

**"On May 16, 1965, while waiting to takeoff on a mission, a B-57B exploded on the ground at Bien Hoa, setting off a whole chain of secondary explosions. The resulting conflagration destroyed ten B-57s, eleven VNAF A-1H Skyraiders, and a US Navy F-8 Crusader. The surviving B-57s were transferred to Tan Son Nhut and continued to fly sorties on a reduced scale until the losses could be made good. Some B-57Bs had to be transferred to Vietnam from the Air National Guard, and 12 B-57Es had to be withdrawn from target-towing duties and reconfigured as bombers to make good these losses."**

**By Mark Carter**  
173d LRRP, E-17th Cav

**T**he Rigger platoon was bivouacked along the northern perimeter fence, outside the perimeter, of course. The fence itself was actually a double apron minefield. We had been in country for less than two weeks. By this time we had constructed a few bunkers, filled a couple million sandbags, and dug prone shelters next to our pup tents. We had yet to receive the squad tents, which were still *en route* by boat from Okinawa, but our cooks had set up a kitchen tent to supply us with B-rations.

We are prepping for a big operation. The boonie rats are already in the field. The runway is filled with B57 bombers, A-1s, and some other aircraft. They are going to bomb the shit out of Charlie this morning. The rigger platoon is putting together bulk loads of ammo, food, and water for air delivery a few days into the operation.



Martin B57 Canberra

We had two or three bunkers completed—walls four bags thick, a timber roof covered with three layers of sandbags, firing slits pointed north, and interlocked with the adjacent bunkers. We were encamped on a gentle hill a few hundred feet in elevation above the runway, so we had a good view to the south. Beyond the runway itself was the Air Force facility—barracks and EM club. Beyond that, the southern perimeter fences, then the small town of Bien Hoa, barely visible in the distance.

I had just finished my B-rats, had walked across the yard to my tent to hang my mess kit up on the tent pole. I don't remember if we were going to fill more sandbags or work on loads for the boonie rats that day, but none of that happened.

I saw a sudden flash, like lightning, from the direction of the runway. I look up in time to hear a tremendous crack, feel the intense heat. A tall column of flame and smoke, with a dark, billowing mushroom rises out of the parking area at the foot of the runway, where a few dozen aircraft were neatly parked, waiting to take off. Everybody around me crouches, looking at the runway. Another flash, another fireball rises. I can see men running away from the parking area. Then the second huge crack arrives, the concussion swats me hard. Fire shoots out in a horizontal line away from the aircraft. The running men disappear behind a wall of fire and black smoke. Then the fuel blivids begin to explode, one after the other, five of them, each filled with 50,000 gallons of JP-4. Heat flashes, unbelievably hot, then subsides. Then, 750 barrels of JP-4 begin to explode, an event chain of flash, sound, heat, concussion.

Nobody knows what's going on. People look in all directions at once.

(continued....)





**Burning Aircraft on ramp at Bien Hoa AFB after explosion**

Shrapnel begins to fall around us—arrhythmic steel and aluminum hail, whap, bang, falling around us in no particular pattern. I have my usual standing nightmare—a human wave attack—so I grab up my web gear, rifle, and flak jacket, and slide into the nearest bunker. Dimly lit by sectors of light from the firing slits, dust drifts down from the boarded ceiling with each new concussion. A few men already are there, weapons in hand, sighting out the firing slits. I wait by the door, since nobody seems to be watching it. The 20mm cannon rounds on the burning aircraft begin to cook off. A few more bombs detonate, but they don't seem as loud, now. More steel rain. People who've been crouching behind things sprint to the bunkers.

Across the clearing, near the mess tent, Captain Cartwright stands transfixed, looking at the runway. Sp4 Evans, who was just coming out of the chow line, puts on his helmet and walks casually toward our bunker, carrying his flak jacket on one finger, over his shoulder, now and then looking down the slope at the spectacle on the runway. Captain Cartwright tells him to *run, dammit, run!* Evans ignores him, shaking his head slowly, as if thinking about it. Cartwright screams again, runs up to Evans and screams into his ear to drop and give him 22 good airborne pushups. Evans stops, looks at Cartwright for a moment, then, calmly he puts his flak jacket on the dirt and carefully places his rifle on it, then he drops into the front leaning rest position and begins to count them out. Cartwright stands over him, breathing hard.

