces Reconnaissance Team was inserted by helicopters in a dense jungle area west of Loc Ninh, Vietnam to gather intelligence information about confirmed large-scale enemy activity. This area was controlled and routinely patrolled by the North Vietnamese Army. After a short period of time on the ground, the team met heavy enemy resistance, and requested emergency extraction. Three helicopters attempted extraction, but were unable to land due to intense enemy small arms and anti-aircraft fire. Sergeant Benavidez was at the Forward Operating Base in Loc Ninh monitoring the operation by radio when these helicopters returned to off-load wounded crewmembers and to assess aircraft damage. Sergeant Benavidez voluntarily boarded a returning aircraft to assist in another extraction attempt. Realizing that all the team members were either dead or wounded and unable to move to the pickup zone, he directed the aircraft to a nearby clearing where he jumped from the hovering helicopter, and ran approximately 75 meters under withering small arms fire to the crippled team. Prior to reaching the team's position he was wounded in his right leg, face, and head. Despite these painful injuries, he took charge, repositioning the team members and directing their fire to facilitate the landing of an extraction aircraft, and the loading of wounded and dead team members. He then threw smoke canisters to direct the aircraft to the team's position. Despite his severe wounds and under intense enemy fire, he carried and dragged half of the wounded team members to the awaiting aircraft. He then provided protective fire by

running alongside the aircraft as it moved to pick up the remaining team members. As the enemy's fire intensified, he hurried to recover the body and classified documents on the dead team leader. When he reached the leader's body, Sergeant Benavidez was severely wounded by small arms fire in the abdomen and grenade fragments in his back. At nearly the same moment, the aircraft pilot was mortally wounded, and his helicopter crashed. Although in extremely critical condition due to his multiple wounds, Sergeant Benavidez secured the classified documents and



made his way back to the wreckage, where he aided the wounded out of the overturned aircraft, and gathered the stunned survivors into a defensive perimeter. Under increasing enemy automatic weapons and grenade fire, he moved around the perimeter distributing water and ammunition to his weary men, re-instilling in them a will to live and fight. Facing a buildup of enemy opposition with a beleaguered team, Sergeant Benavidez mustered his strength, began calling in tactical air strikes and directed the fire from supporting gunships to suppress the enemy's fire and so permit another extraction attempt. He was

wounded again in his thigh by small arms fire while administering first aid to a wounded team member just before another extraction helicopter was able to land. His indomitable spirit kept him going as he began to ferry his comrades to the craft. On his second trip with the wounded, he was clubbed with additional wounds to his head and arms before killing his adversary. He then continued under devastating fire to carry the wounded to the helicopter. Upon reaching the aircraft, he spotted and killed two enemy soldiers who were rushing the craft from an angle that prevented the aircraft door gunner from firing upon them. With little strength remaining, he made one last trip to the perimeter to ensure that all classified material had been collected or destroyed, and to bring in the remaining wounded. Only then, in extremely serious condition from numerous wounds and loss of blood, did he allow himself to be pulled into the extraction aircraft. Sergeant Benavidez' gallant choice to join voluntarily his comrades who were in critical straits, to expose himself constantly to withering enemy fire, and his refusal to be stopped despite numerous severe wounds, saved the lives of at least eight men. His fearless personal leadership, tenacious devotion to duty, and extremely valorous actions in the face of overwhelming odds were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service, and reflect the utmost credit on him and the United States Army.

(Roy's story continues....)



Roy P. Benavidez, Recipient Of Medal of Honor, Dies at 63

By RICHARD GOLDSTEIN,
The New York Times



Roy P. Benavidez, a former Green Beret sergeant who received the Medal of Honor from President Ronald Reagan for heroism while wounded in the Vietnam War, then fought to keep the Government from cutting off his disability payments, died on Sunday at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio. He was 63.

Mr. Benavidez, who lived in El Campo, Tex., suffered respiratory failure, the hospital said. His right leg was amputated in October because of complications of diabetes.

On the morning of May 2, 1968, Mr. Benavidez, a staff sergeant with the Army's Special Forces, the Green Berets, heard the cry "get us out of here" over his unit's radio while at his base in Loc Ninh, South Vietnam. He also heard "so much shooting, it sounded like a popcorn machine."

The call for aid came from a 12-man Special Forces team -- 3 Green Berets and 9 Montagnard tribesmen -- that had been ambushed by North Vietnamese troops at a jungle site a few miles inside Cambodia.

