

January 5, 1968

Operation Niagara I to map NVA positions around Khe Sanh begins.

January 14, 1968

The Green Bay Packers win *Super Bowl II*.



North Vietnamese artillery impacts Khe Sanh

January 21, 1968

20,000 NVA troops under the command of Gen. Giap attack the American air base at Khe Sanh. A 77 day siege begins as 5000 U.S. Marines in the isolated outpost are encircled. The siege attracts enormous media attention back in America, with many comparisons made to the 1954 Battle of Dien Bien Phu in which the French were surrounded then defeated. *"I don't want any damn Dinbinfoo,"* an anxious President Johnson tells Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Earle Wheeler. As Johnson personally sends off Marine reinforcements, he states *"...the eyes of the nation and the eyes of the entire world, the eyes of all of history itself, are on that little brave band of defenders who hold the pass at Khe Sanh..."* Johnson issues presidential orders to the Marines to hold the base and demands a guarantee "signed in blood" from the Joint Chiefs of Staff that they will succeed. Operation Niagara II then begins a massive aerial supply effort to the besieged Marines along with heavy B-52 bombardment of NVA troop positions. At the peak of the battle, NVA soldiers are hit round-the-clock every 90 minutes by groups of three B-52s which drop over 110,000 tons of bombs during the siege, the heaviest bombardment of a small area in the history of warfare.



Johnson after Tet

January 31, 1968

The turning point of the war occurs as 84,000 Viet Cong guerrillas aided by NVA troops launch the Tet Offensive attacking a hundred cities and towns

throughout South Vietnam. The surprise offensive is closely observed by American TV news crews in Vietnam which film the U.S. embassy in Saigon being attacked by 17 Viet Cong commandos, along with bloody scenes from battle areas showing American soldiers under fire, dead and wounded. The graphic color film footage is then quickly relayed back to the states for broadcast on nightly news programs. Americans at home thus have a front row seat in their living rooms to the Viet Cong/NVA assaults against their fathers, sons and brothers, ten thousand miles away. *"The whole thing stinks, really,"* says a Marine under fire at Hue after more than 100 Marines are killed.

January 16, 1968 - 31 January 31, 1969

An Khe Operation WALKER, 173d Airborne Brigade.

September 19, 1967 - January 31, 1968

Operation BOLLING 1 Tuy Hoa / Phu Hiep. The 2/503rd along with A/3/319th returned to the coastal area for a short time to regroup and refit its units with men and equipment while conducting patrols in their TAO. A/3/319th returned to the Dak To area after a short time.

January 31 - March 7, 1968

In the Battle for Saigon during Tet, 35 NVA and Viet Cong battalions are defeated by 50 battalions of American and Allied troops that had been positioned to protect the city on a hunch by Lt. Gen. Fred C. Weyand, a veteran of World War II in the Pacific. Nicknamed the *"savior of Saigon,"* Weyand had sensed the coming attack, prepared his troops, and on February 1 launched a decisive counter-attack against the Viet Cong at Tan Son Nhut airport thus protecting nearby MACV and South Vietnamese military headquarters from possible capture.

January 31 - March 2, 1968

In the Battle for Hue during Tet, 12,000 NVA and Viet Cong troops storm the lightly defended historical city, then begin systematic executions of over 3000 "enemies of the people" including South Vietnamese during operations, government officials, captured South Vietnamese officers, and Catholic priests. South Vietnamese troops and three U.S. Marine battalions counter-attack and engage in the heaviest fighting of the entire Tet Offensive.



Marine gets his wounds treated in Hue City, 1968

(continued...)



They retake the old imperial city, house by house, street by street, aided by American air and artillery strikes. On February 24, U.S. Marines occupy the Imperial Palace in the heart of the citadel and the battle soon ends with a North Vietnamese defeat. American losses are 142 Marines killed and 857 wounded, 74 U.S. Army killed and 507 wounded. South Vietnamese suffer 384 killed and 1830 wounded. NVA killed are put at over 5000.

January 1, 1969

Henry Cabot Lodge, former American ambassador to South Vietnam, is nominated by President-elect Nixon to be the senior U.S negotiator at the Paris peace talks.

January 12, 1969

Super Bowl III: The New York Jets of the American Football League defeat the heavily favored Baltimore Colts of the National Football League 16-7.



American Football League New York Jets quarterback Joe Namath gives his father, who is wearing an Orange Bowl hat, a big hug in the Jets' crowded dressing room on Jan. 12, 1969. Namath led his underdog team to a 16 to 7 win over the National Football League champion Baltimore Colts in the Super Bowl III game in Miami, Fla. (AP Photo)

January 20, 1969

Richard M. Nixon is inaugurated as the 37th U.S. President and declares "...the greatest honor history can bestow is the title of peacemaker. This honor now beckons America..." He is the fifth President coping with Vietnam and had successfully campaigned on a pledge of "peace with honor."

January 22, 1969

Operation Dewey Canyon, the last major operation by U.S. Marines begins in the Da Krong valley.

January 25, 1969

Paris peace talks open with the U.S., South Vietnam, North Vietnam and the Viet Cong all in attendance.

