

23rd: A Viet Cong bomb explodes in a hotel in Qui Nonh, killing 23 servicemen.

24th: Beatles begin filming the movie "Help" in the Bahamas.

26th: The first South Korean troops arrive in Vietnam.

February 1966

February 1966: The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by Sen. J. William Fulbright, holds televised hearings examining America's policy in Vietnam. Appearing before the committee, Defense Secretary McNamara states that U.S. objectives in Vietnam are "*not to destroy or overthrow the Communist government of North Vietnam. They are limited to the destruction of the insurrection and aggression directed by North Vietnamese against the political institutions of South Vietnam.*"

3rd: Influential newspaper columnist Walter Lippmann lambastes President Johnson's strategy in Vietnam, stating, "*Gestures, propaganda, public relations and bombing and more bombing will not work.*" Lippmann predicts Vietnam will divide America as combat casualties mount.

6th-9th: President Johnson and South Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky meet in Honolulu.



U.S. President Lyndon Baines Johnson, General William Westmoreland, Thiệu and Kỳ together in 1966

11th: Johnson announces that the 205,000 troops will be increased gradually.

26th-March 22nd: 173d Airborne Brigade commence Operation Phoenix in Binh Duong & Bien Hoa Province. The 173d ABN and elements from the 1st Inf. Div. killed 35 VC

in this operation. According to CPT Thomas Faley, CO of C/2/503rd, 173d ABN BDE, this operation was planned on Feb 25th as a quick strike at a VC force that had been repeatedly observed in the area five kilometers west of Tan Uyen since the 18th. At 0900 on the 26th, A and B companies were choppered into LZ Chris without contact. B Company moved northwest and A Company directly north. The jungle was so thick that it was described as a '15-foot high briar patch.' At 1510, A Company made contact with a well-dug-in enemy force that put out a murderous rate of fire. As the GI's attempted to pull back, the VC employed the 'hugging tactic' to avoid the allied supporting arms. The distance between the forces was at times less than 30 meters. After pulling back just a short distance, the first airstrike consisted of CBUs seemed to break the back of the VC force. Sadly, a few minutes later the second CBU strike caused several infantry casualties. The airstrikes did force the VC to break off their hugging tactic and fall back to their entrenchments. LTC George Dexter, the battalion CO, was in a C&C Huey. He had directed B Company to move to flank the VC force engaging A Company. At 1715, C Company landed in an LZ 1,500 meters northwest of the battle and moved into a blocking position in a rubber plantation. Shortly after briefing CPT Faley following their insert, LTC Dexter was wounded by enemy fire that came up through the floor of the Huey. Severely wounded, Dexter radio'd his battalion executive officer, Major Robert Carmichael, to

take command of the battalion. At 2000, B Company linked up with the remnant of A Company who had suffered 14 known dead and 76 others wounded. The enemy withdrew during the night and was able to police the battlefield. The next day, B and A Company searched the trenches and moved to link up with C Co.. On March 1, General Smith, the 173d ABN BDE CO, terminated Phoenix and the 2/503rd was extracted at 1130. They closed the brigade's base camp at Bien Hoa at 1335.

28th: Sandy Koufax & Don Drysdale begin a joint holdout against Dodgers.

February 1967

2nd: President Johnson states there are no "*serious indications that the other side is ready to stop the war.*"

8th-10th: American religious groups stage a nationwide "*Fast for Peace.*"

(continued...)



8th-12th: A truce occurs during Tet, the lunar New Year, a traditional Vietnamese holiday.

9th: Dow-Jones Index hits record 995 points.

13th: Following the failure of diplomatic peace efforts, President Johnson announces the U.S. will resume full-scale bombing of North Vietnam.



Aretha Franklin

14th: Aretha Franklin records "*Respect*".

16th: *Operation Big Springs* terminates for the 173d Airborne Brigade in War Zone "D". Twenty-six base camps were discovered in "D" Zone, and enemy troops were often encountered during the search of these camps. Brigade elements located and destroyed over 1,000 bunkers, 78 huts, more than 24 tons of rice and 24 weapons. Brigade ground units with air support accounted for 79 Viet Cong dead.

22nd-May 14th: **The largest** military offensive of the war occurs. *Operation Junction City* involves 22 U.S. and four South Vietnamese battalions attempting to destroy the NVA's Central Office headquarters in South Vietnam. The offensive includes the only (mass) parachute assault by U.S. troops during the entire war.

During the fighting at Ap Gu, U.S. 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry is commanded by Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Haig who will later become an influential White House aide. Junction City ends with 2728 Viet Cong killed and 34 captured. American losses are 282 killed and 1576 wounded. NVA relocate their Central Office headquarters inside Cambodia, thus avoiding capture.

25th: 36 U.S. Marines are killed by NVA who raid their base camp near the Demilitarized Zone.

27th: Influential CBS TV news anchorman Walter Cronkite, who just returned from Saigon, tells Americans during his CBS Evening News broadcast that he is certain "*the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate.*"

28th: Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Wheeler, at the behest of Gen. Westmoreland, asks President Johnson for an additional 206,000 soldiers and mobilization of reserve units in the U.S.

February 1968

1st: In Saigon during Tet, a suspected Viet Cong guerrilla is shot in the head by South Vietnam's police chief Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan, in full view of an NBC news cameraman and an Associated Press still

photographer. The haunting AP photo taken by Eddie Adams appears on the front page of most American newspapers the next morning. Americans also observe the filmed execution on NBC TV. Another controversy during Tet, and one of the most controversial statements of the entire war, is made by an American officer who states, "*We had to destroy it, in order to save it,*" referring to a small city near Saigon leveled by American bombs. His statement is later used by many as a metaphor for the American experience in Vietnam.

1st: Former VP Richard Nixon announces candidacy for president.

