

2. Two rifle Battalions of the 503d Regiment jumped on the Island of Noemfoor off the coast of Dutch, New Guinea early in July 1944, followed by an amphibious landing by the other rifle Battalion a few days later. The Regiment was employed in the elimination of the Japanese garrison on that Island. Airfields constructed on Noemfoor after its capture played a significant role in supporting the advance of Allied troops from New Guinea to the Philippines. Sergeant Ray E. Eubanks was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, posthumously, for his actions on Noemfoor.

3. Following a non-combat landing on the Island of Leyte, in the Philippines, the 503d Parachute Regimental Combat Team made a major amphibious landing on the Island of Mindoro, in the central Philippines on 15 December 1944. Originally, it was intended for the 503rd to jump on Mindoro but due to inadequate airstrip facilities on Leyte an airborne landing was not possible. The purpose of this landing was to secure sites for air strips providing forward Air Corp bases to support later landings at Lingyen Gulf, Luzon. The Combat Team was subjected to intense air and naval actions during this operation, at one point being shelled for 25 minutes by a Japanese Naval task force. One Company of the Combat Team engaged in a fierce battle against a Company-size enemy air raid warning station on the North end of Mindoro.

4. The Combat Team jumped on Fortress Corregidor on 16 February 1945 to liberate that Island from occupying Japanese forces. This was the most vicious combat action in which the Combat Team engaged during its existence. Corregidor was the bastion which withstood a fierce Japanese siege for nearly five months in 1941 and 1942, thereby interrupting the

Japanese advance toward Australia. The 503rd was proud to have been allowed to have the honor of recapturing the Island. Japanese sources, within recent years, have estimated there were 6550 Japanese on the Island when the 503rd landed. Of those, only 50 survived. The 503rd, however, lost 169 men killed and many wounded or injured. The 503rd was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for its actions. Private Lloyd G. McCarter was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery on Corregidor.



Corregidor jump

5. Almost immediately after returning to Mindoro from Corregidor, the Combat Team was called upon to bolster the 40th Division which was bogged down on the Island of Negros, in the Central Philippines. The Combat team was inserted into Negros by landing craft, although it had been alerted for another combat jump. The objectives of the proposed jump, a strategic bridge and a large lumber mill, were destroyed by Japanese forces, thereby eliminating the first objectives of the 503d.

(continued...)





Colonel Jones, Commander 503rd PIR

Unfortunately, the 503rd lost a lot of good men in accomplishing its missions. The names of 348 of these men have been identified. By early November 1945 the 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team ceased to be operational. All men with lengthy service in the Southwest Pacific had been rotated to the United States while those who had served the Combat Team for a shorter time had been reassigned to the 11th Airborne Division and sent as occupation troops to Japan. The Regiment was inactivated on 24 December 1945 at Camp Anza, California. Veterans of the 503rd, who served during World War II, began holding informal get-togethers almost immediately after 1945. An Association was established and National Reunions have been held each year since 1957.

Source:

<http://thedropzone.org/pacific/503hist.html>

(Photos courtesy of the 503rd Heritage Battalion web site)



503rd troopers ready for Nadzab jump.



Japanese surrender at Negros

6. The 503rd engaged in fierce battles against frantic Japanese resistance in the mountainous areas of Negros for more than five months. The 40th US Division convinced higher headquarters there were only a few enemy troops remaining on the Island and were moved to Minanao, leaving the 503rd to battle the Japanese alone. At the end of the War with Japan in August 1945, about 7,500 of the surviving Japanese troops surrendered to the 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team. Official U.S. War Department sources estimated the 503rd killed over 10,000 Japanese troops during its combat operations in the Southwest Pacific.





~ Operation Corregidor II ~

During our 173d reunion this month in Lexington, KY, the Chapter 17 reunion steering committee has secured the *Kentucky Theatre* just a couple blocks from reunion central at the Hyatt Hotel, to serve as site for *Operation Corregidor II*, the interactive meeting with WWII 503rd troopers; *Operation Corregidor I* having been held in N. Myrtle Beach at our 2010 reunion, and *Operation Corregidor* having been held on Corregidor in 1945. This historic building will be ideal for this gathering of paratrooper warriors and their families. Chapter 17 is even providing popcorn and cold drinks!

More than just a movie house...

The Kentucky Theatre is a familiar Landmark to generations of Lexingtonians. It's richly ornamented walls and glowing stained glass fixtures have hosted gala events and entertained overflowing crowds. They have also endured hard times and disasters, both natural and manmade. And so it stands today, a true palace of memories, a hall full of comedy, tragedy, drama, adventure, and just plain fun.

We hope you enjoy this brief look at her history and join us soon to continue the tradition by making some memories of your own.