March 30, 1968 - January 31, 1969

Operation COCHISE Bong Son.

January 15, 1970

The final military units from the Philippines, 1st Philippines Civic Action Force, leave South Vietnam.

January 21, 1970

Pan American Airways offers the first commercially scheduled 747 service from John F. Kennedy International Airport to London Heathrow Airport.

April 15, 1969 - January 1, 1971

Operation WASHINGTON GREEN, Binh Dinh Province. April 1, 1970 3rd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment continued operations in Area of Operations Rock with negative contact. At 3:35 a.m. LZ Uplift received one incoming 82mm mortar round. At 4:45 a.m. Company A was placed on 30 minute standby by 173d. Between 4:35 a.m. and 5:05 a.m. LZ Uplift took 14 incoming 82mm rounds. A Flaeship and Gunship were called in and expended all ordinance with unknown results. Total U.S. casualties were 29 WIA. Company B's 3rd Platoon found one .50 caliber ammunition can at BR 839796 with bandages and methiolate belonging to one male. Also found were unknown-type batteries (C type), U.S.-type stationary and assorted documents. LZ Uplift went on red alert status later in morning due to enemy activity. LZ English and LZ Bits were mortared.

January 1, 1971 - April 21, 1971

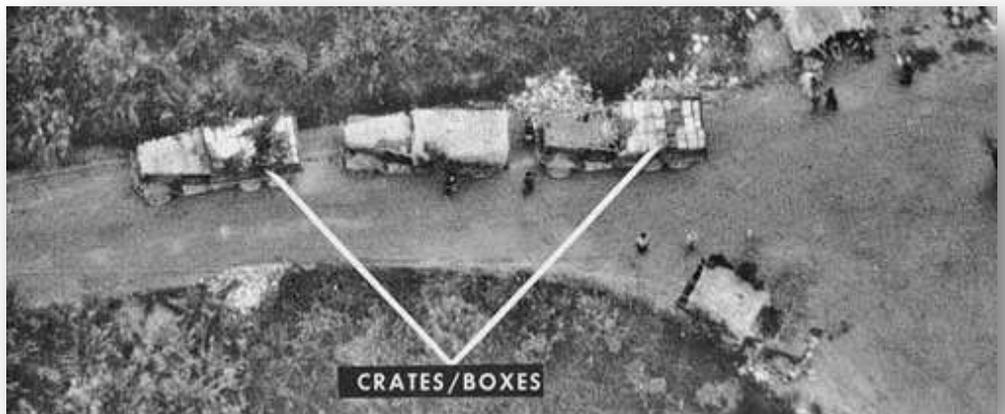
Operation GREENE LIGHTNING, Binh Dinh Province. The 173d Airborne Brigade conducted its 52nd operation, Operation Greene Lightning, in Binh Dinh Province.

January 4, 1971

President Nixon announces "the end is in sight."

January 19, 1971

U.S. fighter-bombers launch heavy air strikes against NVA supply camps in Laos and Cambodia.



Aerial reconnaissance photo of North Vietnamese trucks on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos.

(continued...)



January 21, 1971

In Los Angeles, Charles Manson and three female "Family" members are found guilty of the 1969 Tate-LaBianca murders

January 30-April 6, 1971

Operation Lam Son 719, an all-South Vietnamese ground offensive, occurs as 17,000 South Vietnamese soldiers attack 22,000 NVA inside Laos in an attempt to sever the Ho Chi Minh trail. Aided by heavy U.S. artillery and air strikes, along with American helicopter lifts, South Vietnamese troops advance to their first objective but then stall thus allowing the NVA time to bring in massive troop reinforcements. By battle's end, 40,000 NVA pursue 8000 South Vietnamese survivors back across the border. The South Vietnamese suffer 7682 casualties, nearly half the original force. The U.S. suffers 215 killed, over 100 helicopters lost, and over 600 damaged while supporting the offensive. NVA losses are estimated up to 20,000 as a result of the intense American bombardment. Also among those killed was *Life* magazine photographer Larry Burrows who had been working in Vietnam for ten years. Although an upbeat President Nixon declares after the battle that "*Vietnamization has succeeded*," the failed offensive indicates true Vietnamization of the war may be difficult to achieve.



An assembly of ARVN Rangers prior to commencement of Operation Lam Son 719

January 5, 1972

From San Clemente, President Richard Nixon announced that the United States would develop the space shuttle as the next phase of the American space program, with 5.5 billion dollars allocated to the first reusable spacecraft. "*It would transform the space frontier of the 1970s into familiar territory*," said Nixon, "*easily accessible for human endeavor of the 1980s and 1990s.*"

January 25, 1972

President Nixon announces a proposed eight point peace plan for Vietnam and also reveals that Kissinger has been secretly negotiating with the North Vietnamese. However, Hanoi rejects Nixon's peace overture.

January 1, 1973

CBS sells the New York Yankees for \$10 million to a 12-person syndicate led by George Steinbrenner (3.2 million dollars more than CBS bought the Yankees for).

January 8, 1973

Kissinger and Le Duc Tho resume negotiations in Paris.



