



December 2011, Issue 35

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~ 173d Photo of the Month ~



Sky Soldiers

(Photo by Horst Faas)



2/503d **VIETNAM** Newsletter / December 2011 – Issue 35

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Chaplain's Corner



The Leapin' Deacon

GOSPEL: ST. LUKE 2: 8-14

There were shepherds camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said,

“Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, A Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger.”

At once the angel was joined by a huge and angelic choir singing God's praises: Glory to God in the heavenly heights, Peace to all men and women on earth who please Him.

Dear Stalwart Sky Soldiers, Families and Friends:

A most meaningful and joyous Advent, Hanukkah, and Christmas to you and to all your cherished family members and friends.

This is a special season of the heart and the centerpiece of meaning, purpose and reason why. The great Logo therapist, Dr. Viktor Frankl, wrote a special little book, *“Search for Meaning.”* His center thought and guide for action is:

“If I have a reason why, I can put up with **anyhow.**”

This is a tremendous and captivating thought and guide for giving a person and a family reason to live and to care for oneself and others. Coming back to the theme that this is the Season of the Heart, our Lord God only asks for our hearts. WOW! What a splendid relief! Our Lord will settle for the heart. The only rub centers in the Lord's definition of the heart. If only He might mean a sweet sentiment, a holy and pious mood, or even a

sincere tear. However, you cannot read Holy Scripture without the deep suspicion developing and growing that He is on the path of something far more when He declares, ***“My son, my daughter, give me your heart.”***

He is clearly asking for your ALL. Indeed, He will not settle for less and the Holy Spirit calls us to surrender ALL – to give Him our ALL and best day in and day out, on good days and tough and difficult days. It is the vibrant nature of a living faith to give him ALL: yes, your great and praying heart.

The faith life means to trust Him in all things and in turn to give Him ALL, including your thankful heart. To trust means, *“to put your entire weight of your entire person upon Him,”* and to be jubilantly blessed, particularly during this wondrous season of Advent, Hanukkah, and Christmas. The Lord bless your heart now and forever in His saving and exciting presence and person.

Blessings in our Gracious God, Redeemer Jesus, and the calling Holy Spirit.



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



Connie, ministering to his soldiers in Vietnam.



Helmet Bath

1966 opened for 2/503 with *Operation Marauder*, a brigade operation that was a real change from what we had been used to. Previously we had operated mostly in the jungle. But Marauder was in the northern Mekong Delta – flat rice paddies and sugar cane fields, barren of trees except along the dikes which separated the fields. Irrigation canals crisscrossed the area carrying water to the rice fields, and though no crops had been planted for several years, the rice fields were still muddy from rain which had ceased a few weeks earlier.

On January 2d we had fought a day long battle, ending with our seizure of a dike line where the VC had been holding us up all day. That night the VC withdrew from the area. The next day, January 3d, we were given the mission to push on to the Vam Co Dong River, a few kilometers to the Southwest. We arrived at our objective in late afternoon, after crossing muddy fields and numerous canals up to our waists in muddy water. As we closed in on our objective, the companies were deployed into a perimeter and started to dig in. We set up the Battalion CP on a dike next to an abandoned sugar cane field, and I called for the company commanders to come to the CP for a meeting later in the afternoon.



IHC troops watch air strikes from paddy dike, 2 Jan 66
(Photo by George Dexter)

Since I had about an hour before the meeting, I decided that this would be a good time to take a bath. I was filthy from having lain in muddy water for several hours during the battle the day before, from struggling through the mucky fields all day and crossing the muddy canals. The cane field beside the CP had not been used for years, but there were still enough dead stalks standing that I felt I could find some privacy there. So I filled my helmet with water, got a bar of soap and a clean

set of jungle fatigues, undershorts and socks from my rucksack, and went out into the cane field. There I stripped, carefully laid my clean and dirty clothes around me, and started to lather up.



Jan '66, near Vam Co Dong River, 2/503d troops crossing canal during Operation Marauder. SGM Mish in foreground, last man in the water is RTO Smith (editor of newsletter), others unidentified. (Photo by George Dexter)

What I did not know, and should have, was that the battalion helipad had been laid out right beside the cane field. All of a sudden a chopper came right over my head – not ten feet up – blew down all the cane stalks, picked up my clothes – dirty and clean – and threw them all over the place. So here was the battalion commander running around all over the field buck naked trying to gather up his clothes. Not exactly a picture of dignity.

As it turned out, the chopper was full of correspondents. One of them, a reporter from a Los Angeles newspaper, wrote a story about this man running around naked in a field looking for his clothes. Luckily, he didn't use my name!

Col. George E. Dexter, US Army (Ret)
Commander
2d Battalion (Airborne)
503d Infantry Regiment
173d Airborne Brigade (Sep)
August 1964 to February 1966

Note: This great story by the Commander first appeared in Issue 1 of our newsletter in 2009, when our total circulation was to about 300 Sky Soldiers. Today, our newsletter is published on two web sites, forwarded to others' email lists, and is emailed to over 1500 Sky Soldiers and friends of the 173d, making the story worthy of reprinting here. Now, I heard the Emperor had no clothes, but..... Ed



More troops lost to suicide

By John Donnelly
Congress.org

For the second year in a row, the U.S. military has lost more troops to suicide than it has to combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The reasons are complicated and the accounting uncertain -- for instance, should returning soldiers who take their own lives after being mustered out be included? But the suicide rate is a further indication of the stress that military personnel live under after nearly a decade of war.



Figures released by the armed services last week showed an alarming increase in suicides in 2010, but those figures leave out some categories.

Overall, the services reported 434 suicides by personnel on active duty, significantly more than the 381 suicides by active-duty personnel reported in 2009. The 2010 total is below the 462 deaths in combat, excluding accidents and illness. In 2009, active-duty suicides exceeded deaths in battle.

Last week's figures, though, understate the problem of military suicides because the services do not report the statistics uniformly. Several do so only reluctantly. Figures reported by each of the services last week, for instance, include suicides by members of the Guard and Reserve who were on active duty at the time. The Army and the Navy also add up statistics for certain reservists who kill themselves when they are not on active duty. But the Air Force and Marine Corps do not include any non-mobilized reservists in their posted numbers. What's more, none of the services count suicides that occur among a class of reservists known as the Individual Ready Reserve, the more than 123,000 people who are not assigned to particular units.

Suicides by veterans who have left the service entirely after serving in Iraq and Afghanistan also are not counted by the Defense Department. The Department of Veterans Affairs keeps track of such suicides only if the person was enrolled in the VA health care system — which three-quarters of veterans are not. But even if such veterans and members of the Individual Ready Reserve are excluded from the suicide statistics, just taking into account the deaths of reservists who were not

included in last week's figures pushes the number of suicides last year to at least 468.

That total includes some Air Force and Marine Corps reservists who took their own lives while not on active duty, and it exceeds the 462 military personnel killed in battle.

The problem of reservists' suicides, in particular, has been a major concern to some lawmakers. A Pentagon study this year confirmed that reservists lack the support structure that active-duty troops have.

Some types of reservists are more cut off than others. Rep. Rush D. Holt, a New Jersey Democrat, says that members of the Individual Ready Reserve and other categories of citizen-soldiers do not receive a thorough screening for mental health issues when they return from deployments. One of those soldiers, a constituent of Holt's named Coleman S. Bean, was an Army sergeant and Iraq War veteran who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder but could not find treatment. He took his own life in 2008.