I just know the human wave attack is about to begin. I hope our leadership manages to reevaluate its priorities before Charlie starts blowing the bugles. More tremendous explosions. This time the ground actually shakes. These would be the 750 pound bombs. Lumps of steel rain down on the area. I notice our bunker is

now filled. I move to a firing slit and poke my rifle out toward the scrub on the other side of the road, some distance away. I hear Evans shout "*Airborne,*" as he finishes his pushups, and a moment later he slides down into the bunker. I notice that he's carrying his flak jacket, and then I realize that I had put mine on, but couldn't remember doing it.

Detonations from the airbase continue. Bombs, ammo cook off, shrapnel rains down upon us. We take turns at the firing slits. I realize that I've drunk all my water. Our lister bag hangs near the mess tent. I realize we have no C-rations stored in the bunker, then it occurs to me that we don't have a latrine in here, either. I notice that several of the other riggers have fixed bayonets, and wonder what the hell they think they are going do with them.

Sometime later, one of the NCOs comes down into the bunker to tell us that we are not being attacked, that a bomb fell off one of the aircraft and started all this. He says they need a few guys to go down there with the medics from 2nd Battalion to help out. I didn't go that day, but I went the next morning, to sit on the perimeter road near the parking area, to look for dogs and pigs that might wander into the area on account of the aroma from those few bodies that they've not yet been able to recover.



**Ariel view of base after explosion**

EOD guys are still detonating bombs that were thrown clear of the exploding aircraft. Some cannon rounds are still cooking off. Air Force EOD teams and firemen commonly perform acts of sublime heroism during the next three days. Tuesday is much the same, only now there are no more explosions. By Wednesday afternoon the runway is back in operation. 🇺🇸





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# BENEFIT BASEBALL GAME

Friday, June 29, 7:00 pm



**Hosted by Local Army Veterans of:**

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- Chapter 16, US Special Forces Association
- Veterans of the RSVN 81st Airborne Rangers
- Veterans of 82nd Airborne Division
- Veterans of the 101st Airborne Division
- and RSVN Special Forces of WA

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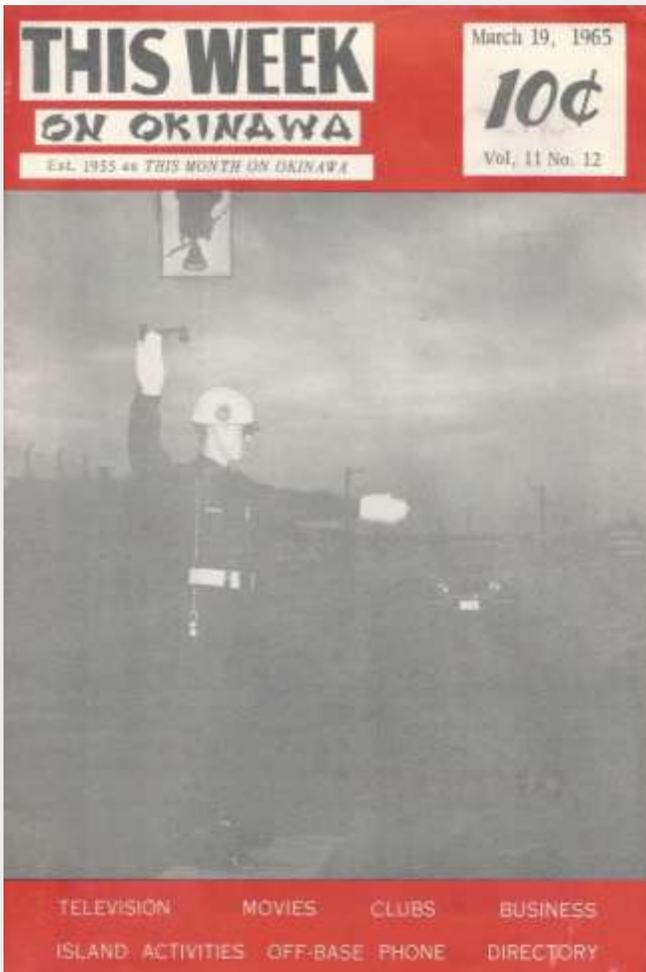
Throughout the game there will be drawings to win fabulous prizes.



*Join us for a family fun evening while helping to support this important cause.*



~ 173d Nostalgia from Okinawa ~



Mrs. Ellis Williamson, honorary president of the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) Officers' Wives Group, right, presents flowers to Mrs. Robert Duddy, program chairman for the production of the Airborne Lassies, in appreciation of her fine work.