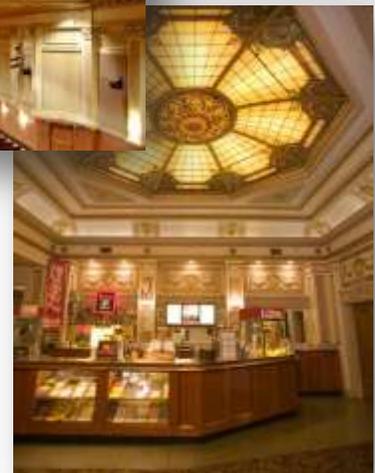
Publicity stunt for an early "talkie" featuring The Marx Brothers. (Courtesy, University of Kentucky Photo Archives)

1965

The Sound of Music. Thousands lined up daily to see this summer's timeless hit.



The present Kentucky Theatre auditorium (by Lee P. Thomas)



The concession area (by Raymond Adams)



October, 1921
Construction plans announced. The Builder, Lafayette Amusement Company offered \$20 in gold to name Lexington's "palatial new photoplay house".

The winner, of course, was the "Kentucky."

April 24, 1927

Enter the "talkies". In a major marketing coup, the Kentucky was the first to introduce Warner Brothers' vitaphone sound films to Lexington.



Operation Corregidor II
coming this month to the Kentucky



OPERATION CORREGIDOR II

*an interactive meeting with
WWII paratroopers from the
503rd Parachute Infantry
Regiment*

DICK ADAMS
RAY BASHAM
CHUCK BREIT
TONY CICCHINO
JIM MULLANEY
TONY SIERRA

Hosted by: Sky Soldiers of the 173d Airborne Brigade & Their Friends

*Tony Geishauser,
Moderator*

*Seating opens at 1300
Program begins at 1330*



KENTUCKY THEATRE

214 E. Main Street, Lexington, Kentucky

THURSDAY, 7 JUNE 2012

Graphics by Ashley Bowers, daughter of Wayne Bowers C/2/503d





~ HONORED WWII 503rd PRCT GUEST ~



Richard “Dick” Adams

Richard (Dick) Adams was born in New York City on 21 July 1922. His father served as a Sergeant in WWI and a Colonel in Army Ordnance during WWII.



Dick at a spry 89

Dick was inducted into the Army in 1943. After Basic Training at Ft. Benning, GA, and some time with the ASTP and the 20th Armored Division, Dick volunteered for jump training at Ft. Benning. In October of 1944 he was shipped to New Guinea, then to Leyte and ultimately to Mindoro. He and the other replacements were scheduled to join the 11th Airborne, but Col. Jones, CO of the 503rd, had other ideas. Dick was assigned to HQ Company 3rd Bn in an 81mm mortar platoon. On 16 February 1945 he jumped onto the Corregidor golf course, and ended up in a tree in Crockett Ravine. He spent a good part of the first day getting injured troopers to the aid station.

When General MacArthur returned to Corregidor on 6 March, Dick was there. He is in the background (red arrow) of this picture of MacArthur in a Jeep. The picture is on display in the museum on Corregidor.



After the Negros campaign and occupation duty in Japan, Dick returned home and joined the National Guard as Operations Sergeant in the 165th Inf. and left the Guard after 20 years as a Master Sergeant.

Dick has a law degree from St. John University and is retired from General Motors. It was at GM that he met his wife of 34 years, Nancy. They have two daughters. Kim, age 31, is a preschool drama teacher. She is

married and lives in Fenton, MI with her husband, Christian. Alyson, age 29, is a Captain in the Air Force, stationed at Hurlburt Field in Florida. Dick and Nancy live in Farmington Hills, MI with Dakota (Rottweiler), Cole (cat) and Heidi (African gray parrot). All are healthy and happy.

In 2012 Dick returned to Corregidor with his wife and two daughters. They were fortunate to be accompanied by a group of people very knowledgeable about Corregidor and WWII in the Philippines. Included in the group were Steve and Marcia Kwiecinski, who live on the Rock and conduct private and group tours (Steve’s dad was a defender of Corregidor and was a POW). Peter Parsons, writer, director and producer of video documentaries, came to interview Dick for a documentary he is working on. Peter was a child in 1941 living in Manila, and has vivid memories of that time. He currently lives on Luzon. He is the son of Navy Commander Chick Parsons who organized and directed the missions to supply and assist the guerrilla resistance movement in the Philippines. Also there was Carl Welteke, a retired Navy diver who lives in Subic Bay and has explored nearly every inch of Corregidor and Bataan, accompanied by John Moffitt, an extraordinary photographer who documents everything with his camera. Rounding out the group was Paul Whitman, author, lawyer and webmaster for the 503rd Heritage Battalion website.

Remembering the trip, Dick wrote:

“The Rock once again is a lush tropical island with beautiful sunsets and panoramic views of Bataan. But, protruding from the carpet of green are the grey stone memories that I recall when I think about February, 1945. The Mile-Long Barracks, the curved line of the officer’s quarters, the buildings at Middleside, Malinta Hill, the dock at Bottomside, the road around Malinta Hill toward Monkey Point are all lined with memories in spite of their green covering. The parade ground is still there minus the shell holes, but the golf course is unrecognizable...no shell holes or blown-off trees, just waist high green. The lighthouse, two water tanks and the old white metal flag pole still stand.”



