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## ~ 2/503d Photo of the Month ~



2/503d Sky Soldiers on Hill 875, Dak To, RVN, November 1967.

(Photo by Gilles Caron)



# Chaplain's Corner

*"For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29: 11-13*



The Leapin' Deacon

Grace and Peace to all 2/503d Bn Troops, Family Members, and to all whom you hold dear. These are heavy-duty political times and interests for our Nation. Let us look at another urgent time of grave importance in our political and leadership history.

Our cherished country has many special and significant dates that deeply impact on us in a life-altering way. May 18, 1860 was such a day. It was the day when the Republican Party meeting in Chicago, Illinois nominated its candidate for President of the United States. It was an exceptionally turbulent time – in fact, the very existence of the "United" States was in serious jeopardy.

Four contenders had their "hats in the ring." The best known of the four was the popular former governor and senator, William Seward, of our most populace state – New York; followed by Ohio governor, Salmon Chase, and Judge Edward Bates of St. Louis. None of the contenders considered Abraham Lincoln of Springfield, Illinois as much of a threat to their high hopes and aspirations. He had little national recognition, having served once in Congress and twice lost in contests for the Senate. He had minimal administrative experience, but SURPRISE, SURPRISE, SURPRISE! Lincoln was nominated on the third ballot. This rustic, country, rail-fence-splitting lawyer would become the greatest President and political genius and leader in the nineteenth century and perhaps one of the two greatest in our National history.

Lincoln, like General/President George Washington was a person of profound destiny, chosen to lead our beloved Nation in a most critical crisis, the Civil War – the War between the States. This giant of a person (inside and out) was brilliant beyond measure; a political genius packed with wisdom. He was a storyteller par excellence.

He used humor for fun and laughter, character building and teaching. He was extremely kind, gentle and magnanimous. He loved soldiers, sailors and their families. He visited combat troops near the front lines and our wounded warriors in their pain, hurt, suffering and healing.

He was single-minded in the purpose of the war, to preserve the Union and to end slavery. He experienced considerable difficulty with the Union Army leadership (being out-generaled). He could not get them to move quickly in their mission; indeed, slow in pursuit of the Confederate Army when the timing was right to do so until he found the winning Combat Team of Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman who caused the brilliant and

remarkable Robert E. Lee and his Confederate Army to surrender. Lincoln was a master at forging a diverse and rival Cabinet that preserved our Nation and secured America from the terrible curse of slavery.

Lincoln was a person of trusting faith, prayer, and Scripture reading. Like Washington's mother's Godly teaching and mentoring, Lincoln's mother, Nancy, had daily reading of God's Word and praying together. She taught her son to read and write. Thank God for such blessed and loving Mothers! As Lincoln grew and matured, he exercised his mother's devotional practice of reading Scripture and prayer. His sharp mind was like a bear trap in his vast reading and self-taught ways. He loved to quote William Shakespeare.

In the short and powerful "Gettysburg Address" he declared, *"But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate – we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it,*



*far above our poor power to add or detract . . . from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth" - - a majestic declaration of his living hope and trust.*

In his second "Inaugural Address" his faith-life glowingly shines through. Lincoln speaks in kindness to both the North and the South: *"Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any man should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes."*

Thanks be to our kind and Heavenly Father, Redeemer-Jesus, and winsome Holy Spirit that Abraham Lincoln was a person of destiny, wisdom and chosen to lead our blessed Nation at such a time of crisis – the terrible Civil War.

2/503d Sky Soldiers and Families – let us press on in mission, hope and destiny as we grow in Grace, Holiness, and Wisdom.

*Blessings in abundance,*

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



## Over \$2.2 Billion in Retroactive Agent Orange Benefits Paid to 89,000 Vietnam Veterans and Survivors for Presumptive Conditions

WASHINGTON, Aug. 31, 2011 – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced today that more than \$2.2 billion in retroactive benefits has already been paid to approximately 89,000 Vietnam Veterans and their survivors who filed claims related to one of three new Agent Orange presumptive conditions.

On August 31, 2010, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) amended its regulations to add ischemic heart disease, hairy cell leukemia and other chronic B-cell leukemias, and Parkinson's disease to the list of diseases presumed to be related to exposure to Agent Orange.



*“As the President said to the American Legion yesterday, VA is committed to ensuring Veterans and their families receive the care and benefits they have earned,”* said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. *“I encourage all potentially eligible Veterans to apply as soon as possible to preserve the most favorable effective date for payments.”*

For new claims, VA may authorize up to one year of retroactive benefits if a Veteran can show that he or she has experienced one of those conditions since the date of the regulatory change.