Moved by Bean's story, Holt wrote a bill requiring phone contacts with these reservists every 90 days after they come home from war. The House adopted Holt's provision as part of its defense authorization bills for both fiscal 2010 and fiscal 2011. But conferees writing the final version of the bills took it out both years. Holt said in December that Arizona Republican Sen. John McCain was responsible for that decision in the most recent bill. A spokeswoman for McCain, Brooke Buchanan, would not state his position on the provision. Instead, she said House members had removed it. A House Armed Services Committee spokeswoman, Jennifer Kohl, said the House reluctantly pulled the provision from the bill because of the opposition of senators, whom she did not name.

Holt said a fuller reckoning of the number of suicides among military personnel and veterans is needed not so much to tell lawmakers and the public that there is a problem — that, he says, they know. Rather, it is needed to more accurately gauge the extent to which programs to help troubled troops are having an effect.

"In order to know whether the steps we've taken work," Holt said, "we're going to have to have more detailed knowledge of who's out there."

This report appeared on the web site of Congress.org, a nonpartisan news and information web site devoted to encouraging civic participation.



2/503d Vietnam Vet Sky Soldier of the Year 2011

All nominations for 2/503d Vietnam Vet Sky Soldier of the Year 2011 have been received and are being considered by the selection committee. The committee comprises three officers and three enlisted men of our Battalion who served in different years in-country and with different companies.

Having read each nomination it is clear they are faced with a most difficult decision as all men nominated are, in my opinion, deserving of this special recognition.

2/503d Sky Soldier of the Year 2010 was Colonel Ken Smith in recognition of his never-ending, ongoing support of paratroopers of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep).

The 2/503d Sky Soldier of the Year 2011 will be announced in the January 2012 issue of our newsletter.

All The Way!

Willie Pitts Jr. Parkway



Jack Owens, A/B/2/503d, standing on the Willie Pitts Jr. Parkway in Albany, GA, Willie's hometown. Jack says, "Willie Pitts was my platoon sergeant in Sept. 1966. He was Paragon Alpha 35. He retired a Major, died in 2005. Best NCO and best soldier I ever knew."

~ VIETNAM TRIVIA ~



Re: Robert Stack's visit to Dak To

Might be a little trivia question for your next issue. Stack was accompanied by a lesser known female television star when I met him, and her, at Dak To. Who was she?

A little hint: The comedy TV show about a fictitious cavalry unit she co-starred in was cancelled in 1967 and the main stars were Forrest Tucker, Larry Storch and Ken Berry.

Just wondered if anybody would remember. She was hot.

Jim Wilson
C/2/503d

"To be a good soldier, you must love the army. To be a good commander, you must be willing to order the death of the thing you love."

- Robert E. Lee



SFC Robert Howard (Col.) A Green Beret



Bob Howard, America's most decorated soldier, died last December and I am honored to pass along some of his story taken from the book *SOG The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam*, by John L Plaster.

Bob Howard was nominated for the Medal of Honor on three separate occasions within a 13-month period yet very few people in America have ever heard of him. At the time of his award of the Medal of Honor by President Nixon, no newspaper or TV station carried the news. American citizens, to their everlasting shame, were not interested. Bob first served in Vietnam as a paratrooper with the 101st Airborne Division. While recuperating from a wound, he was recruited by Special Forces soldiers who were also recovering from their own wounds. Bob joined the Special Forces and volunteered to serve with SOG, the Special Forces unit that conducted secret missions into Laos and Cambodia.

One night, he ran alongside an enemy truck full of NVA soldiers, tossed a claymore mine inside and detonated it. Another time, he saw two VC riding a motor scooter toss a grenade at a GI chow line. He grabbed an M-16 rifle from a security guard, killed the driver and chased the passenger for a half-mile and killed him too. No award for these actions.

In November 1967, on a mission in Laos, he encountered 4 NVA and killed all with one magazine of ammunition. His team became pinned down by a camouflaged machine-gun Bunker. He crawled toward the bunker, killed a sniper along the way, then rushed the machine-gun nest and killed all its occupants at point blank range with his M-16. He immediately came under fire from another machine-gun position. He killed its occupants with a hand grenade. When more NVA took over the

machine-gun position, he destroyed the position with a LAW rocket launcher. His one-man attack caused the NVA to abandon the area. He was recommended for the Medal of Honor, but received the Distinguished Service Cross instead.

November 1968 in Laos, although hit with shrapnel from an RPG rocket in the back and legs, he crawled forward and destroyed an NVA tank. He dragged two wounded lieutenants to safety. Although wounded twice, he dashed 300 yards to a downed helicopter, picked up an injured door-gunner and ran back to safety through a hail of enemy bullets. At daybreak, he was hit again in the back and legs in 14 places by razor-like RPG rocket fragments embedded in his flesh. Like a crazed wounded lion, he charged the enemy and killed two and captured a third. The prisoner told them that they were surrounded by a battalion and an entire NVA regiment, only 3 miles away, was moving toward them. They couldn't be extracted until the next day, if they lasted through the night. They stacked dead bodies around them like sandbags for protection from enemy bullets.

At daybreak, the NVA unleashed a heavy barrage of mortars and RPG's, but air strikes kept the NVA infantry back. A 37mm antiaircraft gun only 600 yards away threatened to prevent helicopters from landing. Howard crept within 100 yards of the gun and killed the entire crew with M-79 40mm grenades. Again he was recommended for the Medal of Honor, but the award was downgraded to a Silver Star.



SFC Robert Howard (front left) in Vietnam with some of the guys - MACVSOG (CCC). SGT Chuck Erickson (RT Colorado) is standing behind at far left. Erickson was later on the Son Tay Raid "Blueboy Element" chopper with Dick Meadows. (Photo courtesy John Plaster)

(continued....)





Col. Robert Howard Medal of Honor recipient

Three weeks later, he volunteered for a prisoner snatch operation into Laos. On insertion, his team of 10 were attacked by 100 NVA. Bullets poured into the helicopter from 3 directions. An ARVN (South Vietnamese) officer was killed, the door-gunner and pilot were wounded. Only Howard and another Green Beret were not hit. They saw two Soviet helicopters under camouflage nets and the NVA all-out assault was intended to kill the team before they could get a radio message off. It was a shootout beneath the still spinning rotor of the helicopter. Some NVA got within 15 yards of the Huey before being killed. One Green Beret was shot three times before falling to the ground unconscious. Howard and the other Green Beret killed dozens of the NVA, got the wounded man into the Huey and the pilot was able to lift off. Air strikes were called in to destroy the enemy helicopters. Howard received no award for this action.

Three weeks later, Howard went into Cambodia with a 40-man platoon to search for a missing Green Beret. As they climbed the hill where his emergency radio beacon was transmitting, an explosion from a Chinese claymore mine knocked Howard unconscious, knocked his rifle away and shredded his fingers. When he came to he saw an NVA soldier 10 feet away spraying a flamethrower on dead bodies. Howard grabbed a grenade and got to his knees as the NVA turned and spotted him. Howard pulled the pin and shook the grenade at the NVA taunting him. The NVA soldier turned and walked away. Howard was too badly wounded to stand so he crawled to another unconscious Green Beret and started dragging him down hill. With no weapon he hid the Green Beret in thick brush and crept downhill. An NVA jumped up firing at him, hitting his ammo pouch setting off an M-16 cartridge with such force that Howard was tossed the last few yards down the slope landing beside an American NCO. They went back up the hill killing a number of NVA and started dragging the Green Beret downhill. Heavy enemy fire and massed NVA caused them to abandon the Green Beret once more. Again they

went back for him and finally got him in friendly hands. By nightfall, only twenty or so men were left and Howard no longer expected to get out alive.

During the night the platoon repelled numerous NVA assaults. Twice Howard called gunship fire through his own position. By 4 a.m., they were almost out of ammunition and Howard was almost too exhausted and injured to think. An unusual night extraction caught the NVA by surprise and they were able to get out, but some bodies had to be left behind. For this action, he finally received the Medal of Honor.