Trooper Dick Adams





~ HONORED WWII 503rd PRCT GUEST ~



Raymond Morris Basham

Raymond Morris Basham was born January 25, 1923, in Bowling Green, KY. Ray lived there with his mother, father, who was a city fireman, four sisters and two brothers. He was educated in the city school system, enjoyed hunting and fishing, and worked hard at riding his bicycle through the city streets delivering the daily newspaper.



Medic Ray

From reading those daily papers that he delivered he said, *"I knew the war was coming"*, so at 17 he joined the Army National Guard and in January 1941, he volunteered for active duty. He was sent to Camp Shelby, MS. He liked the Army life but after the War started in Dec. 1941, he became unhappy with the unit he was assigned to because, as he stated, *"They could not pass on inspection"*. When the Army requested volunteers for the new elite paratrooper units he eagerly volunteered and was assigned in July 1941 to the 503rd at Ft. Benning, GA for paratrooper training. After completing training there he was assigned to advanced training at Ft. Bragg, NC. The 503rd sailed for Australia on Oct. 1942 aboard the now infamous Poelau Laut. The trip took 42 days of hardship for the troopers aboard. The troops had only two meals per day and poor at that. The sleeping areas were crowded and many soldiers were sick which made living conditions miserable. Ray said that many hot nights he would sleep on topside with only a blanket in order to have some fresh air to breath. Needless to say he and all were glad to reach Australia on Dec. 2, 1942. He said the Australian people were kind and generous people who greeted them with good food and hospitality.

After jungle war training in Australia the 503rd started their war campaign in the Pacific. Ray jumped at Markham Valley and was wounded at Noemfoor. A blast came far too close and knocked him unconscious. While at the field hospital being treated for a concussion and burst ear drum, the doctors told him he would be headed home but after two weeks he was sent back to his unit. Ray was awarded the Purple Heart for his wounds.

He served with the 503rd during the Corregidor invasion and was greatly disappointed because he did not get to jump on Corregidor. The casualties were so great the

first day he and his Co. B were sent ashore in navy boats on Feb. 17th. The recapture of Corregidor came at a high price for the 503rd, and for Ray who was a medic, the worst was the explosion at Monkey Point. He and fellow soldiers at their commanders' orders had just moved to the bottom of the hill when it exploded. He thought he was dead and when he discovered that he was not, he began doing his best to help the other soldiers who were wounded. He was surrounded by soldiers who had been with him the entire war who were mortally wounded. Ray was present when his Commander Jones presented the return of The Fortress of Corregidor to Gen. Douglas MacArthur, and the American flag was raised. It was a proud day.

The Army points system sent Ray home in July of 1945, and he was discharged at Camp Antebury, IN, on August 3, 1945. Ray returned home and by Oct. 23, 1945, had married the girl left behind, Mary Katherine Basham. They have two daughters and two sons.

Ray spent many years working in the construction business and built many businesses, homes, and numerous buildings on the campus of Western Kentucky University at Bowling Green, KY. He retired from the FMC Co. at the age of 62 and now enjoys the retired life with his wife at Rockfield, KY.



Ray...one of the first paratroopers

Ray loves his country and is a true patriot. The flag flies in his front yard daily. For him, it will always be, *"All the Way"*.

Airborne!



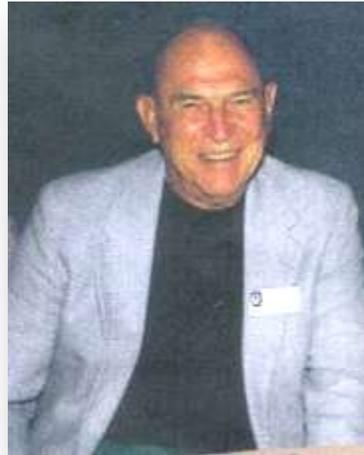


~ HONORED WWII 503rd PRCT GUEST ~



CHARLES E. "CHUCK" BREIT

Charles E. Breit (Chuck), was born December 25, 1925, in Philadelphia, PA. At age 17 he enlisted in the Army in May, 1943. He took his basic training at Camp Croft, SC, during which time he volunteered for the paratroops. Chuck started jump school at Ft. Benning, GA in early 1944, and upon completion volunteered for demolition training (at age 16 he had prior experience in demolitions working for the Cleveland Wrecking Company in Philadelphia and Camden, NJ).