VA has reviewed, and continues to review, thousands of previously filed claims that may qualify for retroactive benefits under a long-standing court order of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in *Nehmer vs. U.S. Veterans Administration*.

*“VA encourages survivors of Veterans whose death may be due to one of the three diseases to file a claim for dependency and indemnity compensation,”* added Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey. Secretary Shinseki’s decision to add these conditions to the list of Agent Orange presumptive conditions was based on a study by the Institute of Medicine, which indicated a positive association between exposure to certain herbicides and the subsequent development of one or more of the three conditions.

Potentially eligible Veterans include those who were exposed based on duty or visitation in Vietnam or on its

inland waterways between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975; exposed along the demilitarized zone in Korea between April 1, 1968, and August 31, 1971; or exposed due to herbicide tests and storage at military bases within and outside of the United States.

The Agent Orange Claims Processing System website located at <https://www.fasttrack.va.gov/AOFastTrack/> may be used to submit claims related to the three new presumptive conditions.

The website makes it easy to electronically file a claim and allows Veterans and their physicians to upload evidence supporting the claim. It also permits online viewing of claim status.

Beyond the three new presumptive disabilities, Veterans may file online at VA’s My-eBenefits web site at: <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/ebenefits.portal>. They can check the status of their claim with a premium account (confirming their identity), and use a growing number of online services. Servicemembers may enroll in My-eBenefits by using their Common Access Card at anytime during their military service, or before they leave during their Transition Assistance Program briefings.

Veterans may also enroll through their myPay or MyHealthVet accounts by visiting their local VA regional office or Veteran Service Organization, or by calling 1-800-827-1000.

For more information about Agent Orange presumptives and disability compensation, go to <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/>. For questions about Agent Orange, Veterans may call VA’s Special Issues Helpline at 1-800-749-8387 and press 3.



# Bravo Bulls deployment and the early days in Bien Hoa

By Roy Lombardo



Col. (then LTC) George Dexter, Bn CO 2/503d, '65/'66 in Vietnam

## PRE-DEPLOYMENT

At a Commanders' and Staff meeting at Camp Kui, LTC George Dexter announced, in early April 1965,

***“Gentleman, we’ll be deploying to Vietnam thirty days from now. This information is classified but initiate preparations for deployment....etc. You will not be able to tell your men until I release the info 24 hours before actual deployment on 5 May 1965. We will be deploying TDY for 90 days ”***

John Manolakis, the battalion S-2, and I exchanged high fives as we left, because we had been training for this day since we were commissioned five years earlier.

As I returned to the company, I ran through the training activities that were possible and appropriate, without giving away the mission. I had these thoughts: marksmanship, physical fitness, and maintenance. The company was already qualified with the AR 15. We needed qualification with those other weapons, not used as frequently. All the pistol guys were gathered, trained, and sent to the nearby ranges behind Brigade HQ.



Mike Broderick

Mike Broderick, the FDC Mortar Sergeant had a hook-up with the IX Corps Logistical Command. His contact would call when they had a storage of mortar ammo that needed testing. PSG Jackie Siggers got the Weapons Platoon to go into testing mode with the mission of qualifying each man on the 81 mm mortar. I directed SSG Jack Schimpf to train the 106mm AT section (these weapons were being left behind) to qualify his section in the use of the 60 mm Mortar. The Log Group provided their own 60 mm mortars for the testing.



Jack Schimpf

PT was run twice each day, morning (at reveille) and afternoon (last event before evening chow). The Sukiran Obstacle Course was added to the course. Strong paratroopers became stronger. All wondered if I had gone crazy, increasing an already intense program. We maintained our weapons and equipment as thoroughly as if we were preparing for an IG inspection.

At 1800 hrs, on 4 May I had scheduled a company formation to announce the deployment. When I drove into the parking lot, pandemonium reined with cheering and laughter. President Johnson had just made the announcement, so the word was out. We were scheduled to move to Naha AFB at “0 dark 30” to enplane. The company had our own ammo point, which we had inherited from the Battle Group in 1963. This ammo was distributed and hand-carried aboard the C-130 aircraft with instructions to await our arrival at Bien Hoa Air Base before actually loading magazines and weapons.

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## DEPLOYMENT

We were met by our advance party upon arriving and guided to the 2 ½ trucks for movement. The company paused for ammo distribution and loading, which took about 10 minutes. I received a call from MAJ William White, the Bn XO, "Get your company loaded and moved out." "Roger, we are loading weapons and will move in about 5 minutes." "Negative, Bravo 6. Brigade 6 is on my ass and wants you to move now." "Roger, we are loading weapons and will move as quickly as possible."