Sergeant Benavidez jumped aboard an evacuation helicopter that flew to the scene. "When I got on that copter, little did I know we were going to spend six hours in hell," he later recalled.

(After the fight)

When he arrived at Loc Ninh, Sergeant Benavidez was unable to move or speak. Just as he was about to be placed into a body bag, he spit into a doctor's face to signal that he was still alive and was evacuated for surgery in Saigon.

Sergeant Benavidez was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross in 1968, but a subsequent recommendation from his commanding officer that he receive the Medal of Honor, the military's highest award for valor, could not be approved until a witness confirmed his deeds.

That happened in 1980, when Brian O'Connor, the Green Beret who had radioed the frantic message seeking evacuation, was found in the Fiji Islands. Mr. O'Connor told how Mr. Benavidez had rescued eight members of his patrol despite being wounded repeatedly.

President Reagan presented the Medal of Honor to Mr. Benavidez at the Pentagon on Feb. 24, 1981.

Shortly before Memorial Day 1983, Mr. Benavidez came forward to say that the Social Security Administration planned to cut off disability payments he had been receiving since he retired from the Army as a master sergeant in 1976. He still had two pieces of shrapnel in his heart and a punctured lung and was in constant pain from his wounds.

The Government, as part of a cost-cutting review that had led to the termination of disability assistance to 350,000 people over the preceding two years, had decided that Mr. Benavidez could find employment.

"It seems like they want to open up your wounds and pour a little salt in," Mr. Benavidez said. "I don't like to use my Medal of Honor for political purposes or personal gain, but if they can do this to me, what will they do to all the others?"

A White House spokesman said President Reagan was "personally concerned" about Mr. Benavidez's situation, and 10 days later the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Margaret M. Heckler, said the disability reviews would become more "humane and compassionate."

(continued....)



Soon afterward, wearing his Medal of Honor, Mr. Benavidez told the House Select Committee on Aging that *"the Administration that put this medal around my neck is curtailing my benefits."*

Mr. Benavidez appealed the termination of assistance to an administrative law judge, who ruled in July 1983 that he should continue receiving payments.

When President Reagan presented Mr. Benavidez with the Medal of Honor, he asked the former sergeant to speak to young people. Mr. Benavidez did, visiting schools to stress the need for the education he never had.

Born in South Texas, the son of a sharecopper, Mr. Benavidez was orphaned as a youngster. He went to live with an uncle, but dropped out of middle school because he was needed to pick sugar beets and cotton. He joined the Army at 19, went to airborne school, then was injured by a land mine in South Vietnam in 1964. Doctors feared he would never walk again, but he recovered and became a Green Beret. He was on his second Vietnam tour when he carried out his rescue mission.

Mr. Benavidez is survived by his wife, Hilaria; a son, Noel; two daughters, Yvette Garcia and Denise Prochazka; a brother, Roger; five stepbrothers, Mike, Eugene, Frank, Nick and Juquin Benavidez; four sisters, Mary Martinez, Lupe Chavez, Helene Vallejo and Eva Campos, and three grandchildren.

Over the years, fellow Texans paid tribute to Mr. Benavidez. Several schools, a National Guard armory and an Army Reserve center were named for him.

But he did not regard himself as someone special.

"The real heroes are the ones who gave their lives for their country," Mr. Benavidez once said. *"I don't like to be called a hero. I just did what I was trained to do."*



NAVY NAMES NEW ROLL-ON/ROLL-OFF SHIP FOR U.S. ARMY HERO

15 September 2000

Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig has announced that the Navy will honor a U.S. Army soldier awarded the nation's highest military award, the Medal of Honor, by naming the seventh in the Bob Hope class of large, medium speed, roll-on/roll-off sealift (LMSR) ships after the soldier.

The name Danzig assigned, the USNS Benavidez (T-AKR 306), honors Army Master Sgt. (then Staff Sgt.) Roy Benavidez, born Aug. 5, 1935, in Lindenau, Texas. Benavides distinguished himself in a series of daring and extremely valorous actions while assigned to Detachment B56, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, Republic of Vietnam.