Dapper Chuck

In October 1944, he shipped overseas to New Guinea where he joined the 503rd PRCT. He then went to Mindoro, Philippines, where he was assigned to Regt. Hdq. Co., demolition platoon. Then Corregidor. Chuck's job there was demolition and he was a flame-thrower man. He landed in a shell hole right in front of the long barracks which was his mission to secure. Upon landing the demolition groups gathered together and did just that. After two weeks of bitter fighting the island was secured by the Rock Force. Chuck was proud to serve as one of General MacArthur's honor guards along with his assistant flame-thrower, Johnnie Banks. He was there to watch (then) Col. Jones say to General MacArthur, *"Sir, I present you the fortress Corregidor."*

After Chuck landed he marked the spot and later was able to retrieve his chute and sent it home with a wounded comrade, Cpl. Vincent A. Minkler. It now stands in the National Infantry Museum at Fort Benning, GA, where it is a memorial to all the members of the 503 who jumped on Corregidor Island. Returning to Corregidor 50 years later with his wife Dee, he found the shell hole still there. *"Cold chills and deja vu indeed,"* he thought.

After his discharge on February 10, 1946, Chuck joined with a 17th airborne vet and formed an air show, *"Bobby Ward's Sky Devils,"* which lasted about three years. Utilizing his paratrooper training he performed delayed drops, wing walking and other stunts at fairs and carnivals all across the country. His partner had been an automobile stunt driver prior to the war so that was added to their repertoire. They then joined *"Kochman's*

World Champion Hell Drivers" performing head-on collisions, ice crashes and numerous other stunts. Chuck also doubled for Clark Gable in one of his movies.

The show wintered in Miami, FL, and in 1952 Chuck met another ex-paratrooper from the European theatre who was working as a painter of radio and t.v. towers. Now ready to leave the road and wanting a warm climate, they joined forces and in 1952 he founded *"Breit's Tower Service."* BTS remains the oldest tower company in the southeast today under the direction of his son.

Chuck retired in 1996, and he and Dee were finally able to leave the Miami life in the fast lane to a place in west central Florida on a beautiful river. He stays very busy with home renovation projects and restoration of their 1940 45' ELCO yacht upon which they lived for 25 years in Coconut Grove, FL.

Chuck has stayed active and involved in the 503rd PRCT Association WWII, serving as national president from 1991-1993, and again from 2006-2008, and is a current board member. He is also the Deep South Chapter president and has been for 6 years. Chuck and Dee have a contented life and enjoy travel and visits from old friends.

Interesting anecdote regarding Chuck:

My wife was standing next to me when I opened the envelope with Chuck's brief bio and photos. Before reading his bio, she picked up his photos and looked at this picture of him in his chute and said, *"He looks like Clark Gable!"* Ed



Chuck, driving the girls crazy!

All the Way!





~ HONORED WWII 503rd PRCT GUEST ~



Anthony “Tony” Cicchino

Following is some brief background information about my life.

At seventeen I joined the army and did my basic training at Camp Croft, South Carolina. From there I went to Fort Benning, Georgia for parachute training. Following five weeks of parachute training, two weeks later I was on my way to join the 503rd RCT, in New Guinea. I served in the Service Company my entire time with the 503rd.



Paratrooper Tony

After returning stateside I held several jobs, but I was not at my best. I reenlisted and was posted to Europe for four years.

Following discharge from the army, I went to work as a vending machine repairman until 1957. I then bought a liquor bar in New Jersey, and in 1962 I sold the business and moved to Florida where I went back into the liquor industry where I remained until 1980, when I retired.



Tony embarking on a life’s journey like no other

My wife and I traveled a lot until she passed away in 2008.

Today I’m retired and living in Boynton, Beach, Florida with my friend Theresa Poklop.

Once a Paratrooper....Always a Paratrooper



Tony, far right, with his buddies. Those daring young men in their jumping machines. Airborne!





~ HONORED WWII 503rd PRCT GUEST ~



James Mullaney

Jim Mullaney was born August 14, 1920 in Louisville, Kentucky. His family consisted of one brother and three sisters. His brother was five years older than him and two of his sisters were older. All are deceased now.



Jim's brother died in a Japanese prison Camp on February 3, 1945 in Japan. He was on two of the Japanese "Hell Ships" transporting prisoners from Subic Bay to the home islands to prevent their rescue by the advancing American forces. The 503rd was on Corregidor about the time of the Japanese ship sinkings. "So close and yet so far," says Jim.

Jim went to Louisville Male High School and got his first taste of the military in their ROTC. After graduating he joined the army reserve. It was 1939. He was called to active duty in January 1942 - three weeks after Pearl Harbor.

He was sent to Fort Benning (Harmony Church Area) for a refresher course. An officer interviewed anyone who might be interested in the Airborne. After seeing the paratroopers in training there he became more than interested, and wondered if he might be good enough to someday be one of them.

After completing the "refresher course" he received orders to report to Lawson Field for Jump School; Class 18A - April 1942. Jim completed jump school in early May 1942, then proceeded to Fort Bragg where he joined the 503rd Parachute Battalion. There were no regiments then.

A short time later - about two weeks - the 503rd Regiment came into existence. Jim was assigned to "H" Company and stayed with the Company for the entire war.