When the weapons were loaded, we loaded the trucks and moved, certainly not as quickly as desired but with SECURITY as our primary focus. This was Vietnam and not some parade field. We trucked to our location on a flat plain, east of Bien Hoa Airbase, where the 2/503 mission was to protect the base from ground attack. Flat red clay, not unlike the soil of Okinawa, was spaded and foxholes appeared in textbook fashion. There was no need to supervise or kick ass because the Bravo Bulls understood the necessity of doing it right and fast. The fatigue jackets are off and sweat flows profusely.

A message from MAJ Bobby Thorp, Bn S-3, "Prepare a platoon for an Honor Guard Ceremony in clean uniforms. You are the Commander of troops. A platoon will also be provided by Company A. Trucks will pick you up in 30 minutes." "Roger. WILCO. You are aware that the troops have been digging foxholes since we arrived." "Roger. Trucks arrive in 29 minutes." "Roger, OUT." The rest of my transmission was silenced in my head and remains there today.

Unknown to us, our arrival and Honor Guard was filmed by the BIG STORY, a regular military broadcasting studio. Copies are available on the internet. In the film, the company guidon was visible during the aircraft un-loading. In addition, PFC Roger Flowers is identifiable from the Honor Guard.



**Gary Davidson &  
Roger Flowers**

We formed without rehearsal before a stand of Vietnamese dignitaries and Army Commanders. General Westmoreland was there as was Brigadier General Williamson, our Brigade Commander. After some brief speeches of welcome from the Vietnamese, thanking us for our efforts to save their country and defeat Communism, young Vietnamese women came forward and placed flowered wreaths around our necks. I prayed that none of my

guys would grab a female by the ass or whatever. God heard my prayers and protected those young women, who had already been undressed by the eyes of each paratrooper.



*"We held the line. We stopped the falling of the dominoes," he said in 1985 at the 20th anniversary of the Army's 173d Airborne Brigade's assignment to Vietnam. "It's not that we lost the war militarily. The fact is, we as a nation did not make good our commitment to the South Vietnamese."* Westmoreland died of natural causes on July 8, 2005 at the age of 91.

Back to our position we rode to pick-up the priority of work that had been set aside to prepare our defensive position. Dark approached and was on us without much transition. The troops were on edge and I certainly couldn't blame them. Their eyes appeared to enlarge to gather in all available light and anything that might be moving. Commo wire tied us in and we settled in for our first night in country.

Around midnight firing broke out in the 2d Platoon area. After the Platoon Leader got the fire closed down, I went down to check. I found nothing and urged the troops to relax and to not give their positions away by premature firing. Of course this advice, though previously offered, came too late. With first light, a recon patrol from the 2d Platoon found that a VC water buffalo had tried to penetrate our defensive position, was discovered, and destroyed by the combined fires of 44 paratroopers. No further attempts were made by any VC elements.

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**Bravo Bulls homesteading in the Rubber Trees, May 1965.**  
(Photo by Jim Robinson, B/2/503d)

### **RELOCATION TO THE RUBBER TREES**

The initial position on the flat plain offered very little for troop comfort and exposed our guys to a brutal sun. After proper reconnaissance, the battalion was relocated to a rubber tree plantation. LTC Dexter stated that he realized that the VC would know our location but would be unable to provide accurate fires because of our concealment. The Bravo Bulls defended the northern perimeter of the Battalion perimeter with Company A to our right and elements of HHC to our left. Our heaviest weapon, the .50 MG from the Mess Truck, anchored our left flank in the perimeter, with protective fires across the entire company front and the ability to traverse left to cover the open plain, which we had abandoned.

Each pair of troopers had a fighting position outside the rubber trees. They also had another foxhole at the foot of their tent, 15 yards into the rubber trees. The tent was elevated off the ground, with individual air mattresses atop pierced steel planking which we obtained from the Bien Hoa Salvage Yard.

The real masterpiece of the Bravo Bulls was the creation by SFC William Kimbrill, the Mess Sergeant. He had requested permission to cut some of the seams of the mess tent to create extended working space and to provide a canopy over the serving line to keep the rain from the mess kits. Kimbrill fought with the 511th Parachute Regiment on the drop onto Tagatay Ridge in the Philippines. He and a small contingent jumped before the main drop to blow the bridges, leading to the DZ that spanned the ravines and rivers. About a squad survived that effort and they each received a diamond earring from the President of the Philippines. Imagine, an NCO wearing a diamond earring in the 40's and 50's to the NCO Club. Kimbrill, though slight, was not someone that you would want to challenge, particularly after a few beers.