Bob Howard buried at Arlington Cemetery

Where does America get such men? We are so fortunate that these men choose to serve in our military. In another time, books and movies would have been made about Bob Howard. At the very least, I can help pass along his story and I hope many of you will do the same. Read the book about other SOG missions that will just blow your mind.

Robert Millner
A/2/503d





**Office of the
Honorary Colonel
503rd Infantry
Regiment**

2 November 2011

MEMORANDUM FOR:

Distinguished and Honorary Members,
503d Infantry Regiment
SUBJECT: Update

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Veterans Day is fast approaching, and although we think of our deployed warriors every day, we often fail to remember those vast scores of Americans who have served our nation in both peace and war. It matters not whether veterans served three years or thirty, or were deployed to combat zones or never left CONUS. All are worthy of our admiration and our gratitude.

I have attached letters from our forward deployed commanders. Note that Brigade Commander Colonel Andy Rohling's message informs that Sky Soldiers will deploy again to Afghanistan in the early summer of 2012. My understanding of the current deployment schedule is that tours will be limited to nine months as opposed to 12-15 month deployments that were common in the past.

Some news about some of our brothers in Arms: Colonel Kevin Owens retired in July and is currently employed as a DA Civilian in Vicenza. COL Bill Ostlund surrendered his position as Deputy Commander of the Ranger Regiment and is currently ensconced at the Fletcher School, Tufts University. There will be an article in Vanity Fair magazine in the not too distant future about the Battle of Wanat. Bill provided some pictures for the article and donated the proceeds to the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation. Former Battalion Commanders Mark Stammer (2-503) and Tim McGuire (1-508 and now 1-503) were recently selected for promotion to Brigadier General.

The 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation recently launched an initiative to provide a \$300,000.00 endowment fund for the Memorial. Called the *Spartan Club*, the program is predicated on limited donations by 300 or more "*Spartan Warriors*" over ten years. For more information on the Memorial Foundation's Spartan Club and how you can participate, please visit the Foundation Website at www.173dairbornememorial.org.

Best wishes for a meaningful and joyous Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday.

Kenneth V. Smith

COL, USA (Ret)

Honorary Colonel, 503rd Infantry Regiment



Sky Soldiers:

It is a great honor to return to the 173rd Airborne Brigade and honestly quite humbling to be the Commander of such a storied organization. This Brigade has proven itself on both the Fields of Battle and during times of peace. As we prepare ourselves for yet another deployment, again to Afghanistan, I would like to assure you that today's Sky Soldiers are committed, trained and ready to complete the mission and uphold the standards expected by themselves, the 173rd Association, the Army and most importantly the people of the United States.

Like always, the Brigade is moving 100 mph. Since returning in June, we have sent a company to the Ukraine, the entire Brigade to Grafenwohr Germany, and a company to Poland. PFC Travis Williams from 2-503IN was selected by the USAREUR Commander and CSM as the United States Army Europe Soldier of the Year and will represent both the Brigade and USAREUR in the U.S Army Soldier of the Year competition in Washington next month. Another standout is SGT Rolfe from 4-319AFAR who was the Distinguished honor graduate of Air Assault School in August. These are but a few of the highlights of the last few months, much more can be found at our website at <http://www.173airborne.army.mil/index.htm>

The next couple of months hardly bring a break for the Brigade. We head to Hohenfels, Germany and the Joint Maneuver Readiness Center for the month of October to conduct a Full Spectrum Training Rotation. This event will commence with the first Brigade size Airborne Operation since our jump into Iraq in 2003. Here we will face both a near peer and unconventional enemy in a scenario that will force the Brigade to not only utilize the lessons gained during the last four Iraq/Afghanistan deployments but to recall the large scale conventional tactics so common prior to the War on Terror. It will surely be a great training event.

We will spend Nov-Dec recovering and retraining before kicking off our pre-deployment training events in Jan-Feb 2012. After loading our equipment and preparing our families, we will deploy to Afghanistan in early Summer 2012. There are sure to be exciting times ahead.

Again, it is an honor to be back in the Brigade. I look forward to the next two years as part of the team and a continued relationship with the Association.

Colonel Andrew Rohling
"Bayonet 6"



Dear Fellow Paratroopers, friends, and families of the 503d Infantry Association:

It is my sincere privilege to write to each of you as the Commander of the FIRST ROCK Battalion. I most recently served at US Special Operations Command and assumed command of 1-503d on June 3d, 2011. Until now, I had never served in the 173d ABCT or in Vicenza, Italy so I have been overwhelmed and impressed with the pride and amazing lineage of such a prestigious unit. I am very proud to be a part of this organization and feel as though I have won the lottery to be selected to command this exemplary outfit.

It is an exciting time to serve in the First Rock! I assumed command at the close of the Army Forces Generation Cycle I (ARFORGEN I) for the 173d ABCT, meaning that the Brigade's 180-day post-deployment window was complete and the moratorium on overnight and collective training was lifted effective June 1st. Since then, the Battalion has deployed to Grafenwoehr, Germany for Expert Infantryman Badge training and testing, for individual and collective live-fire training densities, and the 173d ABCT just returned from the first Full Spectrum Training Environment (FSTE) Rotation at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany since about 2002. This event was very significant for the Battalion, the Brigade, and the Army, as this construct forms the basis for training operational units on the new model of operating in an expeditionary environment against a hybrid enemy threat. 11 nations brought parts of their armies and air forces to participate and to see how the mighty US Army and 173d ABCT prepare our soldiers for "the next war." Some aspects were very familiar to high-intensity conflict and force-on-force operations against a near-peer military force, others smacked of counter-insurgency tactics, while other aspects bent the rules and mindsets of how future warfare might be conducted. It was very challenging and rewarding to say the least. During this rotation, First Rock Paratroopers inserted by parachute assault constituting over half of the 1000-man Brigade assault force, and culminated our last mission with a Battalion (-) air assault.

On November 28th, we will conduct a Battalion Change of Responsibility Ceremony between outgoing SGM Michael D. Williamson, who has been my faithful airborne buddy since I arrived and will go to Fort Benning, Georgia to assume CSM duties, and incoming CSM Mickey R. Rutledge, who arrives to us from US Army Pacific. As we prepare for combat yet again, the Battalion team continues to build fidelity while ensuring our paratroopers and their families are balanced with all the competing demands of a high training operational tempo. This Brigade's fourth Afghanistan deployment since 2006 is on the horizon, and our First Rock Team grows stronger with each training event and new leaders' arrival. The State of the Battalion is great and we will strive to make our 503rd Infantry Regiment veterans proud. Thank you for your continued patronage of the unit and our nation's military. Proud to serve!

Sky Soldiers! First Rock!

"EAGLE 6"

Jeremy J. Schroeder
Lieutenant Colonel, Infantry
Commanding



Friends of The ROCK:

It is an honor to introduce myself as the new Battalion Commander of 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry. I am extremely proud to join CSM Mike Ferrusi as part of the command team. I assumed command of the battalion on 02 JUN 2011 and I am extremely humbled to have the opportunity to serve in the regiment. There is nowhere else I would rather be! Despite my pride of my past service in other units, it is very tough to compete with the esprit and amazing lineage of the 503rd Infantry Regiment.