"Our Bob Hope class of ships are resolute assets that are always quietly there in the background. They are capable of coming forward in a vital way when America calls for reinforcement of its combat needs around the world," said Danzig. *"Roy Benavidez personified that same spirit throughout his life, and most powerfully during a single action that saved lives in combat. I am delighted to have the opportunity to preserve his legacy by naming T-AKR 306 the USNS Benavidez."*

"Master Sgt. Roy Benavidez was a true American hero, rising from humble origins in South Texas to become an Army legend. Wounded over 40 times as he saved the lives of eight fellow soldiers under heavy fire in Vietnam, he always said he was only doing his duty to his fellow soldiers and to the country he loved. The Navy's recognition of his selfless service is truly an appropriate tribute to Master Sgt. Benavidez's memory, and to the ideals of our nation that he epitomized," said Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera.

The USNS Benavidez is a non-combatant vessel built by Litton-Avondale Industries in New Orleans, LA. The launching/christening ceremony is scheduled for next summer. The ship will be crewed by civilian mariners and operated by the U.S. Navy's Military Sealift Command, Washington, D.C. The LMSR ships are ideal for loading U.S. military combat equipment and combat support equipment needed overseas and for re-supplying military services with necessary equipment and supplies during national crisis.

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The ship's six-deck interior has a cargo carrying capacity of approximately 390,000 square feet and its roll-on/roll-off design makes it ideal for transporting helicopters, tanks and other wheeled and tracked military vehicles. Two 110-ton single pedestal twin cranes make it possible to load and unload cargo where shoreside infrastructure is limited or non-existent. A commercial helicopter deck enables emergency, daytime landings. The USNS Benavidez is 950 feet in length, has a beam of 106 feet, and displaces approximately 62,000 long tons. The diesel-powered ship will be able to sustain speeds up to 24 knots.

The USNS Benavidez



USNS Bob Hope. The Bob Hope is first ship in the "Hope" class of rollon/rolloff transports. The USNS Benavidez will be very similar. The ship is 950 feet long, 106 feet wide, 92 feet deep, drawing 35 feet in the water. It has a speed in excess of 24 knots at 90% power. Endurance 13,000 nautical miles. The normal crew of is 95 in peacetime.

[Sent in by MG Jack Leide, CO C/2/503d, '66/'67]

Observations

After reading the "special edition" (Battle of the Slopes, June 22) and Roy's (Lombardo) article concerning the training up prior to departure from Okinawa, I was struck by several thoughts.

First, let me say that I have nothing but the greatest respect for the guys who slugged it out on the Slopes and later Hill 875. So if I say something that someone finds offensive or insulting, let me apologize now. That is not my intent.

Roy covers accurately the physical training that readied the initial troops. That training had a huge impact on the success of the deployment. I would add, that we were mostly "cherries". Several of the NCOs had combat experience. My recon sergeant, Handsome Ed, had been a recon sergeant in Korea. Except for me, there were no

FNG's. This unit integrity was a great advantage. Roy knew his strong platoons. Platoon leaders and platoon sergeants knew their strong squads. Squad leaders knew the guys who they could count on. Individual soldiers were confident about each other. This is invaluable.

I often felt sorry for when everyone was a replacement. Consider a leg draftee from Kansas, with not enough training, often joining a unit like the Americal Division in the midst of an operation. It had to be very tough for a new guy.

Rather than saying that Westmorland was dumb, I'll be content to say, he must have been blinded by that bright light that he kept staring at, at the end of the tunnel.

Some of you might not know, but we were in the Dak To area in August or September of '65. The area was crawling with NVA but they refused to engage us. In November that year they were confident enough to attack the 1st Cav. We all knew the bad guys were there. But we were packed up, and sent just north of Pleiku.

In the early days after every operation, paperwork was generated entitled "lessons learned". It looks like these were never passed along.

Several of the guys have been critical of some of the command -- it's easy to do. But, speaking for myself, the officers I knew, were, if anything, too aggressive. I know I was. If told to do something dangerous, the response was "Yes Sir." We had no maps when we moved up to the Cambodian border and only discovered after the fact, that we sometimes strayed over the line. In my old age, I recognize how silly that was. But, back then, most of us thought we could leap tall buildings and if we failed the first time, we could knock them down.

It does seem that commanders above company commanders could not resist hopping in a chopper to take a look at the battlefield. In the terrain often referred to as triple canopy, air strikes were generally a waste of time and often lives. This required a "check fire" which almost guaranteed more casualties. Because artillery was the only thing that could be walked in to help troops in contact. So while fools circled overhead seeing only tops of trees, grunts slugged it out the hard way.

Thanks for collecting our history.