U.S. Presidential Adviser Henry A. Kissinger shakes hands with Hanoi's Le Duc Tho as they meet outside the communist-owned villa in suburban Gif-sur-Yvette near Paris. They are meeting in new and possibly the final round of talks aimed at ending the Vietnam cease-fire violations. (UPI photo)

January 9, 1973

All remaining differences are resolved between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. President Thieu, once again threatened by Nixon with a total cut-off of American aid to South Vietnam, now unwillingly accepts the peace agreement, which still allows North Vietnamese troops to remain in South Vietnam. Thieu labels the terms "*tantamount to surrender*" for South Vietnam.

January 23, 1973

President Nixon announces that an agreement has been reached which will "*end the war and bring peace with honor.*"

January 27, 1973

The Paris Peace Accords are signed by the U.S., North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the Viet Cong. Under the terms, the U.S. agrees to immediately halt all military activities and withdraw all remaining military personnel within 60 days. The North Vietnamese agree to an immediate cease-fire and the release of all American POWs within 60 days. An estimated 150,000 North Vietnamese soldiers presently in South Vietnam are allowed to remain. Vietnam is still divided. South Vietnam is considered to be one country with two governments, one led by President Thieu, the other led by Viet Cong, pending future reconciliation.

(continued....)



January 27, 1973

Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird announces the draft is ended in favor of voluntary enlistment.

January 27, 1973

The last American soldier to die in combat in Vietnam, Lt. Col. William B. Nolde, is killed.

William B. Nolde was killed by shell fire at An Loc eleven hours before the cessation of all hostilities in accordance with the Paris Peace Accords.



William Benedict Nolde

Colonel

ADV TEAM 47, 3RD REG ASSIST CMD (TRAC),
MACV ADVISORS, MACV

Army of the United States

Menominee, Michigan

August 8, 1929 to January 27, 1973

WILLIAM B NOLDE is on the Wall
at Panel 01W Line 112

January 19, 1974

The Battle of the Paracel Islands was an engagement fought between the naval forces of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) in the Paracel Islands.

January 19, 1974

The UCLA men's basketball team sees its 88-game winning streak end at the hands of Notre Dame.

January 8, 1975

NVA general staff plan for the invasion of South Vietnam by 20 divisions is approved by North Vietnam's Politburo. By now, the Soviet-supplied North Vietnamese Army is the fifth largest in the world. It anticipates a two year struggle for victory. But in reality, South Vietnam's forces will collapse in only 55 days.

January 14, 1975

Testifying before Congress, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger states that the U.S. is not living up to its earlier promise to South Vietnam's President Thieu of "severe retaliatory action" in the event North Vietnam violated the Paris peace treaty.

January 21, 1975

During a press conference, President Ford states the U.S. is unwilling to re-enter the war.

January 24, 1975

Larry Fine, actor (3 Stooges), dies at 72.

[Source: Many of the details presented here are from www.historyplace.com, photos added]

IF

By Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;

If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breath a word about your loss;

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on";

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man my son!

A poem for my main man, Aidan Lewis (Smittytoo) Smith and my main lady, Sofia Danielle (Smitty) Smith and all our little main men and main ladies. Ed



RTO Smitty



Paratrooper Smittytoo



Thanks to Jim Strickland of VA Watchdog dot Org, the current issue of our newsletter will now appear on their website.



About VAWatchdog

VAWatchdog dot Org was the brainchild of Larry Scott. It opened in 2005.

Larry's goals and the mission of the VAWatchdog was simple; he set out to provide veterans with important news and benefits information that weren't being broadcast anywhere else.



Larry Scott

While there are many veteran-centric sites on the Internet, Larry saw that too many of them were populated with "experts" who remained anonymous as they gave out information about what veterans should or shouldn't do. Much of this information veterans were being fed was incorrect. Rumors and hype were the standard and Larry decided to avoid all that. He published facts that were supported by evidence.

I joined forces with Larry in 2006. I was appealing my claims with VA, unemployed and unable to work. I'd started blogging and teaching myself how to build web sites while I waited on the VA to make a decision on my claim. I was unhappy with the process and even more disillusioned with the Veterans Service Organization that (mis)represented me.

I wrote to Larry seeking his advice. Not long after that we established a friendship via our email communications. Larry read some of my writing and invited me to send him a column about how to seek benefits.

In 2007, we started a partnership that lasts to this day. I wrote "Jim's Mailbag", a popular Q&A feature published twice each week. As Larry became busier with the politics behind VA and the workings of Congress, I was point man for benefits issues.

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Jim Strickland

Email: jim912@gmail.com

Fax VAWatchdog dot Org: 1-888-658-5058

Note

The web site of **VAWatchdog dot org** offers a wealth of information of interest and importance to vets, including, but certainly not limited to news about:

- Agent Orange**
- Veteran Benefits**
- ChampVA healthcare for spouses**
- Diabetes**
- Compensation Rates**
- How to file a claim with the VA**
- Prostate cancer**

I urge you to checkout their web site: Ed

www.vawatchdog.org/Vietnam.html

"I see light at the end of the tunnel."