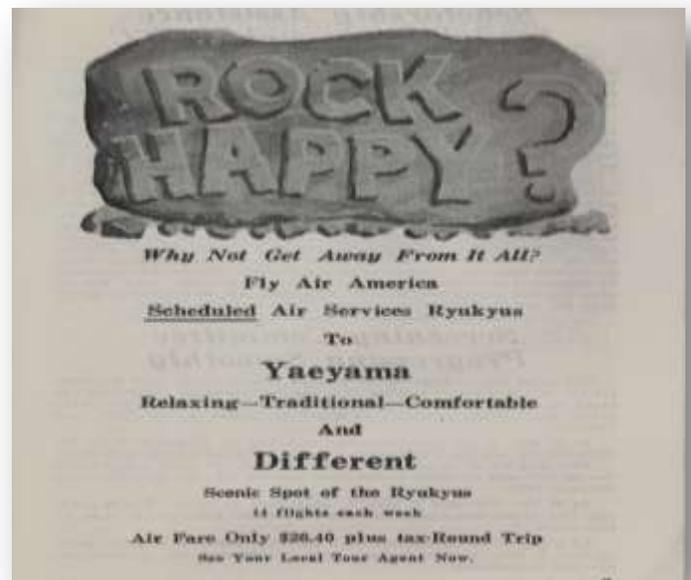


One scene of the skit "A Typical Off-Island Exercise" is presented by left to right, Mrs. William Harper, Mrs. John Manolakis and Mrs. William Mitchell. (TW Photos)



*The Chorus Line*, left to right, Mrs. John Manolakis; Mrs. Jessie Watson; Mrs. James Berg; Mrs. Robert Gingrass; Mrs. William Mitchell; Mrs. Butler Tucker; Mrs. Donald Bliss; Mrs. Richard Hansen; Mrs. Edward Cartwright; Mrs. Vernon Westmoreland; Mrs. James Bennett; and Mrs. Rodney Beasley

The 173d Officers' Wives' Group were hostesses for the Fort Buckner Women's Club Luncheon on Friday (Mar. 12), where the program "Armed Forces Family" was presented. A repeat performance was given the same evening for the men of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade. "Armed Forces Family" is an original musical review, written, directed, and cast by the ladies of the 173<sup>rd</sup>.



[Sent in by Exie Carmichael, wife of LTC Bob Carmichael]



# GI's Widow Presented Medal of Honor

**WASHINGTON (UPI)** – President Johnson has awarded the second Medal of Honor of the war in Viet Nam to an Army sergeant who threw himself on a grenade to save his men.

Johnson presented the nation's highest honor for bravery Thursday to the widow of Staff Sgt. Larry S. Pierce, 26, of Wasco, Calif.

**THE PRESIDENT** promised Mrs. Pierce and her three children that "None of us shall falter in our purpose until we have secured the kind of world for which Sgt. Pierce gave his young and gallant life."

Pierce died Sept. 20, 1965, near Ben Cat, South Viet Nam, when a patrol he was leading was ambushed by the Viet Cong. The men of Pierce's platoon put the Communists to flight, but as they gave chase, the sergeant spotted a grenade on the road.

It was too late to throw the grenade aside or to warn the others in his squad. Pierce threw himself on it as it exploded. He was credited with saving the lives of his comrades.

**PIERCE BECAME** the 2196th serviceman to receive the award, formerly known as the Congressional Medal of Honor. It was established 104 years ago to recognize military men who risk their lives "above and beyond the call of duty."

The first Medal of Honor to be awarded in the Viet Nam conflict went to Army Capt. Roger H.C. Donlen, a member of the army's elite special forces counter-insurgency troops. He received it Dec. 5, 1964.

**JOHNSON SAID** that while men like Pierce defend the ideals of freedom "we at home must be worthy of their sacrifice. We must be united in our purpose to create a world where terror will not go unchallenged – where aggression and violence will shatter on the rocks of our courage and our conviction," he said.