Jim Robinson
FO, Bravo Bulls '65



The Enemy

[plagiarized then edited from the 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC)
Battalion Record 1969-70]

The aim of this article is to explain the enemy confronting W3 Coy [& 1ATF in general] in 1969. Generally speaking from 1966 1ATF confined its attention to enemy within or in close proximity to Phuoc Tuy Province. The forces involved were a blend of conventional military groups, guerrillas and political cadres operating from within the confines of the civilian populace. This wide spectrum of enemy types required great flexibility on the part of 1ATF to adjust its tactical doctrines to changing situations.

All armies have a command structure, and to certain levels, a degree of political control over them. The SVN Liberation Army (SVNLA), the generic term for all North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and VC troops in SVN, was no exception. In accordance with communist doctrines, political control was continued to the lowest levels of the SVNLA military structure. Command in a communist army implies political and military control. The enemy's command commenced in Hanoi which issued policies and directives to the SVNLA HQ. Known as the Central Office for SVN (COSVN), this HQ was located on the SVN border about 100 kilometres North of Saigon.



For ease of command and co-ordination COSVN had divided the land mass of SVN into areas termed military regions. The region that was of direct concern to 1ATF was known as Military Region T7 (MR T7). MR T7 controlled and coordinated the military and political activities within its area by the issue of directives to the subordinate VC military area HQ's of Sub Region 4, U-1 Province, Binh Thuan Province and Ba Long Province. In addition it exercised direct command over main force units allotted to it.

Main Force units are those forces that have been designated by COSVN as front line conventional troops. Near Phuoc Tuy were firstly, 274 (VC) Regiment. The Regiment consisted of a headquarters and three battalions. The battalions each had a HQ, three rifle companies and a heavy weapons company. In addition the regimental HQ had eight supporting companies involving heavy weapons (82 mm mortars, 12.7 mm heavy machine guns and 75 mm recoilless rifles) and communications, transport, medical and engineer companies.



The regiment had an authorised strength of 1500 men, nearly all of whom were NVA. The battalions were however never much more than 150 strong, a result of the continual pressure against them by allied operations. The regiment rarely conducted offensive operations, but remained dispersed in its jungle hides in an attempt to avoid contact with allied forces.

The only other infantry regiment in MR T7 of similar size and composition to 274 Regiment was 33 NVA Regiment. This Regiment ventured only once into Phuoc Tuy Province during the summer of 1969 (May-July) and then withdrew to the La Nga and War Zone D Base areas [it returned briefly in September 1971 but after encountering 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) near Courtney Rubber again withdrew north out of the province].

As in all military formations, MR T7 was complete with the VC version of artillery support supplied by 74 (NVA) Artillery (Rocket) Regiment. The Regiment consisted of three battalions and had both mortar and rocket capabilities.

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It employed quite sophisticated survey equipment and complex mathematical calculations, particularly in target acquisition for its 107mm and 122mm rockets. The Regiment's 2nd Battalion was responsible for the rocket attacks on the 1ATF Base at Nui Dat in May and June 1969.

There were two engineer sapper battalions known as 067 and 0525, these eventually amalgamated and were called 065. This unit was under strength and confined itself to mining tasks on Route 15 in the West of Phuoc Tuy, operating from a base area North of the Nui Thi Vai Mountains.

A sub-division of MR T7 and one of vital interest to 1ATF was Ba Long Province, the VC combination of Long Khanh and Phuoc Tuy Provinces. Operating from a predominantly politically staffed Headquarters in South Eastern Long Khanh Province, Ba Long was responsible for the political and military activities of all local force and guerrilla units within its boundaries. To complement its activities, Ba Long maintained two provincial battalions, D445 and D440, both of whom operated almost exclusively in Phuoc Tuy Province.

D445 Battalion could well be considered 'Phuoc Tuy's Own' as it was raised, reinforced and succoured by local inhabitants of the Province. The Battalion in theory had a HQ, three rifle companies and a support company armed with 82mm mortars, 12.7mm heavy machine guns, 75mm and 57mm recoilless rifles and had a total establishment for 500 soldiers. In reality however, it could only raise about 200 men.

Perhaps D445's most notable achievement was its ability to remain out of contact with 1ATF forces. This came as no surprise as the Battalion had been operating in Phuoc Tuy Province since 1965, had a high proportion of locals in its ranks, and had intimate knowledge of the ground over which it operated. The Battalion spent a great deal of its time based in the VC Minh Dam Secret Zone, a series of underground base camps in the Long Hai Hills. When it did venture from this base area on resupply or offensive missions, it was invariably tracked down and sent scuttling back.