~ Walt W. Rostow, Nat. Security Adviser, Dec. 1967



Fallen Heroes Our Last Salute

Captain Michael Davis O'Donnell

Dak To, Vietnam

Killed in Action: 24 March 1970

Republic of Vietnam

Promoted to Major after status
changed to MIA.

Aircraft: UH1H "Iroquois"

DOB: 13 August 1945

Hometown: Springfield, IL



Michael O'Donnell was recommended for the Medal of Honor for his actions on March 24, 1970. On that date he, along with crew mates Berman Ganoë, John C. Hosken, Rudy M. Becerra, John Boronski, Gary A. Harned and Jerry L. Pool, went Missing In Action. His remains were ultimately recovered, and although remains for all crewmen were not, this crew is now considered accounted for. Michael was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal, the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart as well as promoted to the rank of Major following his loss incident. O'Donnell was highly regarded by his friends in the "Bikinis." They knew him as a talented singer, guitar player and poet. One of his poems has been widely distributed.

Maj. O'Donnell
170th Av Co

~ Remember Them ~

If You Are Able...
Save for them a place
inside of you,
and save one backward glance
when you are leaving,
for the places they can no longer go.
Be not ashamed to say
you loved them,
though you may or
may not always have.
Take what they have left
and what they have taught you
with their dying
and keep it with your own.
And in that time
when men decide, and feel safe,
to call the war insane,
take one moment to embrace
those gentle heroes
you left behind.

By Michael O'Donnell

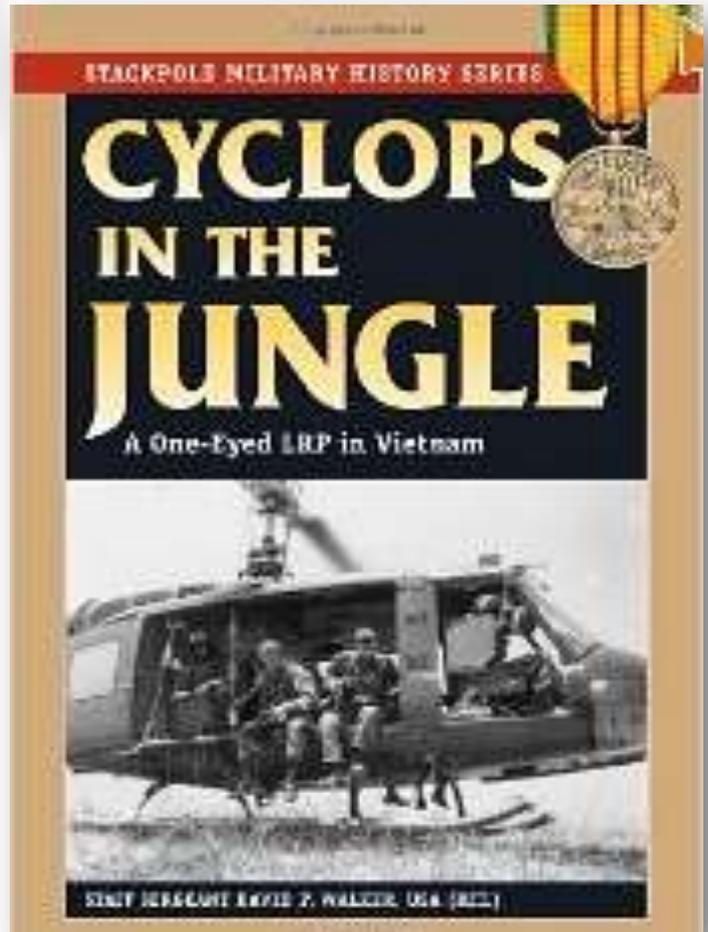
For more information about Major O'Donnell visit
<http://www.taskforceomegainc.org/o021.html>

A One-Eyed LRP in Vietnam

By David P. Walker

173d Ranger/LRRP

"Written in a no-holds-barred, from-the-gut style; this one-of-a-kind story of resilience and determination during the Vietnam War focuses on action with a long-range patrol (LRP) team."



Available at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Cyclops-Jungle-One-Eyed-Stackpole-Military/dp/0811734927>

Correction

There is an error on page 29, last paragraph in the December issue. It mentions that a former POW who died after September 30, 1999, and who was continuously rated totally disabled for a period of at least one year "immediately following death." This probably should have read "one year prior to the death", as once you are dead you "certainly" are continuously rated totally disabled!

Jim "Doc" Gore
A/B/D/E/2/503d



Possible Compromise on Labeling of Combat-Related PTSD

Some Army officers and mental health advocates have been calling for a change in the "PTSD" moniker on the basis that calling it a "disorder" is stigmatizing soldiers and preventing them from getting the help they need.



Marines in southern Afghanistan
(Photo by Patrick Baz/AFP/Getty Images)

BY DANIEL SAGALYN

A skirmish has been brewing between U.S. Army brass and a seemingly unlikely interlocutor -- the American Psychiatric Association (APA) -- over a possible name change for combat-related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the mental illness that has afflicted hundreds of thousands of American soldiers.