On October 10, 1942, he left Bragg and took a train ride to Camp Stoneman in California. After about a week there he and his buddies were taken to San Francisco and boarded a Dutch Ship, manned by Dutch officers with a *Java-neese* crew (people from Java). They sailed to Panama where they picked up the 501st Battalion and headed west for Australia. "We saw neither ship nor plane till reaching Brisbane about 32 days later," says Jim.

Anchored in the harbor for about a day, they then headed north in the Great Barrier Reef to Cairns, Australia. Upon disembarking, the Australian army took them by trucks about twenty miles south, where they parked alongside a road with dense jungle on each side where they camped, sleeping on the ground that night.

Jim and his fellow paratroopers erected tents and were there for the next several months. "Strange land - even stranger animals - snakes too - bandicoots - wallabys - kangaroos. And thousands of exotic birds." Jim recalls. They spent several months there conducting endless training in ungodly heat and rain. Several people went to the front in New Guinea during this period. In August they were shipped out to Port Moresby.

They prepared for their first combat jump on the north side of the island at Nadzab in the Markham Valley. After the jump, and their first taste of combat, Jim and his buddies returned to Port Moresby for more training and many new replacements.

"We moved around the island - went to the north side - Buna - Gona - Dobadura - and then to Dutch New Guinea and landed on the beaches of Hollandia," says Jim. They were stationed near Cyclops airfield.

The 503rd PIR conducted patrols almost daily and prepared for the Noemfoor Island jump which they made on July 4, 1944. They spent several months on hellish patrols in the muddy paths of that hellish island. "On one patrol three 'H' Company men were eaten by the Japs. But that's another story," Jim says.

The 503rd pretty well conquered the island by late August. They then prepared for the Philippines. They boarded a ship which was part of the largest convoy Jim had ever seen. They landed at Leyte Island but didn't leave the beach, where day and night they had a ringside seat to the Japanese suicide planes sinking their ships offshore.

Soon, Jim and his men were alerted to move to Mindoro Island - about ninety miles south of Manila. They landed on the beach at Mindoro in late December, where for the next few weeks they witnessed the largest air battles they ever saw.

The night after Christmas a Japanese cruiser sat offshore lobbing star shells over their dug-in positions. One explosive round hit their area but was a dud. It was thirty-two inches long and eight inches in diameter. "Lucky it was a dud or I wouldn't be here today," quips Jim. Things then calmed down.

They were given replacements - men and weapons - watches - anything they wanted. They knew something very big was in the offing. Even the food improved.

It was a short flight to Manila Bay and Corregidor. Jim and his buddies made the famous combat jump at 8 a.m., February 16, 1945. **Jim, an original jumper** A fourth jump was called off on Negros Island which had fallen into allied hands. They took a very short barge ride to Negros from Panay.

"I was there until November 1945, and received orders to journey home. After several days on Leyte I boarded a ship called the 'Hugh Rodman' and headed for home sweet home. Got there in early December. God Bless America."





~ HONORED WWII 503rd PRCT GUEST ~



Tony N. Sierra



Proud 503rd Paratrooper Tony

I am honored to be asked to participate in this endeavor. Being a trooper of the 503rd has been the highlight of my life.

I was born in Chihuahua, Mexico and brought to Phoenix, Arizona as a baby. I grew up in very humble circumstances. My single mother worked all her life as a washer-woman and housekeeper to the 'ritzies' in Arizona to support me and my two brothers and my sister.

I joined the army when I was seventeen, the war just having started. I was ordered to Camp Roberts, California for basic infantry training. At Camp Roberts two paratroopers set up shop in the cafeteria to recruit new jumpers. When I saw them in their dress jump suits and the trimmings, mainly the wings, I was instantly sold. Of course, they emphasized that my choices were very limited; either I do nothing AND BE ASSIGNED TO ONE OF THE INFANTRY DIVISIONS BEING ORGANIZED AT THAT TIME, OR BE SELECTIVE

AND JOIN THE CREAM OF THE CROP... THE U.S. PARATROOPERS.

When I arrived at Benning I was at first concerned I would be unable to compete with others and do the things one does to train and harden for the troopers. But once I started I loved it and hardened mentally as well as physically, to finally end up a proud trooper of the 503rd.

Additionally, I was in time able to prod my younger brother to also go to Benning; he ended up with the 101st Airborne Division, jumping on D-Day -- another proud trooper in the Sierra family.

As the years have passed my fellow troopers have become my family, and I cannot imagine what my life would have been if I had never become one of them.



Before Corregidor combat jump

I loved the 503rd and all the men I've met over the decades. It is a sad thing, but we know all things must come to an end. Very few 503rd men are left, but I don't for one minute forget any of those who were my brothers.

Sincerely,

Tony N. Sierra
Second Squad, Third Platoon
D Company, 2nd Battalion
503rd Regimental Combat Team



Tony, second from right in back row, with his squad in New Guinea.