D445's sister battalion, D440, was of similar size and composition and relied more on NVA soldiers to fill its ranks. Except for occasional forays against Route 2 villages, this battalion was also content to spend most of its time hiding in jungle base. These two battalions were the main military strength of Ba Long Province and in theory were able to give military and morale backing to VC district organisations and guerrilla units.



VC Ba Long Province was divided into three VC Districts; Chau Duc, Xuyen Moc and Long Dat. Each District was responsible for maintaining political and military control over the civilian population located in their areas of responsibility. To perform these tasks they were staffed with political, financial, supply, proselytizing and civil affairs cadres and a Local Force Company. The real power in the Districts lay in the communist party chapter. These were committees which in fact were the executive heads of the District Headquarters.

The Local Force Companies termed respectively C41 (Chau Duc), C25 (Long Dat) and C70 (Xuyen Moc) were given tasks in accordance with District Headquarters policies. Besides these companies the districts had village guerrillas, on the basis of a squad per village, and VC infrastructure (VCI) groups to provide a direct physical link with the civilian people. Often living in the villages, it was through these groups that the VC attempted to gain the support of the people. The VC, by establishing underground cells in the villages, were able to propagandize the people and gather, by extortion, taxes in the form of finance and food. They also attempted to indoctrinate juveniles into the Communist Party in order to obtain recruits for the Local Force Battalions and Companies.

The enemy troops involved in supply and maintenance were called Rear Service troops. A major source for finance and food supplies was the civilian population. These items collected under District supervision would be passed to Ba Long Province Rear Services either by direct pick up using Provincial forces as carriers and escorts, or by pre-positioning in the jungle edges of the areas in which civilians were allowed access during daylight hours.

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To supplement supplies obtained from civilian sources, Ba Long Province had organised groups of Production Cells which were VC farmers who cultivated food in jungle hides. The Binh Chau area in the far East of Phuoc Tuy was one such area where thousands of acres of rice and vegetables were farmed. Besides supplying its own forces, Ba Long Province also had a commitment to supply food and finances to MR T7 for subsequent distribution to Main Force Units. To accomplish this mission Ba Long Rear Services would deliver supplies to the Main Force Rear Service organisation which was called 84 Rear Service Group (RSG). The Group, under operational control of HQ MR T7, was a complex administrative organisation and combined all the logistic functions that one would normally find in a western army.

Until July 1969, 84 RSG operated from bases on the Northern Border of Phuoc Tuy Province, but after that time, moved deep into bases in War Zone D. The group however maintained forward supply points known as Entry/Exit points through which all types of supplies were received for distribution. It was at these points that Ba Long Rear Services often delivered their supplies. Naturally there were many commodities not available in SVN, the most prominent being munitions, weapons, communications equipment and to a degree medical supplies. These were imported from North Vietnam via the 'Ho Chi Minh Trail' through Laos and Cambodia.

Stores destined for 84 Rear Services Group were picked up from transfer terminals in War Zone D and then delivered to main force units.

In addition to the supply of material, 84 Rear Services Group also operated workshop and hospital facilities. The May Tao base area was the site of a major hospital called K76A capable of undertaking considerable surgical treatment. Located near the hospital were workshops capable of producing mines, grenades, clothing and facilities for the repair of weapons. A postal system was operated by 84 RSG which linked the province and district systems. Known as commo-liaison systems, both personal and official mail was transported by couriers through a network of jungle trails that also doubled as supply routes. It was not difficult to pinpoint these routes and many enemy lost their lives when undertaking one of these hazardous journeys.

Even considering the Asian's inherent capacity to exist under difficult conditions the enemy soldier was subjected to extreme hardships and privations. Hunted and harassed, he had no single base and could neither rest nor properly tend his sick and wounded.

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He was kept continually on the move, living where he could in not always hospitable jungle hides. The bulk of his ranks were filled by North Vietnamese conscripts who were not always accepted by the VC and became disillusioned with the lack of assistance given him in a strange and hostile land. The NVA soldier had no means of communication with his family and friends as there was no postal system operating out of SVN. Continually short of food and medical supplies it was not surprising that so many rallied to the SVN government under the Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) programme.