But now indications of a possible compromise have emerged, even as the issue has triggered a wide-ranging debate among mental health professionals.

Some Army officers and mental health advocates have been calling for a change in the "PTSD" moniker on the basis that calling it a "disorder" is stigmatizing soldiers and preventing them from getting the help they need. Initial indications were that the 167-year-old APA -- which is in the process of updating diagnostic standards

for PTSD and other conditions -- felt the affliction should continue to be termed a disorder, based on traditional medical definitions and precedents. However, Dr. John Oldham, the group's president, said in an interview last week that he would be open to the suggestion of changing the name if it would help encourage those who have it to seek help.

"If it turns out that that [the word 'injury'] could be a less uncomfortable term and would facilitate people who need help getting it, and it didn't have unintended consequences that we would have to be sure to try to think about, we would certainly be open to thinking about it," Oldham told the *NewsHour* in a telephone interview last week.

Oldham's comments come six weeks after Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Chiarelli sent the American Psychiatric Association a letter requesting that the group consider dropping the word "disorder" from the diagnosis and simply call it Post Traumatic Stress.

In an October interview with the *NewsHour*, the four-star general said using the term "disorder" perpetuates a bias against the condition and *"has the connotation of being something that [was] a pre-existing problem"* for an individual before entering the Army. In the eyes of some troops, it *"makes the person seem weak,"* Chiarelli said.

The number of combat veterans diagnosed with PTSD has skyrocketed over the past decade as hundreds of thousands of troops have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, some multiple times. Rates of PTSD within the Army are estimated at 10 to 20 percent for combat infantry soldiers who experienced direct combat. In some units that experienced high combat, the rates of PTSD affliction are as high as 25 to 30 percent, according to military surveys.

The Army has come under fire for not doing enough to identify and treat soldiers with PTSD, compounding the stigma problem. Forty-nine percent of junior enlisted soldiers who tested positive for mental health problems said that seeking help would be seen as an indication of weakness. A comparable number -- 42 percent -- thought that other members of their unit might have less confidence in them if they received mental health services, according to the most recent survey.

See entire report at:

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military/july-dec11/ptsd_12-06.html]



Current Information Regarding DD-214's

Please pass on to other vets. It's official: DD-214 discharge papers are NOW ONLINE. The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) has provided the following website for veterans to gain access to their DD-214s online.

<http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/>

This may be particularly helpful when a veteran needs a copy of his/her DD-214 for employment purposes. NPRC is working to make it easier for veterans with computers and Internet access to obtain copies of documents from their military files.

Military veterans and the next of kin of deceased former military members may now use a new online military personnel records system to request documents.

Other individuals with a need for documents must still complete the Standard Form 180, which can be downloaded from the online web site. Because the requester will be asked to supply all information essential for NPRC to process the request, delays that normally occur when NPRC has to ask veterans for additional information will be minimized. The new web-based application was designed to provide better service on these requests by eliminating the records centers mailroom and processing time.

[Sent in by John "Top" Searcy, HHC/2/503d]

Bravo CO and his Radar Hook-up Over 4 Decades Later

I left "Nam" on my first tour in April 1967. One of my RTOs was Harry Cleland. Harry and I have been exchanging emails for the past year or two but not until a few days ago (December 1) have we gotten together. Harry and his lovely wife, Marilyn, were on their way to Williamsburg, VA to celebrate their 41st wedding anniversary. They stopped off to spend a few hours with Bunny and I. This photo is of the two of us. That's Harry with all the hair and it's me who is bald.



Hawkeye & Radar

It was really good seeing him after nearly half a century.

Ken Kaplan
CO B/2/503d

More on Last Month's Cover Photo



We had identified this photo as simply "Sky Soldiers".

It was taken on June 24, 1965: "After their unit (2/503d) landed in the middle of a Viet Cong staging area, PFC Andrew J. Brown of Chicago draws his pistol while protecting fellow Sky Soldier, Tony Legon (C/2/503d), from sniper fire in the jungle near Thuong Lang, about 10 miles northeast of Bien Hoa. Brown and medic Gerry Levi crawled through the jungle to treat the paratrooper while a live grenade lay nearby."

(AP Photo/Horst Faas)

Here is Levi and Brown carrying Legon to Dust Off. Gerry would be killed in action while providing medical aid to wounded Charlie Company troopers on 2 January 66 during Operation Marauder in the rice paddies of the Mekong Delta. (See story beginning on next page).



Gerald Levy

Specialist Five

HHC, 2ND BN, 503RD INFANTRY,

173D ABN BDE, USARV

Army of the United States

Meriden, Connecticut

May 1, 1945 to January 2, 1966

GERALD LEVY is on the Wall at Panel 04E Line 050

Rest easy Doc. We think of you often.



OPERATION MARAUDER: ALLIED OFFENSIVE IN THE MEKONG DELTA



January 1, 2012, marks the 46 year anniversary since the 2/503d embarked on Operation Marauder in the rice paddies of the Mekong Delta. For many of our troopers this would be their final battle. Ed.