*(continued....)*



Our mess hall was issued “ten in one” rations which was a box of chow to feed ten men. Kimbrill worked miracles with these rations and soon we had to limit the meals to only Bravo Bulls because everyone from the other companies were trying to get access. Using large jars of jam, Kimbrill had his cooks mix the jam with water, straining the mixture through a colander to eliminate the bulk and create a form of Kool-Aid. He was creative and I gave him a free hand. We nailed planks between the rubber trees, creating tables for standing, so the troops had a place for their mess kits; later metal mess trays, while eating. Canned bacon and dehydrated eggs for breakfast but it tasted like the Ritz. Ever present boiling coffee plus as many food tricks as a major chef would have, AND all in a jungled rubber plantation. Later, Kimbrill’s initiative almost landed him *and me* in hot water.

Before long, the monsoons started in earnest and the rainwater filled our fighting positions, every depression, and kept us constantly wet, even when the rain stopped. Of course the mosquitoes came to breed and to attack en masse at every opportunity.

### LEARNING AIRMOBILE TACTICS

On day 2, I was alerted to provide one Officer and one NCO to accompany an ARVN Battalion into War Zone C by airmobile assault. I and my fellow company commanders would accompany the armed helicopters, which reconned the LZ and provided security and fire support. The sequence was air prep, followed by artillery prep, followed by a lone gunship to examine the LZ and to determine if the LZ was safe. John Manolakis (Bn S-2) and I were on the same gunship, escorting the first lift of H-34’s into this LZ. As we did a daisy chain on the right flank of the LZ, two VC .51 HMG’s, opened on the lead H-34, which burst into flames at about 200 feet. The ARVN soldiers in the first aircraft began to jump as the magnesium floor of the H-34 covered them with flames. The gunship, in which we were passengers, put suppressive fires on the VC HMG until all helicopters in that lift unloaded the ARVN on the ground. We escorted them back to the stage field where we re-armed with 2.75 inch rockets and 7.62 MG ammo, both for the UH-1 and its two door gunners. We now understood the sequence of airmobile operations but hoped that the preparatory fires on our future LZ’s would do a better job than what had been done by the fires on our first operation.

### BIEN HOA AIRBASE

The very first Sunday after our arrival, while still digging company positions in the rubber trees, we heard loud explosions and saw smoke rising from what we guessed was Bien Hoa Airbase to our west. I passed the word to the Platoon Leaders to stop digging, occupy our

positions, and be prepared to move if we were ordered to do so. When the situation finally got untangled, we learned that an A1E aircraft had landed with a 250 pound bomb, still in the rack, which jettisoned upon landing and skidded into a parking bay, all of which had bombs, rockets, and 20 mm ammo in the quick-load position. The first explosion set off another explosion, etc. An SF Major went onto the airfield to place explosive charges to blow all of the exposed ordnance, which was feared to be unstable due to the possibility of sympathetic detonation. Happy Sunday, but the Bravo Bulls were content to have been to church services that morning before the fireworks. Finally a stand-down was ordered and we went back to digging while the daylight lasted.



Top secret photo? Bien Hoa AFB.

(Photo by Jim Robinson, B/2/503d)

### THE FIRST MOVIE

Several enterprising paratroopers painted a 4x8 sheet of plywood for a screen and placed empty ammo boxes for seats to create the battalion movie theater. Someone in HHC (maybe Commo Platoon) was the projector operator and the word went out that the first movie would start at 0 dark 30. I don’t remember the name of the movie (maybe THE AX MURDERS) but Joan Crawford was the lead female star. The movie started when Crawford observed her unfaithful husband and some other female in bed. She grabbed a nearby ax and chopped them both into pieces. I left after the third murder but others told me that the murders continued until the movie ended.



(continued....)



Being unsuspecting, I sat in the Company CP writing letters, until a burst of MG fire lit up the company perimeter. The platoon leader reported that the machine gunner thought he saw someone with an “ax” and opened up. In hindsight, it has a ring of humor but that night no one in the chain of command thought it a bit funny as spooked troops would challenge and then fire several rounds until the fire team leader got them under control. Didn’t happen often, but once was too many times.

### ALONG CAME THE 1/RAR



**Under the watchful eye of a 173d MP, Diggers of the 1RAR arrive Vietnam in June 1965.**

To round out the Brigade, the 1st Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment quickly joined the Sky Soldiers. I was impressed with their leadership, experience, and equipment. Their Company Commanders were senior Captains or Majors and had several years service beyond my 5 years and they had served in counterinsurgency slots in Rhodesia and little known countries of Africa.