~ OPERATION CORREGIDOR II ~



Tony Geishauser

Moderator

After three and a half years in the US Marine Corps Reserve and attending college in Maine, Tony was bored with college and wanted adventure flying helicopters in Vietnam in 1966. It didn't matter that he had never seen a helicopter up close and personal before that time. The Army radio ads were doing their job and enticed him to sign up and be all he could be



**Cowboys' Major (Ret)
Tony Geishauser**

Tony's helicopter was shot down almost as soon as it arrived which began an epic battle where upwards of 500 NVA and VC were killed to the 2/503d's 11 KIA and nearly 200 WIA.

Tony retired as a major and a Master Army Aviator and has had a successful Public Relations and Media relations career in Texas.

Tony, a young chopper pilot in Vietnam, 1966.



Tony was lucky enough to be assigned to Company A, 82nd Aviation Battalion - known as the "Cowboys." Based out of Bien Hoa, Vietnam, their primary mission was to fly combat and support missions for the 173d Airborne Brigade.

Tony will be moderating the meeting with WWII 503rd troopers in Lexington, as he did at the 173d reunion in N. Myrtle Beach in 2010.

On Tony's first combat flight in Vietnam, he was flying in a flight of four helicopters with his best friend from flight school in the helicopter behind him. Just before landing at a "secured" LZ, Tony's flight was taken under fire by a lone VC firing an AK-47. The helicopter in front of him was hit and the one with his friend, Jim, in it was hit. Tony soon found out his friend was shot in the head and killed instantly on his first flight.



Cowboys...335th Combat Assault (Tillman Jeffrey photo)

Tony went on to support his beloved "Sky Soldiers" after that tragic first flight. The largest battle he was a part of was on Operation Silver City in the jungles of War Zone "D". His helicopter was loaded with hot A rations for the 2/503d which was located in an LZ area called Zulu Zulu. Unknown by anyone at the time, the battalion was surrounded by nearly 2,000 VC and NVA regulars.

See *Scrambled Eggs—Vietnam Style* on following page.





Scrambled Eggs -- Vietnam Style

By Maj. Tony Geishauser (USA-Ret.)
335th AHC, Cowboys

It started as just another routine day at the office. Of course, my office happened to be the cockpit of a U.S. Army UH-1 "Huey" helicopter flying over Vietnam.

Every day started routinely. Some even ended that way. March 16, 1966, wouldn't be one of those days.

Two 173d Airborne Brigade cooks quickly loaded large containers of hot chow into our bird. Fully loaded and carrying a 400-lb. sling-load of ice, we headed for War Zone "D" north of Bien Hoa. Our LZ or Landing Zone, we later learned, was designated "Zulu-Zulu."

The 2/503d, the 2nd Battalion of the 173d, had been living on a diet of C-rations for days and its airborne "Sky Soldiers" were badly in need of hot chow. My outfit--A Company, 82nd Aviation--carried troops to and from fire fights, provided medical evacuation services and kept a steady resupply of ammo, "C" and "A-rats," water, mail and, on rare occasions, ice to our ground-pounding brothers-in-arms. This morning, we were scheduled to deliver a hot breakfast and drink-cooling ice.



Tony on left

A few miles from our destination, we called the unit, asking it to pop a smoke grenade and identify the landing zone. I soon reported spotting red smoke. A radio operator responded, "Roger, red smoke, Cowboy. Wind calm. No Victor-Charlies in the AO." Good; a friendly Area of Operations. The Viet Cong were elsewhere this morning.

We made a slow pass over a hole in the jungle and decided our best approach was straight down into the LZ, some 100 ft. below the treetops. The hole seemed big enough for us to hover through, but the crew chief and gunner stood on each of our helicopter's skids, talking us down to ensure we didn't inadvertently back our tail rotor into a jagged tree line skirting the LZ. Without a tail rotor to compensate for the main rotor's torque, our Huey wouldn't hover; it'd spin and crash. So, keeping our tail out of those trees was a high priority.

We had just started down through the hole when the jungle erupted.

"Mack! Machine-gun tracers, 2 o'clock! Pull pitch, pull pitch!"

I yelled.

Mack, Joe McHenry, the other pilot, saw basketball-size .51-caliber tracer rounds pass several yards in front of our chopper a second after I did. The enemy gunner, obviously trained to lead his target, expected us to fly into his line of fire. But we weren't flying forward. We were hovering straight down.

As Mack started to pull pitch, rotor RPM started to decay. "Punch off the ice, Mack! Punch off the ice!" I yelled into my microphone. Mack didn't hear me, couldn't find the sling load release button on his stick or had a few other things on his mind. I didn't wait for an explanation. I kicked the manual release lever between my pedals and 400 lbs. of ice fell away. With that extra weight gone, rotor PRM slowly edged back into the green.

(continued...)