On New Year's Day 1966, with Australian and New Zealand forces attached, the 173d Airborne Brigade struck VC positions

By: Colonel Thomas E. Faley
U.S. Army (Ret)
CO C/2/503d

(This article originally appeared in the February 1999 issue of *Vietnam* magazine, and also appeared in Issue 10 of our newsletter. Since this report first appeared, our readership has grown from around 300 to perhaps 2000+. Photos added).



Tom Faley

2/503d troopers prepare to load cattle cars at Camp Zinn on 1 Jan 66 for ride to Bien Hoa Air Base (the 'Snakepit') to start Operation Marauder.

The 173d Airborne Brigade started out the new year on January 1, 1966, with a major strike into the Mekong Delta. Operation Marauder, as the mission was dubbed, soon found its quarry, the VC 267th Main Force Battalion, and a three-day battle ensued. An article in the January 14, 1966, issue of *Time* magazine aptly summarized the significance of Marauder: *'Members of the 173d Airborne swept out in Operation Marauder into the Plain of Reeds to the Mekong Delta. Penetrating an area so thoroughly held by the VC that government troops had not ventured in for six months, they killed 114 VC in their major contact, rooting the enemy out of beehive bunkers built into the ground along the canals.'*

During its first year in Vietnam, the 173d Airborne Brigade was a tri-national brigade. Its major subordinate combat units included two U.S. infantry battalions (the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 503rd Infantry), one artillery battalion (the 3rd Battalion, 319th Artillery), an Australian infantry battalion (the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment) and artillery battery (the Royal Australian Artillery), and a New Zealand artillery battery (the 161st Gun Battery of the Royal New Zealand Army).

(continued...)



Armor and cavalry included two American units, Troop E of the 17th Cavalry and D Company, 16th Armor, and an Australian unit, the Prince of Wales Light Horse Troop.



The 'Snake Pit' at Bien Hoa Air Base, 1 January 66.
L-R: C Company CO Capt. Fred Henschell,
HHC Commo Officer, Capt. Tom Goodwin.

The U.S. paratroopers in the brigade referred to themselves as 'Sky Soldiers,' a nickname given to them a year earlier by the people of Taiwan. The Australians and New Zealanders used their traditional nicknames -- they were known respectively as 'Diggers' and 'Kiwis.'

In 1965-66 the 173d Brigade's base camp was located adjacent to the Bien Hoa Air Force Base. Ironically, the Vietnamese translation of Bien Hoa was '*land of peaceful frontiers.*' The brigade's initial mission was to secure, patrol and neutralize any threat to the air base, but within months that mission was expanded into conducting multi-battalion strikes on major VC targets of opportunity through central South Vietnam.



L-R: Bn CO's RTO PFC Conley, along with PFC Love,
Sp4 April and Capt. Goodbold get ready to load chopper
on 1 Jan '66 at Bien Hoa Air Base.

In late December 1965 the 173d Airborne was ordered to locate and destroy the 506th VC Local (Province Mobile) Force Battalion, reported by intelligence sources to be near Bao Trai in the Mekong Delta. The 506th Battalion had been operating with relative

impunity in the area for a year or more. In addition, units of the 267th VC Main Force Battalion of the Dong Thap Regiment were said to be passing through the area.

The brigade commander, Brig. Gen. Ellis Williamson, planned to launch Operation Marauder on New Year's Day 1966. His plan called for the establishment of a brigade command post and fire support base near the Bao Trai airfield in Hau Nghia province, 35 miles west of Saigon. On the same day, the U.S. Army 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry (1/503), would be helilifted into an LZ west of the Vam Co Dong river with instructions to conduct search-and-destroy operation to the west. Shortly afterward, the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1/RAR), would be helilifted into an LZ east of the river with orders to perform search-and-destroy operations to the northeast sector.



BG Williamson

The 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry (2/503), would then be moved to the brigade base at Bao Trai, with a first-day mission of being prepared to reinforce either the 1/503 or the 1/RAR if either of those units made significant contact with the enemy. If no significant contact was made the first day, the 2/503 would be helilifted the following day into the LZ southeast of the river, with the instructions to search and destroy in that sector and eventually link up with the Australians to the north.

On New Year's Day the forward brigade command post was established at Bao Trai without incident. Then the 1/503 commander, Lt. Col. John Tyler, airlifted his unit to LZ Whiskey at the brigade base and waited until the brigade's artillery established its fire support base at Bao Trai.



LTC John Tyler

Shortly after noon, the 1/503 was helilifted into LZ Vodka, near Tra Cu on the west side of the Vam Co Dong river. Initially the 1/503 encountered only light enemy resistance, but two hours after beginning its sweep, B Company found between 50 and 60 VC with some automatic weapons in small bunkers near the river.

(continued....)





Paratroopers of the 2/503d lining-up in sticks at Bien Hoa Air Base.

A short firefight ensued, with B Company sustaining three wounded. Artillery fire and airstrikes were called in on the enemy positions, and approximately an hour later the VC broke contact with the Americans and escaped to the south.