**"DAUGHTER OF A HERO –** President Johnson comforts 3-year-old Theresa Pierce after awarding the Medal of Honor posthumously to her father, Army Sgt. Larry S. Pierce at the White House. The sergeant was killed when he threw himself on a mine in Viet Nam and saved his squad men from death and injury. Mrs. Pierce, the widow, holds the citation as she stands next to her 4-year-old son, Kelly. The widow and children were brought from Wasco, Calif. by the President for the ceremony." (AP)



**Larry Stanley Pierce**  
**Staff Sergeant**  
**HHC, 1ST BN, 503RD INFANTRY,**  
**173RD ABN BDE, USARV**  
**Army of the United States**  
**Taft, California**  
**July 06, 1941 to September 20, 1965**  
**LARRY S PIERCE is on the Wall**  
**at Panel 02E Line 091**

~ Over 30 Years Later ~

It would be over 30 years later when I was at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida putting on a conference and exposition for the airline industry when a staff member walked up to me with a beautiful lady. He said, "I have someone here you would like to meet." He then introduced me to Ms. Theresa Pierce, from the marketing group at Bakersfield Airport, and daughter of Larry. It was an honor to meet the lady and I gave her a 173d lapel pin I was wearing. That night my wife Reggie and I met Bill Vose (A/2/503) and his bride, Roberta, for dinner at a local restaurant where we mentioned meeting Theresa that day. Bill said he had a large poster of Larry Pierce at his home, so following the meal we all returned to Bill and Roberta's house. After Bill collected the poster, Roberta removed a canvas painting from a picture frame of the appropriate size. Bill then inscribed the poster with his greetings. The next day my wife and I presented the framed poster of Theresa's dad to her. Larry would be proud of his daughter. Ed



~ Sky Soldiers Hooking-Up ~



L-R: Joe Gray & Bill Nicholls both A/2/503d trying a new strategy in Dayton, Ohio flying aboard a B-25 celebrating the 70th Anniversary of Doolittle's Tokyo Raiders.



L-R: Master Blaster Bill Reynolds, A/2/503d and his buddy Ed Kearney, B/2/503d, meet for the first time. With no ossifer present, who drops the salute first, or are they still standing there?

The most interesting man in the world



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~ Need Assistance ~

I am trying to find the following information. Any help will be appreciated:

- Looking for reports prepared by the "Operations Officer of the Unit" during 1970-71.
- Looking for the "Chain of Command for 2nd Battalion" during 1970-71.
- Looking for the "Chain of Command for the Brigade" during 1970-71.

Thanks!

Jim "Doc" Gore  
 A/B/D/E/2/503d  
[gorej@charter.net](mailto:gorej@charter.net)

Leg →



# VFW SALUTES NEW GI BILL PROTECTIONS

**Executive Order better protects military and veterans' communities from predatory practices**

April 27, 2012

**WASHINGTON** —The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is saluting President Obama for signing an Executive Order today to better protect the military and veterans' communities from the predatory recruiting and financial loan practices of some colleges who fail to deliver on their educational promises.



The VFW-supported Post-9/11 GI Bill became law in June 2008, but since then there have been reports of aggressive and deceptive targeting of service members, veterans, and their families by educational institutions, particularly for-profit career colleges, according to the White House. Some institutions, for example, recruit veterans with serious brain injuries and emotional vulnerabilities without providing academic support and counseling; they encourage service members, veterans and their families to take out costly institutional loans instead of first recommending less expensive federal student aid; and they engage in misleading recruiting practices on military installations, and do not disclose the institution's graduation rate.

*"The VFW is big on education, but we are even bigger on the proper administration and oversight of a new GI Bill we fought for 10 years to get enacted,"* said Richard L. DeNoyer, national commander of the 2 million-member VFW and its Auxiliaries.

*"The VFW has worked very hard to get these protections created, and the president's Executive Order will go far to crack down on the predatory recruiting practices and poor performance of all schools who participate in the Post-9/11 GI Bill, but our fight isn't over,"* he said. *"Our veterans are America's future leaders, and what they expect is a solid education that is marketable and relevant to today's environment. The VFW looks to the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense and Education to quickly implement the requirements of the Executive Order."*

## Mental health for vets untimely

By Gregg Zoroya, *USA TODAY*

An internal investigation at the Department of Veterans Affairs released today says tens of thousands of veterans waited far longer last year to receive mental health treatment than what the VA contends.

The inspector general's office found that claims by the VA that 95% of its patients are both evaluated for mental health problems and begin receiving therapy within a 14-day goal set by the department are false.

In fact, only about half of mental patients were evaluated within two weeks. The remainder waited an average of seven weeks, the investigation found.

On the time it takes to begin treatment, the probe corroborated findings by a *USA TODAY* analysis published Nov. 9 which revealed that about a third of VA patients wait longer than 14 days to start treatment. The VA inspector general confirmed that only 64% are treated within 14 days, and the rest wait nearly six weeks on average before starting their treatment.