Their gear was impressive. Their tentage had easily lifted sides and a canvas sunscreen layer above, to provide additional protection and ventilation. Their weapons initially were the FNL 7.62 mm rifles and the Owens submachine gun, both holdovers from times past. They did wear a “sweat rag” which had obvious possibilities for individual comfort. 1/RAR was a very welcome addition to the Brigade. I did my best to learn from their previous experiences and the ATOM (Anti-terrorist Operations in Malaya) Pamphlet.

I have already told the story of our presenting a decorated cake to Charlie Coy (their abbreviation for

company) to celebrate the Queen’s birthday at the end of June. In return, they reciprocated by presenting a hand-carved, engraved boomerang, made by a world-class boomerang athlete. When presented he offered to

demonstrate but I didn’t want the boomerang to be scratched. What I didn’t know, the boomerang had been tested in their area, before presentation to the Bravo Bulls. Their catcher missed the catch and got whacked in the head, requiring medical treatment. When the Aussie doctor asked the nature of the injury and was told, “*I got whacked by a boomerang,*” he threatened to press punishment charges against the injured trooper. That boomerang is still on display in my *Hall of Memories*.



**The Queen’s Cake**

(Photo by Jim Robinson, B/2/503d)

**See “*Let em Eat Cake*” in Issue 9, Pages 6-7**

### OPERATIONS

Our first search and destroy operation was to the east and was intended to clear the area adjacent to our battalion base. Each company did a horseshoe route, going out on a given azimuth and returning on the reciprocal azimuth. I had the lead platoon move in the wedge formation, with each of its squads in column; this meant the two flank squads were 25 meters off of center. Then I had the other two platoons move in column, each behind the flank squad of the wedge. Without excruciating detail, this shortened the company length to a squad with a follow-on platoon, rather than 3 platoons in column. If we got into a shootout, the company was already close to being in a perimeter. It worked for the Bravo Bulls but required the lead platoon to really control his squads because the natural tendency was for everyone to gravitate to the center.

For control we had the PRC 10 for commo. A decent radio but less than ideal in the jungle because the battalion’s radios were beat up by the tens of jumps that they had already made. I don’t exactly know how it happened but LTC Dexter commandeered the Forward Air Controller’s radio, which was a PRC 25.

*(continued....)*





Until that time, the Brigade HQ would have an L 20 fixed wing aircraft overfly our operations to relay messages from battalion to brigade. With the PRC 25, that was no longer necessary. Very quickly thereafter the companies got the new radio and the biggest control problem was solved.

From our first operations on the south side of the Song (River) Dong Nai, we graduated to operations, inserted by chopper onto the north of the Song Dong Nai. BG Williamson's plan, which I later learned from his ADC, was to go everywhere and anywhere to prove that we could. Deeper and deeper we searched into War Zone D, with enemy activity, increasing as further we went.

Airmobile operations slowly gained shape and organization. The Brigade had never participated in an airmobile operation until we got to Vietnam. For jumps, the USAF would travel on an established route and the units could arrange their assembly areas, based on the direction of the aircraft's flight. Initially, we'd mount up in the choppers at Bien Hoa and know where the LZ was but the choppers didn't always land in the same direction upon arrival. That messed up a rapid assembly on the ground until after-action reports worked out the difficulty and got the chopper aviators on-board. Historians might recall that it was the navigation problems of WW II aircraft that contributed to the early airborne difficulties. US troops can solve anything if they can talk to the players.

## RELOCATION OUT OF THE RUBBER TREES



**Moving out of the rubber trees.** (Photo by Jim Robinson, B/2/503d)

LTC Dexter assessed the situation and learned that the TDY had turned into PCS. With this info, he decided to relocate a bit closer to Bien Hoa Airbase and a bit higher terrain that would reduce the water flowing into and under the tents.

The area selected was a former rubber tree plantation and it became obvious that the stumps would have to be removed. Now it just so happened that SSG Grifford, a former Special Forces NCO who had worked with the CIA in the early years, had an idea. He suggested obtaining additional explosives, since our basic load of 30# had been expended blowing LZ's for resupply while on operations. Grifford stated that if I would provide him a 2 ½ ton truck (the mess truck) with a driver and a 3 day pass to Saigon, he would obtain enough demo to clear War Zone D. True to his word he was back quickly with every imaginable form of demo known to the Army: dynamite, commercial dynamite, C-1 and C-2 plastic explosives, blasting caps and det cord. Using my Recondo graduate NCO's, plus Grifford, and a few trusty others, we organized a demo assembly line. It became obvious after a few tries, that if a ½ # charge was dug under two of the main roots of the stump, the explosion would rip it free. We used the commercial dynamite first because the nitro was beading in the heat, making it unstable. Next, the military dynamite, and lastly the plastic explosives. Our area was cleared in one day. What wasn't needed for stump removal became the plastic heating source for C-rations in the jungle.