As we prepare for combat yet again, the battalion will maintain a high training OPTEMPO until next Spring. Since I joined the Sky Soldiers of 2nd Battalion we have executed EIB training and multiple deployments up to Germany for collective live fire training. Soon we will execute US Army Europe's first Full Spectrum Operations (FSO) rotation at JMRC. Earlier this summer we executed Expert Infantryman's Badge (EIB) training. Our EIB candidates had a very high success rate and the CSM and I were most pleased with the high amount of PVTs and PFCs who were awarded their EIBs. This is a great indicator of the future superb young NCO population for this battalion; our future is bright!

As we look ahead, we prepare ourselves for our fourth Afghanistan deployment since 2006. The CSM and I are confident the 2nd Battalion Sky Soldiers will display amazing resiliency again and successfully accomplish the myriad of difficult combat tasks that our Nation asks of us. We will continue to strive to make our 503rd Infantry Regiment veterans proud.

Sky Soldiers! The ROCK!

"ROCK 6"

MICHAEL M. LARSEN
LTC, IN
Commanding



"Members of the 173d Airborne Brigade jump out of a military airplane during a training in Hohenfels, southern Germany, on Wednesday, Oct. 5, 2011. Some 1,500 US paratroops have jumped over the Hohenfels training area in a massive airborne training operation."
(AP Photo/Matthias Schrader)



A call to honor: Veteran remembers fierce fight, lost friends

By Donna Jones
Santa Cruz Sentinel



On left, Steve Welch in Dak To, Vietnam, 1967.



Steve's dad, Harold



Father and son, combat vets....soldiering on together.

SANTA CRUZ — Steve Welch has carried a bullet in his spine for more than four decades, a souvenir from his tour of duty in Vietnam.

But it's the memories he holds in his head that hurt. Welch, who served in the U.S. Army's 173d Airborne Brigade, fought in one of the deadliest battles of the war. Today, as America honors its veterans, that experience gives Welch special insight into their sacrifice.

"Sometimes you can't know what a person's been through just by looking at them," said Welch, 64. Welch, a Santa Cruz High School graduate, enlisted in the Army. His father, Harold, knowing something of putting your life on the line from his service in Gen. George Patton's 3rd Army during World War II, tried to talk his son out of becoming a soldier.

"I said, 'son, you're going to see things you've never seen before,'" said Harold Welch, 87. *"Some things you'll never forget."*

His father proved right about the psychic scars, but Welch couldn't ignore the call of duty. *"I felt that we had dues to pay for living in a free country,"* he said.

Welch arrived in Vietnam in January 1967, and was a battle-seasoned sergeant by Nov. 19 when he and 329 other members of the brigade's 2nd Battalion were ordered to take part in an assault on Hill 875 in Kontum Province.

As he and his squad headed up the mountain, Welch noticed humps he suspected were enemy bunkers. He grew uneasy and before leaving the shelter of trees radioed his concerns to a commanding officer, who told the men to go forward.

As the soldiers advanced in the open, they came under heavy fire. With no cover, they were cut down by an enemy protected by trenches and bunkers shored up with stout logs. Before long, Welch was surrounded by the dead and wounded. Intense fighting prevented helicopters from evacuating the injured and resupplying survivors. Worse, from downhill came the sound of weapons, a sign that they were surrounded.

By nightfall, most of their officers were dead, and the nightmare was just beginning. As dark fell, a U.S. pilot dropped a 500-pound bomb on the American lines. More than 40 U.S. soldiers perished, and many more were wounded. Lying in shallow trenches dug with their helmets, the remaining soldiers fought on. By the time relief arrived late the next day, more than a quarter of the soldiers in the 2nd battalion had been killed.

"I lost a lot of friends on that hill," Welch said.

Just before he left Vietnam in January 1968, a fellow soldier accidentally shot Welch while cleaning his gun. The bullet lodged in his spine, and he went numb below the waist. But Welch's body recovered from the trauma of the hit and feeling returned, though the bullet was not removed.

The emotional numbness he felt during the battle for Hill 875 lasted much longer. It wasn't until the 1990s that Welch sought help. A therapist encouraged him to put his feelings down on paper, and Welch began to write poetry.

"Just want it to end, memories of all those lost friends," he wrote. *"How can one year of your life, 44 years later still haunt you at night?"*



After visiting *The Wall* in Washington D.C., Steve Welch wrote this poem

Washington Memorial

Many families beckon to its call.
As they travel many miles to see this black granite wall.
Many sons and daughters live in this place.
Mothers cry, as they will never again see their loved ones faces.

Standing there touching the many names.
Remembering the soldiers at the door who came.
A father wept as part of him died.
Welling up inside feeling all the loss and pride.

Wives can remember his tender touch.
Because of how she loved him so very much.
She looks at her grown-up children and starts to weep.
Because the pain of his death went so deep.

A small girl kneels to place a card to be sent.
Turns to her mother and says, *"Is this where grandpa lives?"*
Her mother starts to cry as the tears roll down her face.
"Yes honey this is my father's and many others honored place."

The young men and women who never knew their dad.
Grew up without his love and guidance, which was sad.
Many women also died in this horrible War.
And they are remembered deeply in the Wall's Core.

Many Veterans' brothers fill the walkways' path.
Hugging and crying thinking of those days in the past.
Searching for names of the ones they will always miss.
Showing all the emotions and respect as they read the Wall's list.

Thousands of grateful tears have fallen on this path.
There will never come a day when we will see the last.
For this is what happens when a War ends.
As the honored young men and women are remembered by family and friends.



A 2/503d trooper ready for his combat jump in Vietnam, February 22, 1967, as French photo-journalist Catherine Leroy prepares to snap a photo. The late Catherine Leroy also made the combat jump with the 173d.

(Photo by Steve Welch)

WHAT PILOTS SEE WHEN LANDING AT OFFUTT AIR FORCE BASE

A farmer does this with his tractor. He uses GPS to get the letters readable. He has done this every fall for several years now. Here's the view from the flight pattern into Offutt Air Force Base, Bellevue, NE just south of Omaha. This is what our servicemen and women see when landing at the base. Hat tip to the Bellevue farmer who made it happen!



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

A Quick Look at Veterans' Issues By The Numbers

Sent in by "Sgt. Rock" Steve Vargo, C/2/503d

950

Number of suicide attempts per month among veterans receiving care at VA.

700,000

Number of troops who have been deployed to war zone twice or more.

77%

Of troops have shot or directed fire at the enemy.

86%

Of troops who know someone who was seriously injured or killed.

13.5%

Unemployment rate for female veterans of the long-running wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

15 per 100,000

Number of female veterans who commit suicide when downrange.

[Source: *American Veteran*, Fall 2001 issue]



Reunions of the Airborne Kind



517 PRCT Florida Mini-Reunion, January 14 - 16, 2012, Ramada Hotel & Inn Gateway, Kissimmee, FL.

Contact:

Brenda Verbeck Mortensen

Phn: 813-335-8002

Eml: bverbeck@gmail.com



101st Airborne, 2012 Snowbird Reunion. February 15 - 18, 2012. The Doubletree Hotel, Tampa, FL.
Hosted by the 101st Florida Gulf Coast and Sunshine State Chapters.

Contact:

Web: www.101abnfgcc.org



82nd Airborne Div., Winter Weekend Getaway, February 24 - 26, 2012, Hilton Head Marriott Resort & Spa, Hilton Head, SC, hosted by Ben Vandervoort Chapter.

Contact:

Bill Eberle

Phn: 843-682-4171

Eml: airborneben#hargray.com



A Company 2/327, 101st Airborne, Vietnam Veterans 2012 Gathering. April 26 - 28, 2012, The Marten House Hotel, Indianapolis, IN,

Contact:

Dennis Sheridan

Phn: 817-504-1750



2012 Currahee Reunion, 3rd Battalion 506th Infantry Regiment (Airborne), May 2 - 5, 2012. Hilton Garden Inn, Columbus, GA

Contact:

Hoyt Bruce Moore, III

Web: www.506infantry.org/reunion.htm



Recon, HHC, 2/503 '66-'67 is having a reunion in Lexington, Kentucky the same days as the 173d Association annual reunion next June. So far, about 12 members have indicated they will attend. Watch this space for details to follow.