The VA's *"mental health performance data is not accurate or reliable,"* the inspector general's report concluded, adding that the department *"overstated its success."*

*"This report shows that the VA is failing many of those who have been brave enough to seek care,"* says Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., chairwoman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. *"Once a veteran takes the step to reach out for help, we need to knock down every potential barrier to care."*

With the suicide rate among veterans estimated by the VA at 18 per day, Murray, who called for the investigation, said timely mental health care *"can quite frankly often be the difference between life and death."* The VA issued a statement conceding that the way it estimates timely care is flawed. *"We generally agree that some revision of the metric is required,"* the statement says.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have partly resulted in an increase every three months of 10,000 new patients arriving at the VA suffering post-traumatic stress disorder.

The inspector general's office stated that, according to interviews with VA staff, the *"greatest challenge has been to hire and retain psychiatrists."* Three out of four hospital sites visited by investigators lacked psychiatrists.

See complete report: [http://www.usatoday.com/NEWS/usaedition/2012-04-24-VA-Wait-Times\\_ST\\_U.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/NEWS/usaedition/2012-04-24-VA-Wait-Times_ST_U.htm)

[Sent in by Dr. Scott Fairchild, Psy.D, 82<sup>nd</sup> Abn Div (Ret)]



# A Veteran's Death, the Nation's Shame

By **NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF**

Published: April 14, 2012

(Photos by Ashley Gilbertson/VII)



HERE'S a window into a tragedy within the American military: For every soldier killed on the battlefield this year, about 25 veterans are dying by their own hands.



A photograph taken in Iraq of Specialist Ryan Yurchison (left), who died of a drug overdose on May 23, 2010, after returning home to New Middletown, Ohio.

An American soldier dies every day and a half, on average, in Iraq or Afghanistan. Veterans kill themselves at a rate of one every 80 minutes. More than 6,500 veteran suicides are logged every year — more than the total number of soldiers killed in Afghanistan and Iraq combined since those wars began.



These unnoticed killing fields are places like New Middletown, Ohio, where Cheryl DeBow raised two sons, Michael and Ryan Yurchison, and saw them depart for Iraq. Michael, then 22, signed up soon after the 9/11 attacks.

"I can't just sit back and do nothing," he told his mom. Two years later, Ryan followed his beloved older brother to the Army.

When Michael was discharged, DeBow picked him up at the airport — and was staggered. "When he got off the plane and I picked him up, it was like he was an empty shell," she told me. "His body was shaking." Michael began drinking and abusing drugs, his mother says, and he terrified her by buying the same kind of gun he had carried in Iraq. "He said he slept with his gun over there, and he needed it here," she recalls.



Then Ryan returned home in 2007, and he too began to show signs of severe strain. He couldn't sleep, abused drugs and alcohol, and suffered extreme jitters.

"He was so anxious, he couldn't stand to sit next to you and hear you breathe," DeBow remembers. A talented filmmaker, Ryan turned the lens on himself to record heartbreaking video of his own sleeplessness, his own irrational behavior — even his own mock suicide. One reason for veteran suicides (and crimes, which get far more attention) may be post-traumatic stress disorder, along with a related condition, traumatic brain injury. Ryan suffered a concussion in an explosion in Iraq, and Michael finally had traumatic brain injury diagnosed two months ago.

Estimates of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury vary widely, but a ballpark figure is that the problems afflict at least one in five veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq. One study found that by their third or fourth tours in Iraq or Afghanistan, more than one-quarter of soldiers had such mental health problems. Preliminary figures suggest that being a veteran now roughly doubles one's risk of suicide. For young men ages 17 to 24, being a veteran almost quadruples the risk of suicide, according to a study in *The American Journal of Public Health*.

Michael and Ryan, like so many other veterans, sought help from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Eric Shinseki, the secretary of veterans affairs, declined to speak to me, but the most common view among those I interviewed was that the V.A. has improved but still doesn't do nearly enough about the suicide problem.

(continued....)



*"It's an epidemic that is not being addressed fully,"* said Bob Filner, a Democratic congressman from San Diego and the senior Democrat on the House Veterans Affairs Committee. *"We could be doing so much more."*

To its credit, the V.A. has established a suicide hotline and appointed suicide-prevention coordinators. It is also chipping away at a warrior culture in which mental health concerns are considered sissy. Still, veterans routinely slip through the cracks. Last year, the [United States Court of Appeals](#) in San Francisco excoriated the V.A. for "unchecked incompetence" in dealing with veterans' mental health.