Now it just so happened that I had some experience as a teenage builder/builder's helper. Our best scrounger was SSG Big Jim Edwards, who had hooked up with the crew from the civilian building contractor, maintaining Bien Hoa Air Base. From them, we obtained a small supply of 4 x 4's, which were used as floor joists. Not wanting to place the foundation on the ground, we obtained empty 20 mm steel boxes from the airbase, along with gravel to provide stability. With the 4 x 4's supported on the steel cases, 18 " from the ground, we were set to do the floor. Again looking to Bien Hoa, we were aware that they discarded the wooden pine boxes which were the transport packing for the 2.75" rockets. We would disassemble the pine planking, which was 1" x 3", using these first as solid flooring for the tent. Next we scabbed the 1" x 3" planks together to make into 2" x 3" approximating a normal 2" x 4" stud. Since the only support necessary was the canvas GP Medium tent, this method sufficed. In two days we put up four fully supported tent structures.

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With this success, LTC Dexter gave the Bravo Bulls more tents until the company was comfortably housed. Both Company A and C were waiting for the assistance of the 173d Engineer Company, who had skilled carpenters.

Simultaneously, another crew was doing a special construction for the Mess Tent, which really shaped up nicely to cook and serve while protected by canvas. As a piece d' resistance, SSG Kimbrill painted the mess hall flat black, which concealed the white pine planking. Colonel Duddy, The Brigade Deputy Commander, came, unannounced to view this tent city made by amateurs without engineering skills or tools, and applauded our ingenuity and success. In a later staff meeting, LTC Dexter mentioned that the MP's were looking for some missing non-reflective paint used on the U – 2 aircraft, based at Bien Hoa. The paint cost several hundreds of dollars per gallon. I sweated that investigation but the investigators did not find their way to the Bravo Bulls, and followed leads into the city of Bien Hoa and the possible Black Market that flourished there.

## ESCALATION INTO COMBAT OPERATIONS



**Bravo Bulls on early operation in 1965.**

(Photo by Jim Robinson, B/2/503d)

The Bulls were learning fast. The mature, serious reaction by the young Sky Soldiers impressed me the most as well as filling me with pride. Previous discipline problems on Okinawa disappeared and serious mission focus became the norm. We still had some growing pains but we learned from every mistake.

From the first, I did everything “by the book” or as close to that as I knew. I listened to the NCO's with combat experience but leaned heavily on my training in Ranger School and the Panamanian Jungle School. We were experts in patrolling and got better as we went.

The battalion got intel that said there was a VC mortar team NE of our position and the Bravo Bulls were scrambled to be inserted by chopper and told to run the VC to ground. We landed minutes from our base camp, late in the afternoon and looked for evidence of enemy activity. At nightfall we went into our NDP to prevent stumbling into an ambush. We launched at first light and quickly found a trail through the grass made by a laden two-wheeled cart. Paralleling the trail, we moved as quickly as security would allow and soon found the bent grass springing back to normal. We were close but no cigar, as yet.

The trail led to a well-traveled dirt road and was lost. As we headed back to our battalion base, there was a major rice-planting operation in a paddy that we passed. Looking at the workers, there were about 30 females of varying age and one male. With a security detachment, I

moved over, accompanied by the Vietnamese National Policeman, one of which was attached to each of the rifle companies. After brief questioning, we took the male into custody and transported him to Bien Hoa, where it was learned that he was a member of a VC cell. Never found the mortars but had a minor catch for our efforts. One of the axioms of counterinsurgency is that a combined military-police effort is very effective.

Our first live fire exposure came shortly thereafter. Three Bulls had been sent off by their FTL and wandered near an enemy village, where we sustained our first KIA. It was about two KMs away and the firing was not

heard. Helicopters were alerted and came in to help with the search for the troops but found only two survivors, who had found their way back to the original LZ. They had the KIA's weapon and had hidden his body before they withdrew with the VC in pursuit.

*(continued....)*



# Pics of the Bravo Bulls

## The Early Days

By Jim Robinson, B/2/503d

LTC Dexter ordered an immediate airmobile raid the next morning to recover the body and to attempt contact with the VC. We were to return to the original LZ and attempt to retrace the route of the 3 man patrol. Instead we landed about 1 KM away in a rice paddy. We came under mortar and small arms fire immediately but I didn't recognize the mortar fire for what it was. The 60mm mortar rounds fired by the VC were burying themselves in the rice paddy around us but not detonating. I thought some of the Bulls were firing their 40mm grenades amidst our formation. It then became quickly apparent we were under fire, as we closed into the jungle's edge.