173d Airborne Brigade Association Annual Reunion, June 6 - 10, 2012, Lexington, Kentucky hosted by Chapter 17. See early notice on Pages 13-16.

Contact:

Dave Carmon

Eml: dcarmon@roadrunner.com

Web: www.skysoldier17.com



Casper Platoon Reunion 2012, June 28 - 30 & July 1, 2012, Hilton San Francisco Financial District, San Francisco, CA

Contact:

Steve Greene

Reunion Chairman

Web: greenaire@mac.com

Note: If you're aware of any upcoming Airborne reunions please send details to: rto173d@cfl.rr.com



The 2012 173d Reunion

Lexington, KY

June 6 -10, 2012

Hosted By Chapter 17

Room rate 115.00 plus tax per night with Free Parking

New Registration fees:

Sky Soldiers 99.00

Spouses & Guests 75.00

Gold Star 75.00

Children free - unless attending Reunion dinner

The Hyatt is taking reservations now.

Call 800.233.1234

Ask for the 173 Airborne guestroom block or code G-173A.

Also use this code when making reservations on-line
at the Lexington-Hyatt website - www.lexington.hyatt.com

Information and Forms will be posted soon at www.skysoldier.org and www.Skysoldier17.com



~ REUNION PROGRAM ~

Hosted by Midwest Chapter 17



June 6 - Wednesday

0900 – 1700 Registration @ Lobby
0900 – 2230 Hospitality @ Hyttops Sports Bar
0900 – 2300 Vendors @ Kentucky Room
1800 – 2000 President's Reception @ Jasmine-Franklin

June 7 - Thursday

0700 – 1230 Golf Outing TBA GC
0900 – 1700 Registration @ Lobby
0900 – 2300 Vendors @ Kentucky Room
0900 – 2330 Hospitality @ Hyttops Sports Bar

June 8 - Friday

0830 – 1030 Gold Star Reception & Breakfast @ Regency 1
0900 – 1100 Board of Directors Meeting @ Regency 3
0900 – 1700 Registration @ Lobby
0900 – 2200 Vendors @ Kentucky Room
1000 – 2330 Hospitality @ Hyttops Sports Bar
1100 – 1500 Kentucky Veterans Memorial – Frankfort – VFW Lunch

June 9 - Saturday

0830 – 1000 Ladies Brunch @ Bluegrass Pre-function Area
0900 – 1130 General Membership Meeting @ Regency 1&2
0900 – 1700 Registration @ Regency 1 Foyer
0900 – 2330 Hospitality @ Hyttops Sports Bar
0900 – 2300 Vendors @ Kentucky Room

Banquet

1800 – 1845 Cocktail Hour @ Bluegrass Ballroom
1845 – 1900 Post Colors/Convocation @ Bluegrass Ballroom
1900 – 2035 Dinner @ Bluegrass Ballroom
2035 – 2115 Speakers & Awards @ Bluegrass Ballroom
2115 Retire the Colors

June 10 Sunday

0800 – 0900 Memorial Service @ Regency 1
1130 Reunion Closing

BE SURE TO ATTEND OPERATION CORREGIDOR II

173d AIRBORNE BRIGADE ASSOCIATION 2012 REUNION



JUNE 6-10, 2012, LEXINGTON, KY

~ Registration Form ~

Please print. Copy form for additional guest(s)

My Name: _____

Guest: _____

Guest: _____

Guest: _____

Phone: (____) _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail address: _____

Brigade Unit Served With: _____

Dates served: _____

Registration/Event Fees (Check boxes)

Per Sky Soldier Association Member ☒ \$99.
Per Each Guest. (Number of Guest(s) _____) ☐ \$75.
Children free - unless attending Reunion dinner
Per Child or all other extra dinner only guests ☐ \$40.
Per Gold Star Family Member ☐ \$75.
Per Active duty Soldier (Not on Orders) ☐ \$75.
Per Active Duty Soldier on Orders ☐ Free
(i.e. Command, Color Guard)
Per Vendor Table ☐ \$75.
Ladies Brunch (Number attending _____) ☐ Incl
Per player in Golf Tournament (No: _____) ☐ \$45

Enclosed is my check for this Total Amount: \$ _____

Please make Check Payable and Mail to:

Midwest Chapter 17
P.O. Box 09640
Columbus, OH 43209

Hotel Reservations:

Hyatt Regency – Lexington, \$115.00 + tax per night.
Reservations: 1-800-233-1234
Request group rate for 173d Airborne Assn. guestroom block or code G-173A. This is also the code to use if making reservations on-line at - www.lexington.hyatt.com

Overflow Hotel:
To be announced

"HISTORY, HORSES & HOOCH"

2/503d **VIETNAM** Newsletter / December 2011 – Issue 35

Page 14 of 50





OPERATION CORREGIDOR II

Honoring our WWII Paratroopers of the 503rd PRCT

Midwest Chapter 17 is proud to announce we will be inviting paratroopers of the 503rd PRCT who fought throughout the Pacific during WWII to attend next year's 173d Association reunion in Lexington, KY as guests of the officers and men of the 173d Airborne Brigade. This is *troopers honoring troopers* and is not sanctioned by either the 173d or 503rd Associations. It's a paratrooper thang.

In 2010, at the annual reunion in N. Myrtle Beach, SC hosted by South Carolina Chapter 30, five (5) troopers of the 503rd attended as guests of men of our Brigade and friends of the 173d and 503rd. As honest Abe once said,

"Any nation that does not honor its heroes will not long endure,"

and that's just what we'll be doing in Lexington, honoring these men.

Of the over 3000 men who served with the 503rd during WWII, sadly, less than 100 troopers are still with us. We hope you'll join in not only helping out with the funding (until sufficient funds have been raised), but attending our reunion next June and meeting these troopers personally and attending the WWII interactive presentations.

To date, these Sky Soldiers and friends of the 173d and 503rd have made contributions getting us to about 2/3 the way to where we need to be. Our thanks to each of you! *Airborne!!*



Steve Aballa, 2/503
Ron Amyot, 2/503
John Arnold, 1RAR
Jim Baskin, 4/503
Bob Beemer, 2/503
Jerry Berry, 4/503
Pat Bowe, 2/503
Wayne Bowers, 2/503
Jim Brookmiller, 4/503
Bob Bruce, 1/503
Bob Carmichael, 2/503
Chapter 27, Australia
Chapter 30, 173d
Bob Clark, 5th SF
Harry Cleland, 2/503
John Cleland, 173d Bde
Dave Colbert, 2/503
Reed Cundiff, 173d LRRP
Terry Davis, 2/503
Bruce Demboski, C/2/503
George Dexter, 2/503
Roger Dick, 2/503
Tom Dooley, 2/503
Jim Dresser, 2/503
Frank Dukes, 2/503
Scott Fairchild, 82nd Abn
Pat Feely, B Med
Paul Fisher, 3/503
Craig Ford, 1/503
Joe Franklin, 173d Bde
A.B. Garcia, 2/503
Tony Geishauser, Cowboys
Jim Gettel, 2/503
Johnny Graham, 2/503
Larry Hampton, 1/503
Jerry Hassler, 2/503
Dick Holt, 2/503
Nick Hun, 2/503
Ken Kaplan, 2/503
Ed Kearney, 2/503
Jack Kelley, 2/503
Bill Knapp, 2/503
Gary Kozdron, 1/503
John Kyne, 2/503
Joe Lamb, 2/503
Dave Linkenhoker, 2/503
Joe Logan, 2/503
Roy Lombardo, 2/503