2nd: President Johnson labels the Tet Offensive "*a complete failure.*" For the North Vietnamese, the Tet Offensive is both a military and political failure in Vietnam. The "general uprising" they had hoped to ignite among South Vietnamese peasants against the Saigon government never materialized. Viet Cong had also come out of hiding to do most of the actual fighting, suffered devastating losses, and never regained their former strength. As a result, most of the fighting will be taken over by North Vietnamese regulars fighting a conventional war. Tet's only success, and an unexpected one, was in eroding grassroots support among Americans and in Congress for continuing the war indefinitely.

6th-7th: The Battle of Lang Vei was a battle of the Vietnam War fought on the night of 6 February 1968, between elements of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and the United States-led Detachment A-101, 5th Special Forces Group. Lang Vei was an American Special Forces camp, located approximately 7 km (4.5 mi) west of the Khe Sanh Combat Base in Quang Tri Province, in the northwestern corner of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN or South Vietnam), near its borders with the DRV and the Kingdom of Laos.



U.S Air Force reconnaissance aircraft revealed the destruction of two North Vietnamese PT-76 tanks in Lang Vei

(continued....)



The camp was constructed in 1967 for operations of the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) along the Laotian frontier. It was overwhelmed by North Vietnamese forces on 7 February 1968. The history of the camp and the battle for the camp are also described in some detail in the article on the Battle of Khe Sanh. Lang Vei was positioned some nine kilometers (5.5 mi) west of Khe Sanh village on Route Coloniale 9. Known to Americans as Highway 9, this major roadway stretched through Quang Tri Province from Dong Ha on the coast west to Lao Bao, Laos, passing through places such as Cam Lo as well as Khe Sanh. Lang Vei was defended by a force of 500 CIDG Montagnards and 24 U.S. Special Forces personnel.

8th: 21 U.S. Marines are killed by NVA at Khe Sanh.

10th: Peggy Fleming wins Olympic figure skating gold medal, Grenoble, France.

18th: 10,000 demonstrators against US in Vietnam War in West-Berlin.



Germans protest Vietnam War in front of American Haus in West Berlin

22nd: In a major offensive, assault teams and artillery attack American bases all over South Vietnam, killing 1,140 Americans. At the same time, South Vietnamese towns and cities are also hit. The heaviest fighting is around Saigon, but fights rage all over South Vietnam. Eventually, American artillery and airpower overwhelm the Vietcong offensive.

23rd: Viet Cong attack 110 targets throughout South Vietnam including Saigon.

23rd: Over 1,300 artillery rounds hit the Marine base at Khe Sanh and its outposts, more than on any previous day of attacks. To withstand the constant assaults, bunkers at Khe Sanh are rebuilt to withstand 82mm mortar rounds.

February 1969

February 1969: In spite of government restrictions, President Nixon authorizes Operation Menu, the bombing of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong bases within Cambodia. Over the following four years, U.S. forces will drop more than a half million tons of bombs on Cambodia.

1st-16th: 173d Airborne Brigade conducts Operation Darby Trail 1 in Bong Son area.

1st-6th March: 173d Airborne Brigade conducts Operation Darby March in Tuy Hoa area.

2nd: Boris Karloff, British actor (Frankenstein), dies at 81.

5th: US population reaches 200 million.



February 1970

1st: Ford Frick, Earle Combs & Jesse Haines elected to Hall of Fame

2nd: B-52 bombers strike the Ho Chi Minh trail in retaliation for the increasing number of Viet Cong raids throughout the South.

21st: Although the official peace talks remain deadlocked in Paris, behind the scenes, Henry Kissinger begins a series of secret talks with North Vietnam's Le Duc Tho, which will go on for two years.

February 1971

February 1971: *Operation Greene Lighting* in the Binh Dinh Province continues for 173d Airborne Brigade, its' 52nd operation in-country.

4th: British car maker Rolls Royce declared itself bankrupt.

8th: In Operation Lam Son 719, three South Vietnamese divisions drive into Laos to attack two major enemy bases. Unknowingly, they are walking into a North Vietnamese trap. Over the next month, more than 9,000 South Vietnamese troops are killed or wounded. More than two thirds of the South Vietnamese Army's armored vehicles are destroyed, along with hundreds of U.S. helicopters and planes.

(continued...)



14th: Richard Nixon installs secret taping system in White House.

February 1972

1st: 1st scientific hand-held calculator (HP-35) introduced (\$395).

21st-28th: President Nixon visits China and meets with Mao Zedong and Prime Minister Zhou Enlai to forge new diplomatic relations with the Communist nation. Nixon's visit causes great concern in Hanoi that their wartime ally China might be inclined to agree to an unfavorable settlement of the war to improve Chinese relations with the U.S.

February 1973

5th: Funeral for LTC William Nolde, last US soldier killed in Vietnam War.

12th: Operation Homecoming begins the release of 591 American POWs from Hanoi.

February 1974

6th: US House of Representatives begins determining grounds for impeachment of Nixon.

17th: Robert K. Preston, a disgruntled U.S. Army private, buzzes the White House with a stolen helicopter.

February 1975

5th: NVA military leader General Van Tien Dung secretly crosses into South Vietnam to take command of the final offensive.

21st: John Mitchell, H.R. Haldeman & John D. Ehrlichman sentenced to 2½-8 yrs.

27th: House of Representatives pass \$21.3 billion anti-recession tax-cut bill.



Former U.S. POWs heading home on “Hanoi Taxi”, a Lockheed C-141.



STATEMENT OF SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT S. McNAMARA

Once closed testimony to the United States Congress

Southeast Asia

No region is more vulnerable and exposed to Communist subversion than Southeast Asia. Living in the shadow of the Communist giant to the north, the far smaller nations in this region are torn between their desire to be free and independent and their fear of being overrun by the Chinese hordes.



Robert McNamara

It is quite understandable therefore that a policy of neutralism in that area realize the danger of placing themselves at the mercy of Communist China and have sought to retain some ties with the Western powers, particularly the United States.