**Ranger Roy**

I called for 4.2 inch mortar support but they were firing at max range and our FO was concerned about the accuracy of their fire. The firing stopped and I learned that we had two lightly WIA, which we quickly medevac'd by choppers. We proceeded on, guided by the two, but they couldn't retrace their route to their fallen comrade. Finally we were extracted in preparation for a major shootout which would occur on 7 July but that story remains for a future military historian to tell.

It was my honor and privilege to command the Bravo Bulls and to contribute in a small way to their success. They would go on successfully with the NCO's and paratroopers leading the way AND that is how wars are won.

**Roy Lombardo, LTC  
CO B/2/503d**



# Thoughts on a recent day at work

Written by a C-17 Pilot flying the Navy Seals back to Dover AFB.



**Paying respects: U.S. President Barack Obama salutes during a ceremony for the 'dignified transfer' of U.S. and Afghan personnel who died in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan.** (Reuters photo)

Subject: Thoughts on a recent day at work. I had an unforgettable day yesterday and wanted to share it with you. I know we've all sat around and discussed in detail why we do what we do and if we will be willing to continue to do what we do day in and day out regardless of deployments, retirement decisions, job opportunities, missed birthdays, missed holidays, etc. This is something I wanted to share and you were the people that came to mind. It's another reason I continue to serve. I guess because many others do and sacrifice a lot more, some even their lives.

My crew was alerted yesterday to find that our mission had changed. We were now a backup to a high priority mission originating from Afghanistan. When I asked where we would be going the answer was "*back to the states*". Later I learned our destination was Dover. I was the aircraft commander for one of two C-17s that transferred the Chinook helicopter crash soldiers back home. The crew that started this mission in Afghanistan would end up running out of crew duty days and needed another crew to continue the soldier's journey. We just happened to be available.

After being alerted and going through our normal sequence, I found myself at the foot of the aircraft steps. Before I took my first step upward I noticed a transfer case close to the door. I had only seen one in pictures. The American Flag was tucked smartly, folded and

secured on top. I paused at the bottom of the stairs, took a deep breath and continued up with my mind and eyes focusing on making it to the next ladder leading to the cockpit. However, as I entered, I couldn't help but notice the remaining nineteen transfer cases in the cargo compartment. The entire cargo compartment was filled with identical transfer cases with American Flags.

I made my way up to the cockpit and received a briefing from the previous aircraft commander. After the briefing we exchanged a handshake and the other pilot was on his way. I felt a need to ensure the crew focused on their normal duties. I instructed the other two pilots to begin the preflight. I went back down into the cargo compartment to see what needed to be done and find the paperwork I needed to sign. The cargo compartment was now filled with numerous people from the mortuary affairs squadron. They were busy adjusting, resetting and overall preparing the cases for their continued flight. Before they began I asked who was in charge because I knew there was paperwork I needed to sign. I finally found a Staff Sergeant who was working an issue with the paperwork. After it was complete, he brought it up to the cockpit for me to review and sign.



**Petty Officer First Class Michael Strange died serving his country. Strange was one of 31 U.S. special operations troops who died when insurgents struck their helicopter in the Wardak province of Afghanistan late Friday. His family says it is still hard to believe. They find comfort in memory. "He was intense, he was funny, he had that dry humor," said his father, Charles Strange.**

(continued....)



There are moments in life I will never forget. For me, it's the days my son and daughter were born. Another occurred five months ago when I had to deliver the unthinkable news to a mother that her son was killed in Afghanistan and although I didn't anticipate another day like that this soon, yesterday was another. I looked at the paperwork I was signing and realized the magnitude of the day. I glanced over the paperwork and signed. In a way, I felt I had taken ownership of these fallen soldiers. It was now my duty to ensure they make it home.



**Loyal to the end ... Hawkeye lies beside the coffin of US Navy SEAL Jon Tumilson during his funeral.**

(Photo: Facebook)

After confirming the preflight was complete and the aircraft was fueled, I went outside to start my walk-around. As I walked down the steps, a bus had parked in front of the aircraft and unloaded eleven passengers. The passengers were fellow SEAL team members who were escorting the fallen back to the states. I stood at the front of the aircraft and watched them board. Every one of them walked off the bus with focus in their eyes and determination in their steps; just as I imagine they do when they go on a mission. I made eye contact with the lead SEAL, nodded my head in respect and he nodded back.

Finishing my walk-around, I stopped at the bottom of the stairs. I looked up into the cargo compartment; two American Flags and one SEAL Team Six flag hung from the top of the cargo compartment. Three of twenty transfer cases visible; one with an American Flag and two with Afghan flags. I looked up at my aircraft and saw, "United States Air Force" painted on the side and I stood trying to take it all in. I wanted to make certain that I never forget these images. That I never forget the faces of the SEALs, the smell of the cargo compartment

or the sun slowly rising over the landscape. It's important that I don't forget. We need to honor the dead, honor the sacrifice of the fallen.