Bob Lucas, 2/503
Richard Martinez, 2/503
Jim Montague, 2/503
Butch Nery, 4/503, N75
Hal Nobles, 3/503
Bill Ostlund, 173d
Jack Owens, 2/503
Larry Paladino, 2/503
Ed Perkins, 2/503
Lou Pincock, 2/503
Jack Price, 2/503
Gary Prisk, 2/503
Lou Pincock, 2/503
Bill Reynolds, 2/503
Jack Ribera, 2/503
Jim Robinson, 2/503
Lee Robinson, 2/503
Graham Rollings, 2/503
Jack Schimpf, 2/503
Bill Shipp, 2/503 N75
Roy Scott, 3/319
Lew Smith, 2/503
Jerry Sopko, 2/503
Larry Speed, 1/503
Jim Stanford, 2/503
George Stapleton, 3/503
Mike Sturges, 2/503
Bob Sweeney, 2/503
Bill Thomas, 2/503
Marc Thurston, 2/503
Alt Turner, 2/503
Steve Vargo, 2/503
Jerry Wiles, B/2/503
Ron Woodley, 2/503
Bill Wyatt, 2/503

We're raising necessary funds to cover the cost associated with inviting between 3 and 5 503rd troopers and their spouses or a family member. For information about donating to this worthy effort, please contact rto173d@cfl.rr.com for details, or use the form on the following page to send in your donation to this worth effort.





~ OPERATION CORREGIDOR II ~



Honoring our WWII 503rd Paratroopers at 173d Reunion in Lexington

Yes! I am honored to support bringing to the 173d Airborne Brigade Association's annual reunion in Lexington, KY paratroopers of the 503rd PRCT who fought in the Pacific during WWII as guests of our Brigade.

My name:_____ Unit:_____

To help offset the cost for this, enclosed is my check in the amount of \$_____.

Please add to note line "503rd Guest Donation" and mail check payable to:

Midwest Chapter 17

P.O. Box 09640

Columbus, OH 43209

Note: Your donation, not to exceed \$100., will be used to help defray the cost of hotel rooms, reunion registrations and special gifts to our 503rd PRCT guests on behalf of the officers and men of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep).



L-R: WWII 503rd PRCT troopers who attended the Myrtle Beach Reunion in 2010 as guests of our Brigade: Chet Nycum, Chuck Breit, Charlie Hylton, Paul Hinds and John Cleland.



Chuck teaching lyrics to *Blood on the Risers* to 1st Bat's Craig Ford in SC.



Charlie ready to burst out in song before doing a mean Texas 2 Step.



You could hear a pin drop as Chet told of his PLF on *The Rock*.



Honoring those 503rd super troopers at 173d reunion in Myrtle Beach, SC, 2010.



"Any nation that does not honor its heroes will not long endure"

~ President Abraham Lincoln



FADING MEMORIES

As many webmasters have discovered, when you build it, they will come. No, not the legendary baseball playing apparitions from a corn-*Field of Dreams*, but snapshots from the bottom of old WWII Army footlockers and from musty, decrepit shoe-boxes!

Our Aussie mate, Paul Whitman, started <http://corregidor.org> about Corregidor back in about 1998, and he is amazed how many snapshots taken by paratroopers of the 503d Parachute Regimental Combat Team are still around. It is from these materials that he provides our newsletter with stories and photos from WWII.

“Occasionally, there’s a trooper who has passed, and his family is left with a collection of faded, dog-eared snapshots of the young men he served with, but with no names and no places,” he says, “and very little they can do about it. When ‘print on demand’ publishing came along, I decided to compile my personal off-line archive of them. It was a project that just grew. Hopefully I can give their family lineage a Heritage they can readily understand the importance of, and be proud of.” (“And keep them off eBay,” he adds.)

The men who managed to carry cameras with them through their years in the SWPA weren’t assigned to tell photographic stories, and their photos were not intended to do anything other than to provide them with images of the faces of their friends, and what they had seen and done, so their families could know. They had another job to do, of course, to follow orders and to fight a war. Thus, many of the personal images are an afterthought of combat, or are of what happened in their off hours.” “They also swapped snapshots a lot,” he says.

“**FADING MEMORIES**” is Paul’s seventh publication and it includes images from three WWII paratrooper personalities, B. B. Morton, Sherman L. “Bull” Durham and Mike Parendo who each survived New Guinea, Noemfoor, Mindoro, Corregidor and Negros - a “Mac’s” tour of SWPA.

The images are courtesy of Cindy Durham Crawford.

Published by Blurb.com



More about the 503d PRCT WWII Series

Without ever intending it, <http://503prct.org>, an offshoot of Corregidor.Org, has built up a series of informative historic publications which present aspects of Corregidor and of the travels and travails the men of 503d experienced in the SWPA.

- **Combat Over Corregidor** – by Dr. Charles Bradford, the 2d Bn Surgeon – the only eye-witness memoir written solely about the 503d on Corregidor. The best, most personal Corregidor manuscript available.
- **Amid Th’ Encircling Gloom** – Al McGrew’s retrospective of Corregidor in 1941-2 and his unlikely survival as a prisoner of the Japanese – Bilibid, Cabanatuan III, Pasay School, the Hell Ships.
- **503 The Rock Regiment in the Southern Philippines** – a pictorial of the 503d post-Corregidor, in the Negros Campaign.
- **Moments in Passing** – a pictorial of the “early Days” of the 503d PIR in Australia & New Guinea, selected from Chet Nycum’s Collection
- **More Moments** – a companion pictorial with selections from the Emmett Wester Collection
- **Rock Force – The All-American Team retakes Corregidor** - a pictorial collection of Corregidor 1945 images you’d get if you spent two weeks at the National Archives with your scanner.
- **Fading Memories – WWII in the SWPA with the 503d** – Images from the B.B. Morton Collection. 200 pages, 201 images.

Previews of the books are available – go to <http://503prct.org> and click on the Publications tab.



Note: Paul asked we include this final notice for Battalion coins.

Last Opportunity to Order Your Battalion Coin

I am introducing you to 4 coins I did to honor the service of the combat paratroopers of all 4 Battalions in the Brigade. AVAILABLE NOW.

They are \$10. per coin plus \$2.50 for shipping of one or two coins. Shipping for 3 or more coins is \$4.50 in U.S.

If interested please pass on to your readership the availability of these coins. I only produced 100 of the 1, 3, 4 Battalion coins, and 200 of the 2nd Batt coins. After they are gone I am done.

After expenses ALL profits are donated to the 173d Memorial and to a local Food Bank. ALL PROFITS are given away.

Please send a note indicating which coin(s) you are ordering and include your check payable to:

Paul R. Fisher, LTC (Ret)
3/503d
81 Oak Lane
Eatontown, NJ 07724

If you have any questions please call me:

Cell (908) 489-0366
Home (732) 542-1598

Coin Design ~ Front:

Battalion Number Banner.

Circle of the countries where the Brigade has fought (3rd and 4th did not go to Iraq or Afghanistan but the Brigade did).

Center is the WWII Eagle patch of the 503rd Airborne Infantry.

Coin Design ~ Back:

Top: Master Jumps wings (for the Brigade not each individual).

Gold Star for 5 combat Jumps (3 in WWII, 1 VN and 1 Iraq)

CIB: 1st and 2nd Battalions three awards for WWII, VN and SW Asia).

3rd and 4th (2 awards of CIB WWII and VN).

Rock designation 1st, 2nd, 3rd & 4th.