The principal objective of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia is simply to maintain the integrity and independence of the non-Communist nations in that area. We do not require that they be allied with us, but we do attempt to convince them that any tendency to be neutral on the side of Communist China will inevitably lead to Communist control. Accordingly, we have tried in every possible way to support the independence of the non-Communist nations in Southeast Asia wherever our help is wanted, and we have respected the positions of those nations which prefer to seek their security in neutrality. Thus we have a small military program in Burma in addition to a commitment to build a road in that country. However, we have terminated both our military and economic aid programs for Cambodia.

In the case of South Vietnam, our help is clearly wanted and we are deeply engaged in supporting the Vietnamese government and people in their war against Communist Viet Cong. In addition to large-scale economic and military assistance, we are also maintaining a very substantial training and logistics

mission in that country. Including Military Assistance Advisory Group, there are now about 15,500 U.S. military personnel in Vietnam providing training, airlift, communications and advice to the Vietnamese forces and administering the Military Assistance Program.

But the situation there continues grave. Last September we had hoped we could bring sufficient pressure to bear on the Diem government to persuade it to abandon its oppressive measures against the Vietnamese people and get on with the task of winning the war against the Viet Cong. Although the military situation in the Delta region was still very bad, good progress had been made in the northern areas and especially noteworthy work had been done in the key coastal provinces where Viet Cong strength had once threatened to cut the country in half. In the central area and the highland, progress had been steady, though slower. The situation was still difficult in the provinces to the west and north of Saigon itself. Throughout the northern two-thirds of the country, the strategic hamlet program had developed very well and freedom of movement in the rural areas.

Robert S. McNamara

Vietnamese Government Over-Thrown

The arrest and assassination of Ngô Đình Diệm, then president of South Vietnam, marked the culmination of a successful CIA-backed *coup d'état* led by General Dương Văn Minh in November 1963. On the morning of November 2, 1963, Diệm and his adviser, younger brother Ngô Đình Nhu, were arrested after the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) had been successful in a bloody overnight siege on Gia Long Palace in Saigon.



Ngô Dinh Diem

(continued...)



The *coup* was the culmination of nine years of autocratic and nepotistic family rule in South Vietnam. Discontent with the Diem regime had been simmering below the surface, and exploded with mass Buddhist protests against long-standing religious discrimination after the government shooting of protesters who defied a ban on the flying of the Buddhist flag.

When rebel forces entered the palace, the Ngô were not present, as they had escaped before to a loyalist shelter in Cholon. The brothers had kept in communication with the rebels through a direct link from the shelter to the palace, and misled them into believing that they were still in the palace. The Ngô brothers soon agreed to surrender and were promised safe exile; after being arrested, they were instead executed in the back of an armoured personnel carrier by ARVN officers on the journey back to military headquarters at Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base.



Ngo Dinh Diem

While no formal inquiry was conducted, the responsibility for the deaths of the Ngô brothers is commonly placed on Minh's bodyguard, Captain Nguyễn Văn Nhung, and on Major Dương Hiếu Nghĩa, both of whom guarded the brothers during the trip. Minh's army colleagues and US officials in Saigon agreed that Minh ordered the executions. They postulated various motives, including that the brothers had embarrassed Minh by fleeing the Gia Long Palace, and that the brothers were killed to prevent a later political comeback. The generals initially attempted to cover up the execution by suggesting that the brothers had committed suicide, but this was contradicted when photos of the Ngôs' bloodied bodies surfaced in the media.

U.S. Reaction

Kennedy learned of the deaths on the following morning when National Security Council staffer Michael Forrestal rushed into the cabinet room with a telegram reporting the Ngo brothers' suicides. According to General Maxwell Taylor, "*Kennedy leaped to his feet and rushed from the room with a look of shock and dismay on his face which I had never seen before.*" Kennedy had planned that Diem would be safely exiled and Arthur Schlesinger recalled that the U.S. president was "somber and shaken". Kennedy later penned a memo, lamenting that the assassination was "particularly abhorrent" and blaming himself for approving Cable 243, which authorized Lodge to explore coup options in the wake of Nhu's attacks on the Buddhist pagodas. Forrestal said that, "*It shook him personally...bothered him as a moral and religious matter. It shook his confidence, I think, in the kind of advice he was getting about South Vietnam.*" When Kennedy was consoled by a friend who told him he need not feel sorry for the Ngo brothers on the grounds of despotism, Kennedy replied, "*No. They were in a difficult position. They did the best they could for their country.*"



Reflections of a Defense Secretary

"Be prepared to reexamine your reasoning... What makes us omniscient?" asked McNamara, referring to Vietnam but also looking at the world then around him. *"Have we a record of omniscience? We are the strongest nation in the world today. I do not believe that we should ever apply that economic, political and military power unilaterally. If we had followed that rule in Vietnam, we wouldn't have been there. None of our allies supported us. Not Japan, not Germany, not Britain or France. If we can't persuade nations with comparable values of the merit of our cause, we'd better reexamine our reasoning."*

Robert S. McNamara

"Now we have a problem in making our power credible, and Vietnam is the place."

-- John F. Kennedy, 1961



Senate panel hears of battles for care by veterans with PTSD

By Gregg Zoroya
USA TODAY
12/1/2011

Accounts of chronic staff shortages among Department of Veterans Affairs mental health staff and veterans discouraged over delays in therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder were brought before a Senate Veterans' Affairs committee hearing today.



The U.S. government tests hundreds of Marines and soldiers before they ship out to help predict who is most susceptible to PTSD

Photo by Jae C. Hong, AP

"Too often, I am told that the patient will have to wait as long as six weeks for the first appointment. But after waiting that long, many patients lose the motivation for treatment, or their PTSD worsens while they are waiting," testified Michelle Washington, a coordinator of PTSD care at a VA hospital in Wilmington, Del. Forty percent of about 600 Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans surveyed by the non-profit Wounded Warrior Project in recent weeks, and who were seeking VA mental health treatment, reportedly struggled in getting help. And among those, 40% received no therapy at all, said John Roberts, executive vice president of the organization.