Patrick Bellon, head of *Veterans for Common Sense*, which filed the suit in that case, says the V.A. has genuinely improved but is still struggling. *"There are going to be one million new veterans in the next five years,"* he said. *"They're already having trouble coping with the population they have now, so I don't know what they're going to do."*

Last month, the V.A.'s own inspector general reported on a 26-year-old veteran who was found wandering naked through traffic in California. The police tried to get care for him, but a V.A. hospital reportedly said it couldn't accept him until morning. The young man didn't go in, and after a series of other missed opportunities to get treatment, he stepped in front of a train and killed himself.



Likewise, neither Michael nor Ryan received much help from V.A. hospitals. In early 2010, Ryan began to talk more about suicide, and DeBow rushed him to emergency rooms and pleaded with the V.A. for help. She says she was told that an inpatient treatment program had a six-month waiting list. (The V.A. says it has no record of a request for hospitalization for Ryan).

*"Ryan was hurting, saying he was going to end it all, stuff like that,"* recalls his best friend, Steve Schaeffer, who served with him in Iraq and says he has likewise struggled with the V.A. to get mental health services. *"Getting an appointment is like pulling teeth,"* he said. *"You get an appointment in six weeks when you need it today."*

While Ryan was waiting for a spot in the addiction program, in May 2010, he died of a drug overdose. It was listed as an accidental death, but family and friends are convinced it was suicide.

The heartbreak of Ryan's death added to his brother's despair, but DeBow says Michael is now making slow progress. *"He is able to get out of bed most mornings,"* she told me. *"That is a huge improvement."* Michael asked not to be interviewed, he wants to look forward, not back.

As for DeBow, every day is a struggle. She sent two strong, healthy men to serve her country, and now her family has been hollowed in ways that aren't as tidy, as honored, or as easy to explain as when the battle wounds are physical. I wanted to make sure that her family would be comfortable with the spotlight this article would bring, so I asked her why she was speaking out.

*"When Ryan joined the Army, he was willing to sacrifice his life for his country,"* she said. *"And he did, just in a different way, without the glory. He would want it this way."*

*"My home has been a nightmare,"* DeBow added through tears, recounting how three of Ryan's friends in the military have killed themselves since their return. *"You hear my story, but it's happening everywhere."*

We refurbish tanks after time in combat, but don't much help men and women exorcise the demons of war. Presidents commit troops to distant battlefields, but don't commit enough dollars to veterans' services afterward. We enlist soldiers to protect us, but when they come home we don't protect them.



*"Things need to change,"* DeBow said, and her voice broke as she added: *"These are guys who went through so much. If anybody deserves help, it's them."*

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*Different wars.... same shit.*



# VA EXEMPT FROM SEQUESTRATION

'Disabled veterans can breathe a sigh of relief...'



April 23, 2012

**WASHINGTON** — A letter sent today from the Office of Management and Budget to the General Accountability Office officially exempts the Department of Veterans Affairs from mandatory budget cuts should sequestration occur.

The letter, signed by OMB Deputy General Counsel Steven D. Aitken to Julia C. Matta, GAO assistant general counsel for Appropriations and Budget, clearly states that *“all programs administered by the VA, including Veterans’ Medical Care, are exempt from sequestration.”*

*“Disabled veterans can breathe a sigh of relief today knowing that VA programs are exempt from sequestration,”* said Richard L. DeNoyer, national commander of the 2 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries.

*“Today’s decision means the healthcare plans and programs the VA currently provides to millions of disabled veterans will continue unabated, as will claims processing and veterans’ burial benefits,”* he said.

*“Protecting the VA is exactly what President Obama told me he would do during a meeting in the Oval Office in March, and now he has come through for America’s veterans and survivors. It’s a great day to be a veterans’ advocate.”*

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***“The executive order I’m about to sign will make life a whole lot more secure for you and your families and our veterans — and a whole lot tougher for those who try to prey on you,”*** the president said.



[Sent in by Mike Guthrie, A/2/503d]

## Very Important Airborne Colonel

Having just moved into his new office, a pompous, new colonel was sitting at his desk when a PFC knocked on the door.