Dual Battalion Crests.

Brigade Patch.

Sky Soldier for the name the Chinese gave the Brigade.

Coin color Dark Purple for the blood combat paratroopers spilled on the battlefield.

1/503d



2/503d



3/503d



4/503d



Airborne.....All The Way!



Obama signs bipartisan bill to help jobless vets

By JULIE PACE | AP – Tue, Nov 22, 2011

WASHINGTON (AP) — Heralding a rare moment of bipartisan agreement, President Barack Obama signed into law Monday legislation aimed at helping unemployed veterans find work while putting more cash in the hands of companies with government contracts. The legislation, which creates tax breaks for companies that hire jobless veterans, marks the first proposal from Obama's \$447 billion jobs bill to be signed into law. The rest of the package of new taxes and spending has largely failed to garner support from Republican lawmakers.

"Because Democrats and Republicans came together, I'm proud to sign those proposals into law," Obama said during a signing ceremony Monday.

Looming over the brief moment of unity, however, was the apparent failure of lawmakers from both parties to agree on \$1.2 trillion in spending cuts ahead of a Wednesday deadline by a special committee. While Obama didn't directly address the looming deadline, he said the American people deserve bold, bipartisan action. *"My message to every member of Congress is keep going. Keep working. Keep finding more ways to put partisanship aside and put more Americans back to work,"* he said.

The veterans' legislation had overwhelming support from both parties, with the House passing the measure 422-0 and the Senate approving it 95-0. In addition to the tax breaks for businesses, it also beefs up job-training and counselling programs for unemployed veterans. The legislation also repeals a 2006 law that would have required the federal, state and local governments to withhold 3 percent of their payments to nearly all contractors. That statute, which doesn't take effect until 2013, was supposed to pressure contractors to pay their taxes in full, but lawmakers now say the law would deny cash to companies that need it to hire more workers.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said passage of the bill showed that it is possible for both parties to reach a consensus. *"By focusing on areas of agreement — rather than partisan stimulus bills — we can pass legislation to help foster job growth. Neither of these measures alone is going to solve the jobs crisis, but they'll provide relief to job creators and help American veterans,"* McConnell said.

McConnell praised Obama for inviting Republican Sen. Scott Brown of Massachusetts to attend the ceremony. It was Brown who had introduced the 3 percent withholding bill.

Brown was joined on stage with the president by two other GOP lawmakers — Florida Rep. Jeff Miller and Tennessee Rep. Diane Black — as well as a handful of Democrats.

The tax credits for hiring veterans will cost the government an estimated \$95 million — a tiny fraction of Obama's overall jobs plan. The credits would be as much as \$9,600 for companies hiring disabled vets who have looked for work for more than half a year. The size of the credit would be based on the worker's salary and how long the worker was unemployed.

The programs would be financed mostly by extending a fee the Veterans Affairs Department charges to back mortgages. Erasing the withholding requirement for contractors would reduce federal revenues by an estimated \$11.2 billion over the coming decade. It would be paid for by making it harder for some elderly people to qualify for Medicaid by changing the formula used to determine their eligibility.

Many economists have said annulling the withholding law would have a minimal impact on hiring.



We Can't Wait: Leading Veterans Organizations Back Returning Heroes, Wounded Warrior Tax Credits. President Barack Obama greets representatives from leading veterans' service organizations in the Oval Office before delivering remarks on the American Jobs Act in the Rose Garden, Nov. 7, 2011. The President spoke about tax credits included in the American Jobs Act and new executive actions that will help get veterans back to work.

(Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)



Phan Thai

**Over 45 years ago,
Republic of South
Vietnam, 173d
Airborne Brigade**

By Steve Konek, Sr.

Once in a while you are sometimes fortunate enough to meet a special individual. I consider my friend Phan Thai to be one such person. At the time I could not imagine that our lives would be entangled from that time forward.

I transferred in to the Brigade S-5, Civil Affairs from the Brigade Staff Commo Section. Civil Affairs gave me the opportunity to get exposed to the Vietnamese -- that is what I had come to Vietnam for.



Operation in Ho Bo Woods. Civil Affairs – Dr. Anderson on left, with S-5 interpreter Sgt. Phan Thai



Operation in Ho Bo Woods. Civil Affairs – Sgt. Phan Thai, unknown doctor and PFC Karl Witt from S-5.

There were approximately 50 interpreters attached to the Brigade at the time. They were assigned throughout the Brigade, rotating around from the line companies to the staff sections and everywhere in between. Thai had

started out with the 172d MID, Brigade Military Intelligence section after joining the RSVN Army in 1965.

In 1966 he transferred to the S-5 as interpreter and this is where we first crossed paths. Shortly after I arrived in S-5, the Brigade interpreters were offered the opportunity to become jump qualified. Of the 50 interpreters, only two volunteered; Thai was one of the two and off he went to jump school. I gained new respect for him, as he was a volunteer, one of us. We became friends during our time in civil affairs.



LT Emery Mikula, Civil Affairs -- KIA, Operation Robin.

Thai rotated and hooked up with B/2/503d during operations in the Iron Triangle, Cedar Falls, Junction City and north to Dak To. I would run across him at times and always worried after his welfare. In November of 1967, I finished 19 months with the Brigade and transferred to Saigon to finish out my enlistment and time in Vietnam with the 4th PSYOP Group. The NVA followed me south as the Tet offensive shattered the peace of the city a few months later.

On payday each month, the interpreters were allowed to return home to take their pay to their families. Good fortune for me, Thai and two other interpreters from the 173d lived in Saigon and we would all fall in together each month. We would have dinner at one of the member's homes, rotating around from month to month. Seems there was always a lot of alcohol involved and the Vietnamese took great delight in trying to get me to eat something exotic after I was sufficiently intoxicated.

They had a big laugh after talking me into chewing on a pig's ear! I still haven't gotten even but I have not forgotten. I was accepted into Thai's family as another member. I left Vietnam and the Army in 1968.

(continued....)





Sgt. Phan Thai during Operation Robin – Highway 15, Forward Base Camp.

Thai left the 173d in 1969 and joined C/75th Abn Rangers and was promoted to E-7. In 1971, he transferred to the Vietnamese Special Forces and in 1973 transferred to the Vietnamese Navy where he was a Chief E-8. Thai, along with his younger brother and new wife, escaped the country by boat on the day Saigon fell in 1975. After a harrowing journey, transferring from a sinking ship at sea, a year in a refugee camp in Hong Kong, and time in a camp in Pennsylvania, they took-up residence at my home in Seattle. For the second time, they had given-up everything they had worked for to ensure they could live freely.

This had not been his first journey to escape the communists. Thai's family had left their home in Hanoi in 1954, under the pretense of going to the shore for

the weekend, but instead boarded a ship south, and escaped the communist government taking power in the North. To all of our joy, Thai's parents, my Vietnamese parents, were able to immigrate a few years later.



Thai's good buddy, then PFC Steve Konek, near Bien Hoa, RVN.

November 5th Thai and me, together with fellow members of the Airborne community marched together in the Auburn, WA veterans day parade under the banner of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep). It has been a great blessing to have this bond and has always been a positive memory of my time in Vietnam.



Thai, on right, at 2011 Veteran's Day Parade. A Sky Soldier, Vietnam Vet, and U.S. Citizen.





VA Plans 3,000 Units of Housing for Veterans at 25 Locations Nationwide

Continues Ongoing Efforts to Provide Housing to Veterans

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs has entered agreements to provide more than 3,000 units of permanent and transitional housing for Veterans at 25 VA medical center campuses nationwide. Additionally, agreements are pending on an additional 1,000 units, which we anticipate completing in the coming weeks.