Roberts called the survey result a "stark call-to-action." The committee has been pressing the VA hard in recent months on delays in treating mental health cases after a survey done within the department earlier this year showed that 70% of clinicians believe the VA lacks staffing or space to handle the mounting numbers of veterans seeking care.

A *USA TODAY* analysis of VA data showed that new mental health patients at about a third of department hospitals wait longer than the VA's goal of treating patients within 14 days or less.

The VA insists that it is meeting scheduling deadlines and that any delays are the result of problems it cannot control, such as patient rescheduling or failing to show up for appointments. *USA TODAY* reported Wednesday that 10,000 combat veterans with PTSD sought care at VA hospitals every three months this year, pushing the total number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans treated by the VA for the disorder to 211,000.

Washington was the first VA employee to step forward publicly in recent months and describe severe delays in mental health treatment. "I am frequently frustrated in my ability to provide care," said Washington, who has also been authorized to speak on behalf of the 600,000 member American Federation of Government Employees, the largest federal employees union. Washington said VA schedulers are under enormous pressure to meet the VA's 14-day deadline for new patients and this robs therapists of the ability to manage growing numbers of veterans requiring ongoing and lengthy counseling.

She said problems will persist "as long as scheduling continues to be driven by clerks pressured by management to make the numbers look good — and as long as mental health providers have little or no say about where and when to best serve patients."

The VA director of mental health operations, Mary Schoen, says the department has increased its staffing by nearly 50% since 2006, and continues to look for ways to improve access to care. The VA's failure, however, to acknowledge significant problems led committee member to question the credibility of Schoen and her staff.

"I just want to hear the truth," said Sen. John Rockefeller, D-W.Va.

Source: Veterans United for Truth newsletter

"I am too positive to be doubtful, too optimistic to be fearful, too determined to be defeated."

Colonel Vance Forepaugh
173d Airborne Brigade

[Sent in by Art Fry, A/2/503d, '69/'70]





173rd Airborne Brigade

503rd Infantry - 4th Battalion Geronimo

GERONIMO'S JOURNEY TO 'NAM

By Elmer "Buddy" Davis
C/4/503d

Everyone knows that the 4/503d was originally the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment assigned to the 101st Airborne Division, Ft. Campbell, KY. The famous nickname of the 1/501st was "Geronimo". Of course, we had a wooden Indian that stood proudly at the door of our Battalion Headquarters. When the 1/501st deployed to Vietnam as the 4/503d to join the 173rd Airborne Brigade in 'Nam, we left our wooden buddy back at Campbell.

I was the supply sergeant of Company C, 4/503d. A couple of months after arriving in Vietnam, the Red Cross was in the process of sending me home for my wife's child birth at Fort Campbell, KY. The company commander, Captain Jack K. Tarr, stopped me on my way to the Bn S-4 at the Bien Hoa rear area. Captain Tarr said that the Battalion CO, LTC Healy, knew I was going to Fort Campbell to be with my wife. Iron Mike wanted me to locate our mascot, Geronimo, and ship him to Vietnam. Since Geronimo was a wooden Indian, he was not transferred with the rest of us to Vietnam.



MG Michael D. Healy

When I got back to Ft Campbell, I located Geronimo on my first stop, the Brigade Headquarters. Geronimo was about 5' 4" and weighed about 90 pounds. A fine looking wooden Indian. There he was standing at the inside entrance. It really was good to see him again. Seemed as he looked at me like, "What the hell took you so long?"

I had to convince the Brigade Commander, a full colonel, that I was sent by LTC Healy. He was surprised, but gave approval to send our buddy to Vietnam. There was no problem lifting and loading

Geronimo in my pickup. I put him in the front seat with me. Nothing else to do, so I talked to Geronimo on the way to Post Transportation. I asked Geronimo if he knew he was dropped from the rolls of the 4th Battalion as a deserter?

I went in the Transportation Warehouse and told a couple civilians that I had a wooden Indian that I needed to ship to Vietnam. They looked at each other and smiled, nodding their heads. Really a couple of very helpful individuals. I had to convince them by dragging Geronimo in the door. They immediately started putting a wooden box together. I guess that would be like a wooden Indian's quarters for the long trip. It was a "hand shake deal". Nothing in writing. What did I know about returning AWOL wooden Indians to their unit?

About 7 weeks later, I was back in 'Nam and Captain Tarr again stopped me in almost the same spot. In a very serious voice, he said that LTC Healy wanted to know if I had stolen Geronimo? Clearly a "Who me?" situation, and I looked over my shoulder to make sure he was talking to me. My integrity was at stake. My reputation alone should have taken care of the Colonel's thinking, and this situation was based on honesty, and merit as a supply sergeant.

Thank God Geronimo showed up a few weeks after the conversation with Captain Tarr. I went to the Battalion Headquarters building when I got the good news of his arrival. There was Geronimo standing inside the entrance in his headdress and all his color. He never looked better. I looked him straight in the eyes and let him know that he had gotten me in a great deal of trouble.

Years later, I had a few days left in the military before retirement, when the 4/503d colors were returned to Fort Campbell. Geronimo was not in the advance party. To the best of my knowledge, he was not in the main body either.

I often wonder if he's getting old. Could he still be serving? Would sure like to see him. Anyone know how I can locate Geronimo?

(continued...)



So, you wanna be an Army
combat helicopter pilot?