On the same day, the 1/RAR battalion commander, Lt. Col. Alex Preece, also helilifted his unit into LZ Whiskey. When the choppers returned from inserting the 1/503 during the late afternoon, the Australians were helilifted into LZ Scotch, on the east side of the Vam Co Dong near the village of Can Thuy. The Australians encountered little opposition but reported finding many unoccupied enemy bunkers.



Platoon Sergeant Paul Weedman (left), C Company, 8th Platoon, 7th Royal Australian Regiment, checks in with his operational command during Marauder, assisted by Private Thomas Hunt. During its first year in Vietnam, the 173d Airborne was a tri-national brigade.

(National Archives)

All the units involved in the operation reported mobility problems because many of the rice paddies and sugar cane fields there were flooded. Crisscrossing the area were numerous streams and canals, which were 5 to 15 feet wide and 3 to 5 feet deep, with a lot of silt on the

bottoms. The banks of the canals were formed by dikes, which rose about 3 feet above the paddies and had trees and other vegetation planted along them.

Many unoccupied enemy bunkers were discovered in the dikes bordering the canals and paddies. The bunkers possessed good fields of fire, since elevations in the area were less than 5 meters. An article on Operation Marauder in the January 5, 1966, issue of *The New York Times* provided a good description of the setting and gave some idea of how difficult search-and-destroy operations were in that area: *"The gloomy and dismal Plain of Reeds is full of chest-deep canals, standing water, and fetid, nauseating, smelly mud."* Small forested patches and villages were interspersed among the canals and watery fields.

Up to that point, neither the Americans nor the Australian battalion had made enemy contact significant enough to warrant the insertion of brigade reserve, the 2/503.

The events of the first day of the operation were summarized by Tom Reedy in an *Associated Press* release: *"Although the enemy offered some brisk skirmishes and steady sniper fire at the start of Operation Marauder New Year's Day, the Viet Cong withdrew into the marshes of the Plain of Reeds. By late afternoon there was only occasional contact with the guerrillas"* As a result, the 2/503 remained at Bao Trai overnight.

The next morning, January 2, the 2/503 commander, Lt. Col. George Dexter, planned an air assault into LZ Wine in the southeast sector. After landing, Dexter wanted to move his B and A companies abreast southwest of the river and then northwest to eventually link up with the Australians.



Col. George Dexter

Dexter's reserve was a one platoon of C Company. The two remaining C Company platoons had been temporarily attached to the brigade's D Company, 16th Armor (D/16), which became the brigade reserve at Bao Trai. Brigade headquarters planned to move the mechanized force to Dexter if any significant enemy contact was made by the 2/503d.

Prior to the air assault on LZ Wine at 0800 hours, Colonel Dexter sent in airstrikes, artillery fire and helicopter gunships in an attempt to clear the area.

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As the helicopter gunships were departing the LZ, they encountered heavy ground fire, a sure sign that a large enemy force was somewhere nearby. Consequently, Dexter decided at the last-minute to land his battalion 500 meters northwest of LZ Wine. It proved to be a wise decision.



2/503d depart Bao Trai for assault on LZ Wine, 2 Jan 66.

B Company landed first and moved through a cane field southwest of the landing site while receiving sporadic fire to the front and left flank. By the time the next company -- A Company -- landed, the enemy fire had increased. Two helicopters took many hits -- one door gunner was killed and some troopers were wounded as they exited the helicopters.

In this army photo are Battalion XO, LTC Bob Carmichael (then Major) and his RTO, Lew Smith, at Bao Trai airfield on the morning of 2 January 1966. Their's was one of two helicopters hit by incoming fire during the heliborne assault into LZ Wine. It was Smith's first combat mission in Vietnam



and he must have looked terrified. Over the roar of the chopper blades Carmichael leaned over and yelled, "Don't worry, Smitty, this LZ is secure!" He barely got the words out of his mouth when the roof above their heads was torn apart by incoming rounds. Carmichael knew the armored unit had been deployed to secure the LZ, but he didn't know they would become bogged down in mud and never arrived the landing zone; and they were instead now heading into a hot LZ. Ed

After landing, A Company attempted to move south to go on B Company's left flank. As it did so, both companies became pinned down by heavy fire from numerous bunkers 100 to 300 meters to the southwest. The 2/503 had found the 267th VC Main Force Battalion. An enemy machine gun, located in a concrete bunker at the point where B and A companies had intended to link up, was pouring enfilade fire into B

Company and inflicting heavy casualties on its left flank platoon. The B Company commander, Captain Les Brownlee, had only been in command for two weeks. One of the supporting aircraft dropped a bomb on B Company, killing four troopers and wounding six. [Years following the war, Brownlee would become Acting Secretary of the Army].



**Les Brownlee
Cap**

A Company continued its attempt to swing the hinge and come abreast of B Company, but a large volume of fire precluded any significant movement, and A Company remained mired in the paddy marsh and mud, seeking whatever cover was available. The A Company commander, Captain (later Lt. Gen.) Carmen Cavezza, recalled being upset about not getting the artillery support he needed at that point. Because of the close proximity of all battalion units, battalion headquarters retained control of artillery fire at that stage in the battle. The situation changed several hours later, however, when each company was provided an artillery battery for direct support. Cavezza also found the use of his mortars was limited because his mortar men were vulnerable to enemy fire in the open paddies.