The conditions of the local guerrilla forces were not much better. The stark realism of Dat Do guerrillas eating bracken roots only 10 kilometres from their home town, and Ngai Giao Production Cell members starving 5 kilometres from their village was typical of the plight these people found themselves in. Lacking the military sophistication of the NVA, the local forces needed constant and explicit directions. When this was not forthcoming, disintegration within their ranks was rapid.

6 RAR/NZ (ANZAC) was fortunate during its tour in that it was able to observe positive signs of disintegration of the enemy's command and logistic systems. By the Spring of 1970, the enemy was in a desperate situation and, apart from small scale attacks, could do nothing to prevent its gradual starvation and destruction by allied forces. There were two reasons for the VC persistence under these arduous conditions; fears of retaliation from his fanatical communist leaders, and a natural desire for survival. The enemy was committed to a conflict of arms and had to fight to avoid his own destruction.

Although prevented from conducting conventional warfare, the enemy always had the potential of waging guerrilla warfare. To this end he had many advantages and used them frequently with a good deal of resourcefulness. He proved to be a cruel and elusive enemy who suffered many casualties in the coming conflicts with 6 RAR/NZ.



WHODAT?



Who is this super-duper 2/503 trooper? Yeah, he looks like a Leg, and he was one once, but went on to fame and fortune in the paratroops. No, he's not Bobby Darin, altho there is a similarity. I've heard this guy sing, and it ain't pretty. In fact, when he sings *even flies are afraid to fly*. Ed

Veteran's Benefits

The 2011 edition of the **Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors** booklet is now available on the web at:

http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book.asp

and is also available in PDF Format.



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



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ROLLING STONE

Late February - early March 1966

1RAR was detached from the 173d and put under the operational control of the US 1st Infantry Division to protect the Engineer Battalion while they were building a road between Ben Cat and The Iron Triangle as the engineers were contending with raids by saboteurs destroying their work and machines at night with command detonated mines and sniper attacks by day.

The entire battalion is moving to the new area of operations we are to harbour up near an old airstrip, I'm told it was built by the French during their war with the Viet-Minh. The good news is, either the engineers or the pioneers have built showers and we get to use them today. This will be the first opportunity for a shower in three weeks, I'm really looking forward to being clean again; I've accumulated a layer of dust, sweat, mud, mossie repellent and general filth over my entire body -- my clothing has changed from jungle green to a red, muddy colour with texture of stiff cardboard. The stench is unbelievable. Fortunately, we all smell the same, so no one worries.

At the beginning of our operation, we placed a spare set of greens and socks etc. in a bag to be brought out when and if showers were to be made available. The usual routine of digging in starts in earnest and I build up a real sweat but the digging is good, my fighting pit is shoulder deep, my hutchie (tent) is up, and I'm ready for a few minutes of pure bliss, a nice cold, soapy shower.



A wounded digger hurt in a bobby-trap explosion is evacuated to Vung Tau. AMW COL/67/0140/VN

I gather my rifle and head over to the shower area to collect my shower bag, I can see a great stack of bags near the showers and someone from the "Q" store handing them out to the diggers as they arrive; I always knew those "Q" blokes would have their uses. I've never seen the blokes in such hire spirits as they walk

away in their fresh clean clothing, even their mothers would have recognized them. Their old greens are placed into their respective bags and loaded ready for return to base.



Vietnam 1966: Australians patrol near the village of Tan Phu, near Bien Hoa Air Base. (CUN/66/0161/VN)

I walk over to our friendly "Q" man and ask for my bag, I'm feeling on top of the world, really looking forward to my turn in the shower when my whole world is shattered in an instant! The lousy bastards have lost my laundry bag!!! I storm away from the bludgers, strip off, and dive under the nearest shower. At least I can get clean even if I have to put the same uniform back on. I can't even have a shave as my razor is in the bloody bag as well. After I'm dragged out from under the shower, I climb back into my filthy, foul smelling, stiff uniform, and pull on the same pair of socks I've been wearing for the last few weeks and wander slowly back towards my hutchie. Everyone is giving me a wide berth; I feel like a bloody leper. I've never felt so down before in my life!

Suddenly, I hear the roar of armored personnel carriers (APC's); it's my company! They have taken off without me. There'll be hell to pay when they get back, no doubt, they've been looking for me. I settle back in my hutchie and wait for the fireworks on the company's return. It seems Charlie had been taking a few pot shots at the engineers building their road, and the company set off on a moment's notice as a ready reactionary force to sort out the bastards.