“Casper Huey 143 on a support mission for 173d line units
somewhere out of Dak To 1967” (Casper web site photo)

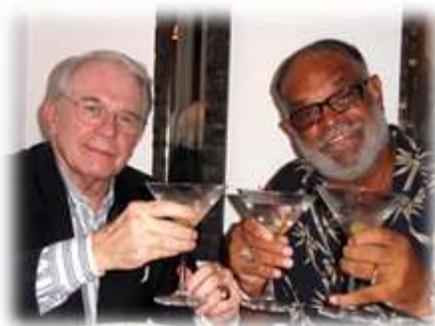
~ Fighter Pilot's Prayer ~

*"Lord, I pray for the eyes of
an eagle, the heart of a lion
and the balls of an Army
combat helicopter pilot."*

[Sent in by Jerry Sopko, D/4/503d]

Red Leg & Grunt

On my most recent
visit to Panama, my
wife Mary and I were
privileged to spend a
convivial evening of
fine food and drink
with the former Charlie
Battery 319th Artillery
commander (4/66-4/67),
Colonel Court Prisk
(Ret). This good-
humored encounter
was made possible by his younger brother, Gary “Cap”
Prisk (C/D/2/503, 67-68). Court has resided in Panama
since 1985 and is married to prominent Panamanian
dermatologist, Gioconda Guadiano Salud!



Court & Wambi

Wambi Cook
A/2/503d

(See a story by Court on Pages 40-44)

Vietnam Veterans Homecoming Celebration Set for March 31, 2012



The Vietnam Veterans Homecoming
Celebration for military members and their friends and
families will be held on Saturday, March 31.

The USO of North Carolina and Charlotte Motor
Speedway, with support from the North Carolina
Association of Broadcasters, announced that they will
hold an incredible *Vietnam Veterans Homecoming
Celebration* for military members and their friends and
families that will be held on March 31.

Vietnam veterans never received the type of
homecoming celebration that today's troops receive as
they return from service. To honor those who served
and the military members who returned from combat,
the USO of North Carolina is holding a long, overdue
homecoming celebration.

Hosted by the USO of North Carolina and Charlotte
Motor Speedway, the *Vietnam Veterans Homecoming
Celebration 2012* is set to be an unforgettable experience
featuring live entertainment, displays and
demonstrations, military salutes, and much more.

Visit this web site for details:

http://www.charlottespeedway.com/tickets/vietnam_veterans_homecoming_celebration_2012/600589.html

[Sent in by Larry Hampton, A/1/503d]

*“There is the guilt all soldiers feel for
having broken the taboo against killing, a
guilt as old as war itself. Add to this the
soldier's sense of shame for having fought
in actions that resulted, indirectly or
directly, in the deaths of civilians. Then
pile on top of that an attitude of social
opprobrium, an attitude that made the
fighting man feel personally morally
responsible for the war, and you get your
proverbial walking time bomb.”*

~ Philip Caputo, 1982



A GOOD RANT, AND A GOOD STORY

(Plus a bit about Alice's Restaurant)

By George Rivera

A/2/503d

Smitty:

You'd better stop being sentimental and get your tired, shot up, old ass back to work. Nobody is standing in line to do what you do because no one else can, is willing, or is capable. I might. What's the pay? I among many will lament your absence when you stand in the door, get the green light, and *Go!* I hope it's to Heaven buddy. Become a believer. It's easy. I can help. I hope it is green for you. I'll be waiting for you there. In the meantime, say whatever you want. Tear them up!

War music is part of who we are. I didn't like all of it. I hated those hippie bastards. I was surrounded by damn hippie grunts every day wearing their beads and peace signs. But they humped and kicked ass like nobody's business.



Hippie bastards

I knew real hippies who jumped and humped, and yeah, they were goat herders. Imagine that! I even heard some of them smoked pot. I never did myself though, I just read about it you know. Well, except for that one time on a radio relay station midway between English and Phu Cat known as the Hawk's Nest. I was only on it once.



The chopper we were on was flying southwest of Highway 1 when it abruptly, steeply banked and turned left climbing into a horseshoe with a reddish rock spike with two bunkers on it that were shrouded in clouds and fog. It was covered with antennas like a porcupine has quills. I had never seen anything like that. I thought we were headed for the hilltops behind it. But the pilots wanted to play scare the humpers and made a steep left circle. I think I left the impressions of my fingerprints on the bar behind the pilot's seat. He missed the initial approach for fun and because he was going too fast. On the second attempt, they came back around, flared and stopped dead with the left skid on the spike and the other in the air and somebody yelled, "*This is it! Last stop! Everybody out!*" As I leaned forward out of the ship I could see through the left skid to the ground far below. It was straight down for at least a hundred feet.

The team leader was Sergeant Danny Osborne. He was likeable towards me, and he was all business as I was, so I felt an ease with him that comes from confidence in his knowledge and leadership abilities. There were two bunkers. The westward one belonged to a young lieutenant and an older Master Sergeant. They both stared at Sgt Osborne and me as we walked the full perimeter looking for weaknesses or penetrability. It was straight up all around so we were sure no one was coming over looking for trouble, which meant we would be able to sleep a full night. All operations ceased at 1800 countrywide, and it became a free fire zone. That chopper's crew was headed home just in time.

There was a native tenant standing by the enlisted bunker motioning us over. As we entered the bunker there was a section about six feet long that was solid radios from ceiling to floor. It was dark in there. There was a cloud of smoke from the ceiling down to about three feet. I had to bend over to see under the smoke where I was going. It was like in *Apocalypse Now*. There was a throne made of sandbags, and a sandbag table. Bon Bon cans, some full and some empty were on the table. The occupants of the E.M. bunker had these huge glass devices, with brown water in them. By the time SGT Osborne and I got in there, the other team members had already begun testing the waters. I won't speak for Danny Osborne, because I don't remember, but I will speak for myself.

They had beer in there in a refrigerator, and when one made it down to me, I grabbed it. It was a 12 ounce Falstaff 3.2, but it was cold. In the 2/503 we had a ration of two warm beers a month and two warm sodas a month. You all know it's true.

(continued....)