The 2/503d arrive LZ Zulu Zulu on 15 Mar 66 looking forward to a hot breakfast on the morning of 16 Mar. The bad guys are watching. (Photo by Wayne Hoitt, HHC/2/503d)



As Mack started easing us back up through the opening in the treetops, that enemy gunner swung his aim point, overcorrected and blasted our tail boom and tail rotor. The chopper started to spin, dropping towards the ground. I said what every helicopter pilot says at a time like this: *"Shit!"*



Cowboys: The Zulu Zulu chopper pilots, Tony (L) and Joe "Mack" McHenry during a quieter moment.

The closer we got to the ground, the faster my mind raced, which converted all activity into an illusion of slow motion. All the way down, I said to myself: *I'm not going to get seriously killed.* Heck, I even upped the ante and said I wasn't even going to get hurt. It worked--at least, the not-getting-killed part did. The foliage cushioned our fall somewhat, but the main rotor blades nearly shook the Huey to pieces as they chopped trees into kindling.

Our Huey finally settled to the jungle floor on its left side with a final death heave. *"Anyone hurt?"* I shouted.

Everyone reported he was OK, including the crew chief, whose back was nearly broken. Banged-up and bruised, we all scrambled out the right cargo door as fast as possible, slipping on spilled eggs, orange juice and coffee.

I saw a figure running towards us, rifle in hand. Our gunner held his fire, then recognized a round-eyed airborne soldier, who had come to escort us to safety. As our last crewmember scampered from the dead Huey, all hell broke loose. Hundreds upon hundreds of weapons started firing--all on full-automatic. The noise was deafening. The 700 or so men of the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry were surrounded by a reinforced North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regiment of 2,000 regular soldiers, not ragtag Viet Cong rebels.

Once we were clear of the chopper, our 173d paratrooper escort bent low to the ground and shouted that timeless infantry command: *"Follow me!"* We hauled for all we were worth, aiming for the center of the battalion's defensive position, perhaps 100 meters from where we had crashed.

We were directed to locations that might be out of harm's way, but those positions often changed as the battle raged. Two M-60 machine guns taken from our chopper helped shore up the battalion's defensive perimeter. Within minutes, a sergeant appeared, carrying our crew chief's now-broken M-14 rifle. Its wooden stock had snapped off during the crash landing, leaving only a trigger-housing group and hardware forward of it. The burly sergeant motioned for me to come closer. I low-crawled over to him.

Stooped low, the paratrooper held the weapon near his groin area and said, *"When they break through, hold the trigger housing group here in your groin. Grab the barrel and aim it with your left hand. There's not much kick when the M-14 fires. Don't worry about it. Just hit what you're shooting at and keep it on semiautomatic. Here are two more ammo clips. Any questions?"*

Any questions? How did this day go from routine flying to John Wayne-style lessons about shooting bad guys with half a rifle, *when--not if--they break through?* I shook my head, which he took to mean "no questions." Actually, it was my way of saying, *"unbelievable; totally unbelievable."*

The next four hours were a blur. Artillery, theirs and ours, fell inside and outside of our perimeter. Fighter aircraft strafed us, because the enemy was literally right on top of our position. When I saw lead flying through the air, hitting two soldiers a few yards away, I thought Charlie had finally broken through. Surely, I would be the next to get it.

(continued...)





Tony & Joe's Huey's final touchdown at Zulu Zulu.
 (Photo by Tom Goodwin, HHC/2/503)

I made sure the ammo clip was firmly seated in the broken M-14 and a round was in the chamber. I waited...but nothing happened. I finally realized the lead I'd seen must have been from a fighter plane strafing our zone. The perimeter hadn't been breached. The 2nd Bat was continuing to hold against overwhelming odds.

Box scores can't measure the strong hearts and brave souls of the men who comprised the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade, as they fought and defeated a fierce and determined enemy three times their number. After our sister battalion, the 1st of the 503rd, arrived--fighting through enemy forces to reinforce us--the body count was 11 Americans killed, 109 wounded. Later, we learned that more than 600 NVA bodies were found around the stubbornly held perimeter that day. There's no telling how many wounded crawled away.

It had taken the 2nd Bat's sister battalion nearly four hours to hack its way through thick jungle to get to us. One of the men in that unit, Specialist Fourth Class Alfred Rascon, a medic, exercised "...*extraordinary valor in the face of deadly enemy fire. His heroism in rescuing the wounded went well above and beyond the call of duty to protect and treat his wounded comrades ...*" as they fought their way to us. For his actions that non-routine day, he received the Medal of Honor.

When it came to flying helicopters, I knew what I was doing. But when it came to fierce in-your-face, gut-wrenching, close-quarters combat, there were no better soldiers than the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry and its

sister battalion, the 1st of the 503rd. Thanks, "Sky Soldiers," for saving my helicopter crew and my bacon on a day when we were simply trying to bring you bacon and eggs.