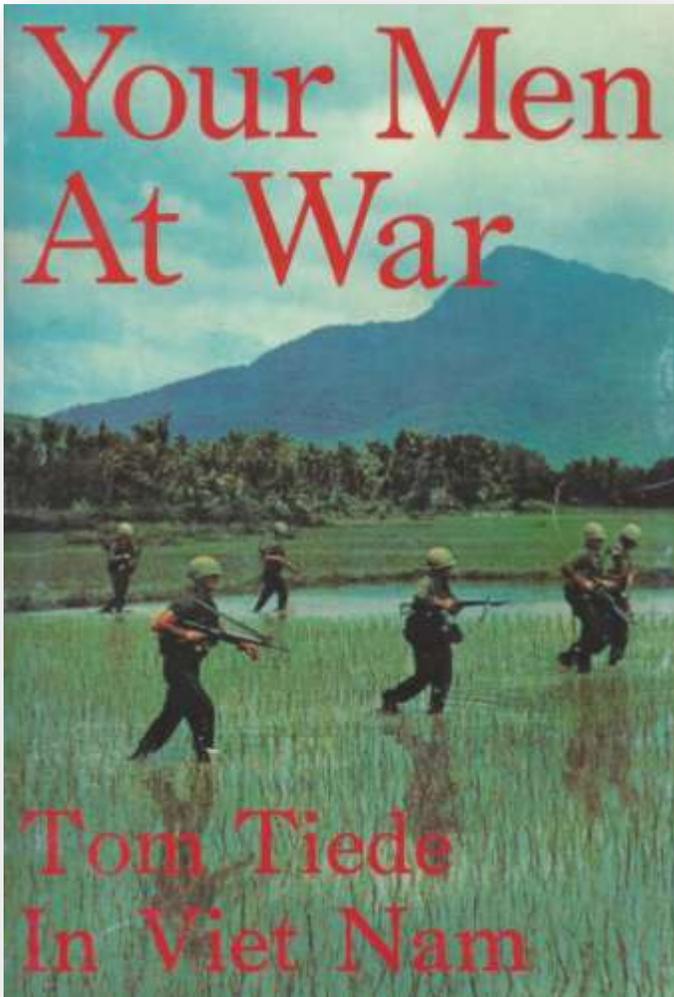
Conscious of his new position, the colonel quickly picked up the phone, told the PFC to enter, then said into the phone, *“Yes, Mr. President, I’ll be seeing him this afternoon and I’ll pass along your message. In the meantime, thank you for your good wishes, sir.”*

Feeling as though he had sufficiently impressed the young enlisted man, the Colonel loudly demanded, *“What do you want Private?!”*

*“Nothing important, sir,”* the PFC replied, *“I’m just here to hook up your telephone.”*



An excerpt from....



**christ on an ammo box;  
dominus vobiscum.**

The jungle out at Ben Cat was drip-drying after a rain shower and overhead clouds gathered anew to plot still another storm.

One by one, and in silence, the GIs joined into a damp group while a priest traced the shape of the cross in the humid steam.

And then a dozen men of war knelt to pray for peace. Church in the combat zone.

This was a congregation heavy-wet and dirty from work. Under their rain ponchos, they looked like mounds of mud piled up on the edge of this rice paddy parish.

*"Our Father..."* they whispered wearily.

*"Forgive us our trespasses..."*

*"But deliver us from evil. Amen,"* they said finally, and their fingers tightened on the weapons beside them.

The worshipers were men of the 2/503rd Infantry. Moments earlier, they were in unpius pursuit of the enemy in a nasty nest of Viet Cong called War Zone D. Moments later, they would be again.

But now, for 40 minutes, there was an uneasy pause.

Each man gave thanks with his eyes wide open. They stopped before a statue of Christ propped up on a live ammunition box. There were no pews and each man crouched in mire. A soldier with a gun assisted at the altar. Other men stood sentry on the perimeter and some cattle ate grass nearby during service.

*"Dominus vobiscum,"* said the priest. *"The Lord be with you."*

He was a tall man, dressed in white vestments and muddy combat boots. His head was bare and the short blonde hair was an immaculate exception to the surroundings.

Father Kennedy, Capt. James Matthew Kennedy, 38, of Syracuse, N.Y. Six feet, well-built, compassionate, friendly. The men like this one.

He is always there, it seems to them, in the foxholes, at the chowline, even wringing out his socks under the lister bag. The story is he dislike being an officer because it separates him from the men and thus he works harder to earn their trust.

And work he does. In battle he is everywhere, but safe, dressing wounds, giving comfort, intoning the Last Rites over the frightened face of a dying boy.

He has courage, but possibly too much, and the men are frightened for his life.