Somebody passed over a joint rolled in yellow paper the diameter of my pinky. I had never seen such a beautiful thing. Perfectly rolled, and crying out, taste me! Taste me! Now I was not a hippie trooper, I disdained their pot smoking. But I could be dead tomorrow, so why not? I looked at Sgt Osborne. He shrugged his shoulders and made a motion that meant every man for himself. I didn't see him again until 0500. I am saying this at such a late date because if the President can say he smoked crack, and did cocaine, I can say I smoked a joint. Well, I had no experience with drugs so I took a couple of hits and passed out. The guys all talked about what a great time they had had, and I had no recollection. What can I say? I was a virgin.

I didn't inhale. I held my breath for as long as I could. Then I don't remember what happened except that they later told me that I had eaten ham and mother fuckers mixed with ham and eggs. I really had never known a mother fucker and I sure wouldn't have eaten one, much less a posse of them. But I had. I still spit when I think of it.

Any Recon guy who says he got to listen to music at LZ English is likely a liar. At least in '68. The only radio I had was a AN/PRC-25 and the only music I had listened to primarily



F-100F Super Sabre at Phu Cat

was the static when I broke squelch for a hourly Sit-Rep while in the field, or when one of the Air Force Fighters out of Phu Cat were being guided down their glide slope by Phu Cat Approach Control when their tubes blew, and I also had a lot of night fire missions. I did not even know of Radio Saigon (where was that? Good morning Vietnam!?). I saw the movie when it came out. I never went anywhere but An Khe, Pleiku, and Bong Song, and the scenic mountains, streams and villages thereabouts. I never heard of AFVN, or anything else either until years after the war was over. Damn it, I'm having a flashback!

Okay, I'm better. I want to tell a war story now.

In early June of 1971, there was a platoon of Bravo 3/319th with M-102 Howitzers on the small prominence of a mountain of 2650 meters acting in support of the rest of the 2/503d which was conducting hunter-killer operations in the surrounding valleys. It was part of the mountain



M-102

range in North-Eastern II Tactical Corps just a few kilometers south of I Corps. There was also a platoon of infantry and a recon team of which Richard Celaya and I were members along with others I can't recall because I have severe CRS syndrome now. The recon team patrolled with a squad of infantry during the day and set up night ambushes on the ridgeline approaching the fire support base. I did no patrolling on this base, only F.O. work.

Everything went well for a time. The gun bunnies cleaned their pieces during the day, fired a few minor missions and did heavy Harassment & Interdiction (H&I) fires at night. It was hard to sleep there at night with all the firing-associated noise and commotion of people yelling orders, charge cutters and gunners reading back-fire commands, and moving around all night and the nearly constant firing. Then between watch changes, just about when I was about to pass out from fatigue, **BOOM! BOOM!!** More H&Is.



Night Fire

Finally, the day came when we were ordered off the mountain. And not a day too soon. I was stressed from having to defecate in view of everyone, friend and foe. We were ordered to be extracted the next morning. The NVA must have received the orders too, because they spent the entire night keeping us up with probing fires. We were going home. Well, LZ English, close enough, and they were trying to prevent us. Bad NVA.

That night, the 4th Infantry got into a big fire fight, maybe even a battle north of us, which was when I first realized just how far north we were. I was an artillery observer as you all know by now, so I had full map sheets, but not of maps outside of the currently assigned AO.

(continued....)



They were getting their butts whipped. There were tracers going both ways -- a lot of them. At some point there were the flood lamps of Dust Offs, then silence, then more firing, but not as intense as before. It amazed me that Dust Offs and slicks could fly at night but gunships could not.

Finally, the interminable silence of approaching dawn. No artillery or fire support of any kind for the duration of the night. It must have been emotional hell on that mountain. There was nothing I could do. Nothing I could have done. It has bothered me every time I think about it.

The next morning was a little more exciting. CH-47 Chinooks were ferrying ammo in all morning because some grunts had bumped into a medium to large NVA on-the-run unit that did not want to engage and scattered them all over the valley. Finally, the NVA decided to forego the infantry and maneuver one of their sister units to attack the fire support base that was ruining their Nuoc Mam. The NVA had set-up just the other side of the north-south ridgeline and begun sniping, or harassing fire, if you can call a few NVA sporadically firing semi and full auto in teams sniping.



CH-47 Chinook in support of 173d Airborne

Photo by Fitz-Enz

Our infantry platoon had condensed into a smaller perimeter because of the now directed sniper fire being delivered by the NVA, and because nobody wanted another Hill 875 type engagement where troops were scattered all over as they were being butchered by NVA. The NVA stopped for their union contract lunch break, and as soon as they re-engaged us, the two remaining M-102s on the north facing slope engaged them with MTSQ HE and Beehive. But still, the local NVA political cadre insisted on saying good bye to the famous 173d Airborne Brigade.

I was short, about a week and some days on my second tour, and I wanted to make it out on my feet with my eyes blinking, not inside a black or OD bag. I had spent the last night in a hole on the southeast facing slope of the mountain and I was a little nervous. Okay, I was highly concerned, but still collected. Remember when you were short, how your vision and hearing improved? Mine had too.

The NVA were interrupting the ride home and hot chow, which can all now recall, was nothing to fight over. You knew it was never hot, or even warm, but it was understood by all after years of indoctrination to be hot chow, so it was hot chow. We were not happy. They stopped firing, but every time a CH-47 approached, the NVA resumed firing at the ships, which then had to abort the extraction attempt. We were hot, the base was hot and we had no LZ, just a hover point that kept shifting over the different positions of the three M-102s. At one point, we were down to one M-102, and less than a hundred assorted rounds of 105MM. I remember a full 55 round pallet slung and some extra, so the ammo count was more than 55, but less than one hundred. More importantly, the NVA knew where we were, how many of us there were, and what we had. Yeah, they had seen our nakedness. And more kept coming to the party.