Fast forward some 36 years. The 173rd Airborne Brigade was having a reunion in Fort Worth, TX. Not long before, I had linked-up with one of the 2nd Battalion's radio operators via the Internet. He invited me to come to the reunion and speak to his comrades. Very few of those soldiers had met the Huey pilot who'd crashed in the LZ, dumping their bacon and eggs that fateful day.

I did go to the reunion--but not before stopping by a McDonald's public relations office. Concluding my 5-min. speech to the reunion's ex-soldiers, I said, "*The 'Cowboys' always deliver, even if it takes a second try--30-some years later.*" To a standing ovation, I handed out more than 300 McDonald's *Egg McMuffin* gift certificates.

Tony Geishauser completed a full 20-year Army career, retiring as a major and a Master Army Aviator. In addition to being an infantry officer and helicopter pilot, he served as a public information officer for the Army in Europe and at the world's largest military post, Fort Hood, Texas. He later held positions as a worldwide media relations and advertising manager for Texas Instruments, and media relations positions in other companies for more than 19 years. He previously operated his own consulting firm in Austin. He and his bride, Pam, live in Texas enjoying the retired life.



Soldiers' Circle Memorial dedicated with ceremony

BY ROB WHEARY (STAFF WRITER)

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A rose placed by Annette Sandri, mother of Matthew Sandri, sits on the memorial plaque of the Soldiers' Circle.

Mark Gilger Jr./Staff Photo



COAL TOWNSHIP - The drops of rain didn't deter those who stood at the top of the hill, honoring local residents who served their country and paid the ultimate price in doing so.

The Soldiers' Circle Association dedicated its new Soldiers' Circle Memorial Monument Thursday morning at the top of a six cemetery complex in the Springfield section of Coal Township.

The monument, located at the top of the Saint Stanislaus Cemetery and at the entrance to the Transfiguration Cemetery, honors the 2,000 veterans buried in that area. Master of ceremonies for the dedication, Garth Hall, told the crowd how the monument came to fruition.

"Construction began in early June and the original plans for the circle's design was more limited than what we see here because of only having \$1,800 in funds available," Hall said.

One of the more poignant moments of the ceremony happened when Robert and Annette Sandri laid a rose on a stone plaque, dedicating the monument. They are the parents of Sgt. Matthew Sandri, who was killed in March 2004 in a rocket attack outside Fallujah, Iraq.

"This is amazing what they have done here," Annette Sandri said. "This just shows the generosity of the community to make this monument possible, to help us keep in mind the struggle that the soldiers and family go through. It really shows how people will come together to help someone else."

The plaque reads: "This 'Soldier's Circle Memorial' is dedicated to all United States of America Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard Veterans buried in St. Edward's, Saint Stanislaus, St. Mary's, Saint Michael's, Transfiguration Ukrainian Catholic and B'Nai Israel Jewish Cemeteries."

Lowered to half-staff, Sgt. Mark Burille, who has served in the Armed Forces through several foreign conflicts, read a prayer written by a soldier who was heading into combat.

"Standing before the enemies of my country, my fellow citizens and my family, I beg you, my Lord, to protect me. You are my creator of all things seen and unseen. I place my life in your hands, my soul in your

loving heart. Forgive me for what I must do, for even my enemies are your creation. I beg your forgiveness both for me, and my enemies," Burille prayed.

Burille said while Thursday's ceremony was important, efforts to remember the contributions soldiers make should always be on everyone's mind.

"There are 2,500 war and peacetime veterans who are buried in these cemeteries," Burille said. "As we stand here today, let us work to make sure that we remember what they have done, not just today, but every day. As we remember, all gave some, but some gave all."

In Memory of Sgt. Matthew "Matt" Sandri

fellow paratrooper and combat medic, C Co., 82nd FSB, 3BCT, 82nd ABN DIV, who was killed in action on 20 March 2004, in Fallujah, Iraq.



Karen Murray calls Matthew J. Sandri the strongest of her friends, a sincere, honest and genuine person willing to go out of his way to help a friend in need. "There's just something special about Matt. When you look into his eyes for the first time he just has a way with people," Murray said. "It's like he's so inviting. He had a love for people, he loved life. I could just look at him and start laughing because I knew he was thinking of something funny." Spc. Sandri, 24, of Shamokin, Pa., died March 20 in a rocket attack outside Fallujah, Iraq. He was stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C., and had completed three years of study at Bloomsburg (Pa.) University with a concentration in biology. Murray recalled the time she met him: "He just started talking to me as if he already knew me," she said. "From then on, we were like best friends. I had so many years of fun with him; there's nothing but good memories of Matt." Survivors include his parents.

~ All The Way Brother ~

Assisted by LTC Bryan Sleight, 82nd ABN DIV Surgeon and MG Mike Scaparrotti, 82nd ABN DIV Commanding General, Connor Taylor, son of LTC Mark Taylor cuts a ribbon to officially dedicate the Taylor / Sandri Medical Training Center at Fort Bragg, in presence of the Taylor and Sandri families.