I understand my role in getting these fallen soldiers home is insignificant compared to the lives they lived and the things they did for our country. Most of it we will never know. All I know is every American should see what I've seen. Every American should see the bus loads of families as they exit the freeway headed for Dover AFB to reunite with their fallen or witness the amount of time, effort, people and equipment that go into ensuring our fallen have a honorable return.

The very next day we took the same aircraft back overseas. We had leveled the aircraft at our cruise altitude and I walked down to the cargo compartment. No more American Flags hung from the ceiling. All the transfer cases were gone. Instead I watched a father lay with his son, cradled on his chest, on the same spot that only yesterday held a fallen soldier. I watched a young girl, clutching a teddy bear, sleeping quietly where the fallen had laid. I realized so many Americans have no idea where the fallen lay. I'm honored to be one that does.

[Sent in by Jaime Castillo, C/2/503d]



# SPECT brain scans help Army doctors "see" traumatic brain injuries

by Kurt Niland

When Spc. James Saylor, a 31-year-old father of two, returned home from Afghanistan, he didn't believe at first that his short temper, vivid nightmares, and short-term memory loss could be the result of a concussion he suffered after a mortar exploded near him. After all, traditional CT scans and MRIs showed a normal brain unaffected by contusions, bruises, and other physical injuries.



But such is the nature of concussions, which are mild forms of traumatic brain injury (TBI) that can have severe and lasting effects if ignored, repeated, or not properly treated. Concussions and many other forms of TBI usually leave no physical trace on the brain, making diagnosis elusive and treatment tricky, especially when initial symptoms may be too subtle to recognize, even to the victim.

Faced with a record number of soldiers returning home from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars with TBI (estimated to be at least 200,000 in the last decade), military doctors are quickly learning more about recognizing and treating these injuries.

Armed with a better understanding of TBI, Mr. Saylor's doctors turned to a single-photon emission computerized tomography (SPECT) scan, an imaging procedure normally used to study dementia and Alzheimer's disease in the brain. The color SPECT scans revealed the blood flow (perfusion) to Mr. Saylor's temporal lobes was diminished.

Maj. Andrew Fong, the Army radiologist treating Mr. Saylor at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, told the Associated Press that normally in younger patients he could expect to see a lot of perfusion in the brain "because their brains are fresh." But SPECT images he ran on soldiers returning from war with concussions revealed the disturbing truth: "We are seeing these guys with decreased perfusion and they are in their 20s," Dr. Fong told the AP.

According to the AP, when Dr. Fong discussed the scans with Dr. David Twillie, director of Fort Campbell's brain injury center, "they wondered whether the scans

were showing them the effects of a blast injury." Fong said that the temporal lobes are positioned behind the eye sockets on either side of the brain and thus are in the path of the shockwaves produced by the blast. "We are thinking maybe that is related," Fong told the AP.

Unfortunately, Fort Campbell is just one of only two military bases that use the SPECT scan to study the effects of TBI in combat veterans, but that may soon change as military physicians make more headway in understanding TBI. And as doctors get a more complete picture of TBI, their patients get a better understanding of their injury and how to cope with it.

"When I first came in, I was like, 'Why am I going through this program?'" Mr. Saylor told the AP. "I've had a concussion before when I was younger, playing football."

Now, Mr. Saylor has some valuable tools in coping with dramatic mood swings and cognitive difficulties, including a Smartphone application that enables him to monitor and better control his temper.

According to the AP, "When he starts to get upset and lose focus, he pulls out his phone and starts tapping the screen in time with his breathing." "It's just deep breathing," Mr. Saylor told the AP. "I use that breathing technique to concentrate and clear my mind."

Source: [http://articles.philly.com/2011-05-23/news/29574572\\_1\\_scans-brain-injuries-blood-flow/2](http://articles.philly.com/2011-05-23/news/29574572_1_scans-brain-injuries-blood-flow/2)

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

**In Doc Scott's own words, "Finally, after all these years." And when did Doc Scott brief the DoD Center of Excellence in DC on SPECT? May, 2008.**  
Ed

## A Question Raised

While without question the young troops in the Middle East continue to suffer an overwhelming number of blast-related injuries (TBI), it raises the question of how many Vietnam vets were similarly injured and have gone undiagnosed or misdiagnosed all these years?

"TBI can cause a host of physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral effects, and outcome can range from complete recovery to permanent disability or death." Some of these symptoms seem to parallel PTSD. Ed