A few sorties had been forced to divert from the red smoke. A Chinook is a big ship, and except for the severely visually impaired, an easy target. There was an immediate cessation of NVA fire at one point, and one of the ships finally made it all the way in and out with the surplus 105MM. It was almost the last run. It came in, picked a sling load of ammo and left. The last basic load and Scorpion were netted. A few minutes later, another, maybe the same ship rolled in. It hovered just above the ground, rear door open, everyone raced in, then it lifted off to about 6-10 feet and moved over to pick up the last M-102 with its' basic load of 55 rounds. Everyone was on the ship. All of the NVA opened fire in volume all at once. Those who had set up just the other side of the north-ridge line began full firing. I was on the left side, front most seating position behind the door gun.

I could feel and hear the fire hitting the left side of the ship. It sounded as if someone were throwing handfuls of pea gravel at it. Thinking I might get shot in the back of the head, I leaned forward, but where they were on the ground and where I was in the ship, the fire would have made the round(s) pass through me from my lower back, through my abdomen and thorax, maybe travel and exit through my head and me in a bag immediately came to mind.

(continued....)



I bolted upright just in time to see a burst of rounds travel from the extreme left rear and hit a large diameter aluminum hydraulic line on the right side. The line exploded gushing a thick, high pressure stream of bright red hydraulic oil onto the floor. It was like severing an artery. I began screaming at the Load Master while pointing to the rear of the ship, but he thought it was he who was hit and he looked down and felt his chest and abdomen. I screamed again, *"No, back there!"*

Right after that as I stood straddling over the open load bay, he must have received an intercom call from one of the pilots. The ship began shaking and the ass end began violently moving left to right. The ship was bouncing like a rodeo bull. I looked through the cockpit bulkhead and I could see the right seat pilot struggling with the cyclic. He was white, tall, slender, blonde hair and he was half out of his seat pulling up as hard as he could with both arms. Somebody jettisoned the M-102 with its basic load and the ship jumped up and screamed down the east side of the mountain with the pilot's manually inputting control. I looked around and saw blank stares on the faces of everyone on that ship whose faces I could see. I still do not know why they were looking at me while I was looking at them, but I thought, *"I'm going to die, so I might as well see where,"* and I half stood up to get a better view out the cockpit Lexan foot wells.

I clearly remember thinking, *"Well, it can't hurt that much and if it does it won't be for that long,"* so I leaned forward more to see what was going on. I could hear loud "Popping." The belly of the ship was breaking off tree tops. I could see the base of the mountain where I was going to die. I was not afraid. I knew I was going to die and I was not going to die afraid. What could I do? I kept looking at the right seater struggling to maintain control. It did not look good for us. Just when the ship was about to impact the valley floor, the ship leveled off at maybe one hundred feet, maybe fifty. For the briefest time I felt relief, then I looked straight ahead at a fast approaching hill ridge and I thought, *"Okay, that is where we are going to die."* It was flying fast while yawing left. Not having been an aviator and having only seconds to live, I tried to figure out what was going to happen next. I could only guess that they could not flare or steer the ship so it was headed where it was pointed, and it was pointing at mid-height on ascending terrain just below the ridge.

It was slowing down and I was hoping it wouldn't hurt much. Then as we rapidly closed on the ridge, just a second or two before impact the ship made it to jump over the ridge and crash on a shallow river on the other side. Okay, I hurt my back, but I took command and began barking orders. To my surprise, at this stage of my life, everyone did exactly as I said without question

except for two infantry guys. There was a M-60 squad that I helped set up. Well, I was instructing them in how to set up the M-60. My instructions were interrupted. I was twenty feet away from the right seater as he began calling, *"Mayday, Mayday, Mayday"* on his Emergency Radio. Man, that guy was tall! He was well over six feet. Then he said something I couldn't make out. The river at that point was oriented approximately South-North.

The riverbed was covered with river boulders of approximately 200mm in diameter. I turned to the gunner and assistant gunner of the '60, *"You two start stacking these boulders to make a parapet and set your gun up behind it facing that way,"* pointing approximately West.

Then I turned to the other two and said, *"You two, go forward and set up an O.P."* One of them asked, *"But what if we take fire?"* I said, *"Then return fire and make it back here."* *"But what if somebody back here opens fire on us?"* I said, *"Nobody back here is firing anything until you get back here."* *"But what if we get hit?"* they asked. I looked them straight in their eyes just as I answered, *"Then I'm coming for you."* They looked at me, then at each other, nodded okay, and disappeared into the elephant grass.

Then I went over to set up the north side. My then friend, Doc Celaya, yelled at me, *"You're hit!"* I didn't feel hit. I looked down at myself much as the Load Master had done, and I couldn't see any pain or feel my blood. Yes, that's correct. Pain can be seen and blood can be felt. I had seen it many times when someone else was hit and they didn't make a sound until they saw their pain. Then they began screaming. I yelled back, *"Where?"*

Doc answered, *"Your head!"*

Having my rifle in my right hand, I reached up with my left hand and wiped my forehead from right to left, then down the left side of my face to the back of my head, and everything was where it was supposed to be. I felt fine, no holes, no blood.

Then he yelled, *"No, the other side!"* I reached up and wiped from front to back the right side of my face and there a bump and there was blood. Doc Celaya yelled, *"Do you want me to put you in for a purple heart?"* I said, *"No, I'd be embarrassed for such a minor injury."* There was blood, but it wasn't running much. I was a good clotter. I'd live. I don't know how I was cut; a graze? (Richard, if you read this, you can still put me in for that Purple Heart).

(continued....)



Almost at the same time as my words were leaving my parched lips, two Cobras wound their way through the valley towards us. They were beautiful. Almost black dark green. But I could see the light through their 2.75" empty rocket launchers. They circled once and left because they were, "Bingo fuel." Bingo, "Are they going to play Bingo?" The right seater said, "That means they are low on fuel. They'll be back. There are others on the way." They never did return, but two OH-60 Loaches with mini-guns came, stayed a while hunting and then left.