I start to doze despite the odor coming from my clothing, and the war seems to be elsewhere for the moment. I'm brought back to reality by the return of the APC's, so I decide to lay low for awhile, and wait and see what is going to happen.

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So far, no one has said anything. All those concerned think I was on a different "Track" to them and I haven't even been missed.

By the time the company got to the engineers, the VC had bolted. The best part of this event, everyone in the company is already just as sweaty and dusty as I am, given a day or two they won't even notice the smell.

The 1st Infantry Division engineers are a slack mob; during the evening they seem to party on with little heed to security. They have a few gun posts around the place, but spend most of their time in the boozier! It is only a matter of time before they get hit. The first three days are spent patrolling by day and setting ambushes by night; these night ambushes are met with a fair bit of success, with a gunner getting three Main force Viet Cong soldiers and wounding some others. They were carrying webbing, good quality weapons and rations -- these blokes were not your usual local part timer, they were pros.

As a result of these and other contacts it looks certain the engineers are being lined up for an attack.

It looks like being a busy time tonight, we have moved into a defensive position and are being urged to dig good solid fighting pits, the engineers have been warned of the possibility of a major attack, but going by the noise they are making over there, they're not worrying too much. After completing our new fighting pit, (I'm sharing with the platoon RTO) and go through the usual rituals of feeding, cleaning myself and rifle, we hit the sack.

About 0200 hours we are blasted out of our sleep by the supersonic crackling of rounds ripping through our shelter, barely inches above our prone bodies. We move as one, grabbing our rifles, radio and webbing and dive headfirst into our hole. The sky is lit up like a Christmas tree! I can hear the steady chugging of heavy machine guns, the unmistakable sharp crackle of AK47's, answered in full by armalites and M60 machine guns, mortars exploding, tanks and artillery ripping trees out of the ground. God help anyone in the killing fields in front of us.

The tracers, both green and red are going in all directions, there are leaves and bits of wood falling all over as shrapnel and bullets slash the low scrub, and the earth around me erupts as round after round strikes, and whines off into the bush behind me. I can hear movement out in front of us and the pop of mortars being fired at the engineers; who in turn are throwing everything bar the kitchen sink at the massed attacking

enemy forces. We've got the bastards in a murderous crossfire.

The rounds coming in our direction are now coming from the engineers, the enemy have managed to get in between us and the Americans, the rounds are ripping through the VC and into our position, it's lucky we are well dug in; our crossfire must be doing the same thing to the yanks with poor old Charlie stuck in the middle.



AC-47....Puff

Now we've denied Charlie cover of darkness. *Puff the Magic Dragon* has arrived (C47 aircraft) dropping flares, and has lit up the scrub for miles around like an obscene but deadly carnival. There is another aircraft doing runs across the killing zone firing mini guns, pouring out thousands of rounds of 7.62 per minute carving a swathe of destruction through the milling Viet Cong. The battle rages for an hour or two and for a change I'm just a spectator albeit in a ringside seat.

About 0400 hours the enemy start to move away from the engineers' front, in order to escape and run across the front of B Company on our left flank. B Company pour fire into the retreating VC and a steady barrage of artillery is being used to farewell the survivors of this night's work.

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Some hours later, we go out and start following up blood trails -- there are dozens of them and discarded pieces of equipment and grenades are lying around everywhere; the machine gunner hears a sound from behind a bush fearing an ambush, he fires a burst. On investigation we find a dead Viet Cong, he appears to have been wounded during the night and left to die by his own men. No one likes to see the wounded shot but the gunner reacted to potential danger, our survival instincts are strong.

The platoon sergeant and I search and examine the body and find the round hit him under the jaw blowing the top of the skull away, he is naked from the waist down and had been carried with his feet and hands tied to a pole like an animal. We left a note for the engineers indicating we had our way with the poor bastard since he was stripped and ready, they called us a dirty bunch of bastards but credited us with the kill. We tag the body and radio the location for collection and burial.

I hear a sound behind me and find one of our blokes down on his hands and knees looking at the wound, I ask him what he is doing; he says he can see daylight through the head! A couple of other blokes have a look and agree, yes, you can see daylight!!

Later that day we buried over 250 dead "Charlies" in a mass grave, thank Christ we had the Engineers to dig the bloody hole

We have been in this country and exposed to this kind of inhuman slaughter far too long. Some of these blokes are only 19. What is the war doing to us, and how can we explain our feelings to those who haven't been here.

Ken Baker
1RAR



We loved that rascal Puff.