In an unusual twist of fate, an Air Force FAC who was piloting his Cessna O-1 'Bird Dog' at low level along the line of contact accidentally flew into a volley of outgoing friendly artillery fire. There was a loud 'pop,' and the troopers looked up to see an artillery round strike the tail of the little aircraft. The Bird Dog dived into the ground, killing the pilot instantly.



Similar to the FAC shot down at LZ Wine.

Insert: It was later reported by Steve Haber, he and other members of C Company were among the first to later reach the downed aircraft, only to find inside the be-headed pilot. Ed.

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LTC Dexter and RTO Conley at LZ Wine.

At 1030, Colonel Dexter had brigade headquarters release to him the two C Company platoons and the D/16 Armor. Dexter planned to have this mechanized force move southwest around A Company and outflank the VC positions. However, around noon the armored vehicles bogged down in the mud in the vicinity of Ap Tho, two kilometers away from the 2/503.



2/503d trooper works his way through the muck.

The two C Company platoons slogged through the mire. They did not reach the area near the firefight until late afternoon. One of the troopers, Specialist Jim Morton, later remembered that the approach took hours because of *'the tough going in the muck and water from dike to dike.'* As Morton's unit neared the battle area, he remembered receiving lots of small-arms fire and seeing the downed spotter aircraft.



Attack at the dike line.

Meanwhile, A Company's Captain Cavezza was eagerly awaiting the C Company reinforcements to come up on his flank. Years later he recalled, *'It seemed like it was taking forever.'* The January 3, 1966, *New York Times* summarized this phase of the battle: *'For eight hours the Americans crouched in the muck, behind paddy dikes and watched bombs, napalm, artillery, and mortar shells hit the enemy.'*



Troopers of Bn Command Group watch airstrike along tree line during Marauder.

Around 1600, the two platoons linked up with the 2/503, and Dexter ordered all three companies to attack to the southwest. A massive firefight ensued, but the battalion was still progressing slowly, with A Company obtaining the best results. The key event occurred an hour into the attack, when five men of A Company's 2nd Platoon managed to overrun a position on the enemy line adjacent to the concrete bunker and then move along the dike, clearing enemy positions one at a time. That enabled A Company to fully penetrate the 267th Battalion's defense.

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Alpha Company RTO on PRC-25 as troopers hunker down, 2 Jan 66.

Captain Cavezza was shot in the stomach and had to turn his company over to his executive officer, Lieutenant Linn Lancaster. Cavezza's last words to Lancaster before lapsing into unconsciousness were,

“Win this battle first, then evacuate the casualties.”



Dexter's battalion command group. Seated wearing steel pot with his arms folded is Maj. Bob Carmichael, Bn XO.

Dexter was a highly respected, courageous leader, and one of his greatest assets was his ability to analyze situations. When he later reflected on the battle, he wondered what the outcome would have been had he ordered the night attack, since the enemy was in disarray at that point and the moon was full -- providing plenty of light for a nighttime move. In a monograph he prepared for the Infantry School in 1968, Dexter summarized the factors weighing against the night attack, including the following:

He had fought off one enemy battalion (267th Main Force), but he had no idea where the remainder of the other (506th Local Force) was. He knew that he had already expended his reserve that afternoon, and he knew that he had sustained almost complete turnover of key leadership personnel since he last conducted a night

attack. For example, two of the three line company commanders that night had been in command for less than two weeks. His troops were exhausted.

While the 2/503 was battling the 267th Main Force Battalion, the 1/503 encountered little enemy opposition in its operating area. The troops had discovered an extensive tunnel system, but no VC remained in the tunnels.

The 1/RAR also had experienced little enemy contact. Small groups of VC harassed the Diggers but were driven off by small-arms fire. An unusual incident was later reported by Australian author Colonel Bob Breen in his book *First to Fight*: One of the harassing VC was nicknamed 'H&I (Harassment and Interdiction fire) Charlie' because of his ability to pin down members of the Digger battalion headquarters, located on a small section of dry ground surrounded by a flooded area. According to Breen, this lone VC 'kept popping up from the surrounding waters and spraying the area with rounds from a Thompson submachinegun.' He would pop up, fire, disappear under water and reappear later in a different place.

Eventually, Captain Bob Hill solved the problem when he directed one of the Prince of Wales Light Horse Troop's armored personnel carriers to drive out in the water and wait. Shortly afterward, when H&I Charlie popped out of the water, he was killed by the carrier's machine-gunner.

After midnight on January 3, Dexter sent orders to his 2/503 companies to continue the attack to the southwest at daybreak. Just after daylight, the battalion started to move out as planned. Then, suddenly, tragedy struck C Company. The company's artillery forward observer, Sergeant Jerry Morton, had called in marker white phosphorous rounds ahead of the company from the support New Zealand gun battery and then called for 'fire for effect' on a suspected enemy position in front of the company.



Burst at LZ Wine

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