Bell AH-1G Cobra

Loaches were better for close in work. After a while a recovery crew in a Slick came in with big nets, straps and tool bags. They began taking the wounded ship apart by dumping her fuel in the river. They then climbed up on top of her, worked a few minutes on the rotor heads and threw the rotors to the ground. I would not have ridden in them if I had known they came apart so easily.

Now, the fear and the anger began settling in. The enemy had not only tried to, "Motherfuckin kill us, M.F. 'n murder us when we were M.F. 'n trying to M.F. 'n peacefully leave, they got a free M.F. 'n Scorpion with a M.F. 'n 'Secret' sight, and a M.F. 'n free basic load. We were going to have to M.F. 'n sleep in the M.F. 'n woods full of M.F. 'n blood sucking parasitic bugs, with a tired M.F. 'n platoon of goat herders that was out of M.F. 'n food, water, M.F. 'n critically low on M.F. 'n ammo, and Damn it, no M.F. 'n Hot Chow either! You M.F. 'n NVA M.F. 'ers! You M.F. 'n took my M.F. 'n Hot M.F. 'n Chow, you M.F. 'n NVA M.F. 'ing bastards," I yelled hysterically as my comrades looked on in stunned silence.

I was nothing if not fashionable. I wore the finest in Jungle Fatigues, and the best weaponry. "Motherfucker is the word of the day!" Once I caught on with a new curse word, I really used it up. I became shrouded in reality.

I yelled up, "Hey! Don't throw those rotors down so hard! You're breaking them," concerning the downed CH-47's rotors. "Pass them down to me." But he yelled back something like, "It's okay, they will never see service again!" "What do you mean, They'll never see service again?"

Once a ship goes down, we have to strip it to ship it back to the "World" for overhaul. "This baby's going home brother!" "Great!" I asked, thinking I could profit from the post-war rotor surplus, "How much do these things cost?" "Oh, they cost around \$32,000 each!" "\$32,000? Can I have one?" "No you can't. We have to account for them by serial number, then destroy them. When we get back, we saw them into pieces."

I thought, "Dammit, man. I get paid a couple of hundred bucks a month Base Pay to be abused, malnourished, and dehydrated, \$65. Combat Pay monthly to let people I don't know shoot at me, and \$65. Jump Pay per month for attempting suicide every three months. Give me a damned rotor!" "Sorry man. No can do."

Then it started to become dark. It became dark quickly in the Central Highlands. Then it was dark. Jungle dark. Not as dark as ocean dark, but dark. No moon, no stars, just dark. In the Coastal mountains, the moist, warm sea evaporates meets cooler mountain air and entire mountain ranges disappear in enveloping fog. Except for the deafening chirp of hundreds of thousands of tons of bugs, the prop wash of insect wings, and whine of turbine powered Vietnamese mosquitoes, it was quiet too. It was good for us. When the enemy was on the move, the jungle became dead silent. Any movement by anyone at all would silence billions of insects who were trying to eat or get laid. Me too motherfuckers! "If I can't get any, why should you?" I whispered to myself.

After some point in time, I could make out the squeal of armored vehicles. You can't sneak around in M-551 Sheridan Light tanks otherwise known as ARAAV for "Armored Reconnaissance Airborne Assault Vehicles" or M-113 APCs (Armored Personnel Carriers) without everyone in the valley knowing where you were. It was an Infantry Company with tracks, maybe from Troop E 1/17th Cavalry Airborne with Captain (later to become General) Joe Jellison as CO. I knew his voice from before. He was barking orders.



APC

(continued...)



A CH-54 "Flying Crane" came on station and lit up the entire operation and men with its flood lamp. It was hovering over the downed CH-47 with a recovery crew member trying to hook the sling that held the CH-47 sling load to the load hook of the CH-54 without success. After several failed attempts, Captain Jellison yelled, "Somebody get up there who knows what they're doing." I had never done that, but I could see the problem. The recovery crew member was intimidated by the proximity of the CH-54 and wasn't allowing it to hover low enough to grab the hook. I climbed up the left side, grabbed the sling shackle and motioned for the Flying Crane operator to descend more and more, until I could reach it. I was hunched over between the two ships and when it was close enough to make the hook, I jumped up and hooked it, then slid down the left side of the CH-47 and off she went into the darkness. I don't know what happened to her after that, but she had saved us just before she died.



I was dead tired. I don't remember anything more. I know that we spent another night in the woods feeding mosquitoes.

I contracted P. Falciparum and Vivax Malaria there and almost died there and here at home. As recently as 1994, I was having recurring episodes of Plasmodium Falciparum Malaria at least twice a year. The VA said it was impossible. Finally, a Dominican neighborhood physician named Dr. Torres told me to go to Metropolitan Hospital in Harlem, North Manhattan, "where there were many doctors from Africa and Asia. If you have Malaria, they will find it." Which they did in three days. Diagnosis; Plasmodium falciparum Malaria. They treated me and I have been symptom free since then.

I do know that a few days later, my First Sergeant told me, "There's a slick waiting for you on the Crap Table. Get on it." It was not unusual for me to be ordered to take a slick. I thought I was going back out to the field, because that was how I moved from company to company. I had many frequent flier miles with Casper and Lucky Seven Aviation. When I got to the crap table, the pilot told me, "This is your lucky day," and he took off gaining altitude enough to clear the high Tiger Mountains on the way to Ahn Khe.



Mountain range near LZ English

I wanted to return to English. I did not want to leave my friends behind. I never even got to say goodbye to any of my friends, have our last beer together, hand down my gear, or lose my virginity. If any Wildcats show up, send them to me. I might know them, and we can have that beer. The virginity thing...can we work out? Got any sisters?

FOR SALE

Parachute

Only used once, never opened, small stain.

Call Mike Sturges, A/2/503d, Walter Reed Army Hospital