Proposed opportunities include housing for homeless Veterans, senior Veterans, disabled Veterans, other at-risk Veteran populations, and their families. *“As we approach Veterans Day, it is important that we never forget the sacrifices made by our Veterans to ensure the freedom and independence all Americans cherish,”* said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. *“These efforts to ensure the well-being of our Veterans and their families demonstrate our Nation’s gratitude for their service and commitment to honoring their dedication.”*

The agreements are part of VA’s Building Utilization Review and Repurposing (BURR) initiative. BURR is a VA strategic effort to identify and repurpose unused VA land and buildings in support of VA’s goal to end Veteran homelessness. VA is using its enhanced-use lease authority to permit third-party providers to finance, design, develop, maintain and operate housing with on-site supportive services, on a priority basis, for Veterans and their families.

The co-location of these projects on VAMC campuses ensures that Veterans have ready access to care and treatment designed to help them attain long-term independence and self-sufficiency.

An estimated total of 5,300 units of affordable and supportive housing will be provided to Veterans. This number includes projects already in operation or underway.

VA is proceeding with agreements with third-party providers at 25 sites nationwide. These sites and proposed developments include:

Canandaigua, NY – 48 transitional and permanent housing units
Fort Howard, MD – 1,437 housing units
Lyons, NJ – 62 permanent housing units
Newington, CT – 74 permanent housing units
Alexandria, LA – 70 transitional housing units

Kerrville, TX – 100 units of assisted living/extended care housing
Knoxville, IA – 75 units of permanent housing
Newington, CT – 100 units of assisted living/extended care housing
Northampton, MA – 48 permanent housing units
Roseburg, OR – 44 permanent and 10 transitional housing units
Bath, NY – 40 permanent and transitional housing units
Battle Creek, MI – 100 permanent housing units
Bedford, MA – 70 permanent housing units
Brockton, MA – 14 permanent housing units
Fort Harrison, MT – 100 permanent housing units
Hines, IL – 120 permanent housing units
Menlo Park, CA – 60 permanent housing units
Minneapolis, MN – 58 permanent housing units
Northport, NY – 110 permanent housing units
Sacramento, CA – 99 bed nursing care facility
Spokane, WA – 60 units of assisted living
St. Cloud, MN – 35 permanent housing units
Togus, ME – 50 permanent housing units
Tuscaloosa, AL – 26 permanent housing units
Vancouver, WA – 42 permanent housing units

For additional information regarding the BURR initiative, please visit

<http://jvwlistserv.org/emailmarketer/link.php?M=6393&N=117&L=92&F=H>

For all other questions regarding the BURR initiative please contact VA_BURR@va.gov

[Sent in by John “Top” Searcy, HHC/2/503d, and circulated by Jose Gonzalez, 1/503d]

What is a Vet?

“He is an ordinary and yet an extraordinary human being - a person who offered some of his life's most vital years in the service of his country, and who sacrificed his ambitions so others would not have to sacrifice theirs.

He is a soldier and a savior and a sword against the darkness, and he is nothing more than the finest, greatest testimony on behalf of the finest, greatest nation ever known.

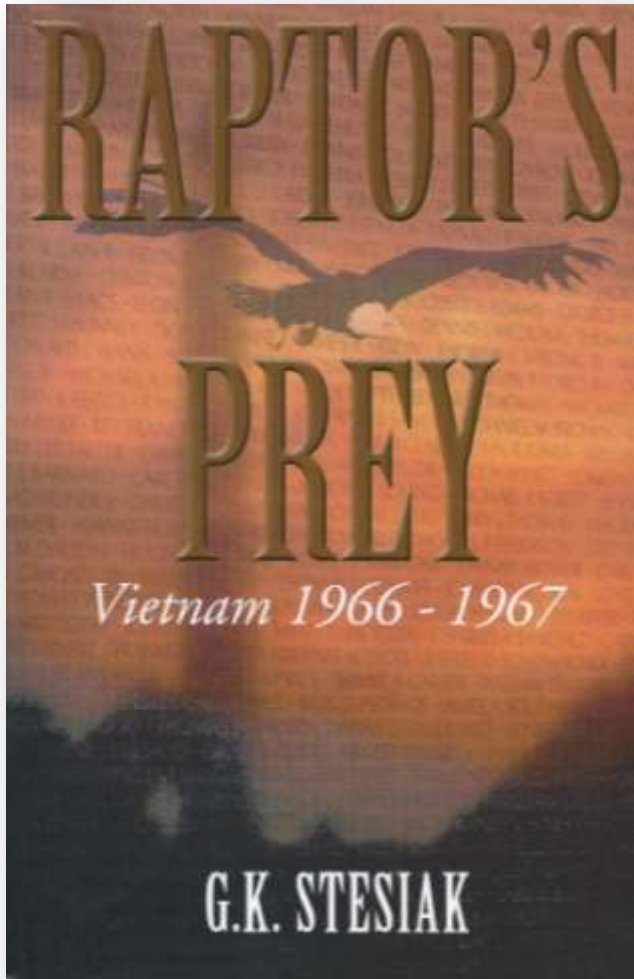
So remember, each time you see someone who has served our country, just lean over and say Thank You. That's all most people need, and in most cases it will mean more than any medals they could have been awarded or were awarded.”

Father Demos Edward O’Brien, USMC



A Sky Soldier's Tale of War

By G.K. Stesiak



Gerry (Doc) Stesiak served as a Medic with A/4/503 in 1966/67. In 1966, he made a promise to his fellow paratroopers. With the publishing of this book, he has fulfilled that promise.

“The Author takes the reader on a journey from the world of the US Army in 1964, to Vietnam aboard ship in 1966. Did our boys know what they were getting themselves into? Did the US Government know what they got themselves into? An unforgettably powerful read destined to become a classic of an era some of us would choose not to remember.”

“This is more than a book. Raptor's Prey is a time machine that puts the reader directly into the sights and smells, feelings and emotions of that incredible war. This powerful work should be read by everyone too young to remember Vietnam – and everybody old enough to think they have forgotten it.”

Jack Lessenberry, former National Editor and Foreign Correspondent, Detroit News

Available on Amazon.com

~ JOB OPPORTUNITY ~

A friend of mine was asked to circulate this notice for an Executive Director role for Transitional Living Services for Veterans in Woodstock, IL. If you have someone who is qualified and wishes to make contact with this group, my friend is willing to provide an introduction. Have them contact me. RAGMAN.

Robert A. Getz

Task Force CO, 2/503d

rgetz173@yahoo.com

JOB DESCRIPTION

JOB TITLE: Executive Director

STATUS: Full-time

REPORTS TO: TLS Board of Directors

SUMMARY: The position of Executive Director is responsible for managing the operations and fiscal activities of Transitional Living Services. This position is ultimately responsible for monitoring, oversight, supervision and appraisal of staff, program implementation and evaluation, marketing, and accounting. The working rapport between the Executive Director and the Board is critical to the success of the TLS agency. The primary difference in scope of responsibility between the Executive Director and the Board of Directors is the Executive Director is primarily responsible for Administration Management and Operations which applies precedent rather than establishes precedent; whereas the role of the Board of Directors is Governance and establishing policy with a long-term duration or impact on the agency.

ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

include *Public Relations, Program Development and Administration*. Other duties may be assigned.

QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS: To perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. The requirements listed below are representative of the knowledge, skill and/or ability required. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

EDUCATION and/or EXPERIENCE: The Executive Director is required to hold a Master's degree from an accredited institution of higher education. Appropriate fields of study and/or experience in public or business administration, social work, community development, educational leadership or equivalents are required.

Note: Contact Bob for complete job description and requirements.