He has six months left in Viet Nam but they wish he would leave now in one piece. He takes too many chances, they say quietly. Ambushed four times, under fire 10 times and close to injury too often for even a man of God to discount.

The sky pilot, they call him.

Holy Joe, God's Commando, Capt. Chaplain.

The men like him and he likes them.

It began to rain again during the Mass. The precipitation mixed with the wine and crumbled the hosts of Communion. Drops spattered onto a soldier's face to help him hid the tears which had, without warning, leaked out.

Then the priest spoke, concisely, for there was no time for eloquence. He said no worthless words of solace but advised, instead, that those there remain in a state of grace at all time so that when, in case....

Water streaming from his face, he bowed to the crucifix and said softly his concluding words to God. The he turned and, with a gently gesturing right hand, gave the final blessing.

The men genuflected, crossed themselves and began to leave. The priest folded his vestments, placed his belongings in a bag and followed.

Moments later, the jungle had swallowed them up. Dominus vobiscum.



# ~ FUN WITH HATS & PATCHES ~

Thanks to LTC Bob Carmichael, 2/503d Bn XO/CO, '65/'66, and his bride, Exie, for sending us a number of new military hats and patches to give away to veterans; 13 hats in all, and 3 patches. Now, when I used to carry a radio for (then) Major Bob Carmichael, he'd never fail to give complete orders such as, "RTO, be quiet, and don't drop that handset again!" or, "Don't worry, Smitty, this LZ is secure." (Liar) And, "No, you cannot have any of my cookies from home." But, this time he just sent hats and patches with no detailed instructions, other than, "Give them to the guys." What Bob didn't tell me is, how do we give 13 hats and 3 patches to nearly 2000 veterans who receive our newsletter? Having given this dilemma serious thought, a plan was devised.

Any veteran with any unit who reads this may email one request, one time, naming two hats or one hat

and one patch they have interest in receiving. Because our newsletter is emailed over the span of two separate days, your emailed request cannot be sent until after midnight on 14 May 2012 – thus giving everyone an equal opportunity to respond. In your email request please include the corresponding numbers below to two hats or a hat and patch. The date and time of your email will determine if you receive a hat or patch -- first come, first served. We'll notify the 16 recipients, and the hat or patch they won will be mailed to them. In the July issue we'll name the recipients. The editor of your newsletter is not responsible for anything, particularly mistakes. If all hats and patches are not spoken for by midnight on June 1st, they will be given away to troopers.

Bob asked we not mention they provided these neat hats and patches, but.... *Thanks Bob & Exie!*

**SELECT TWO NUMBERS BELOW, AND EMAIL YOUR ONE-TIME SELECTION TO [rto173d@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rto173d@cfl.rr.com) TO BE EMAILED AFTER MIDNIGHT ON 14 MAY 2012. WINNERS WILL BE NOTIFIED ON JUNE 2ND. GOOD LUCK!**

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# WHAT IS A VIETNAM VET?

A college student posted a request on an internet newsgroup asking for personal narratives from the likes of us addressing the question: "What is a Vietnam Veteran?" This is what he received back.

Vietnam veterans are men and women. We are dead or alive, whole or maimed, sane or haunted. We grew from our experiences or we were destroyed by them or we struggle to find some place in between. We lived through hell or we had a pleasant, if scary, adventure. We were Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Red Cross, and civilians of all sorts. Some of us enlisted to fight for God and Country, and some were drafted. Some were gung-ho, and some went kicking and screaming.

Like veterans of all wars, we lived a tad bit--or a great bit--closer to death than most people like to think about. If Vietnam vets differ from others, perhaps it is primarily in the fact that many of us never saw the enemy or recognized him or her. We heard gunfire and mortar fire but rarely looked into enemy eyes. Those who did, like folks who encounter close combat anywhere and anytime, are often haunted for life by those eyes, those sounds, those electric fears that ran between ourselves, our enemies, and the likelihood of death for one of us. Or we get hard, calloused, tough. All in a day's work. Life's a bitch, then you die. But most of us remember and get twitchy, worried, sad.

We are crazies dressed in cammo, wide-eyed, wary, homeless, and drunk. We are Brooks Brothers suit



**Ed Anthony**  
**172d MID/MACV**  
**a Vietnam vet**



**Freddie Parks, A/2/503d**  
**a Vietnam vet**



**Gary Prisk, C/D/2/503d**  
**a Vietnam vet**

wearers, doing deals downtown. We are housewives, grandmothers, and church deacons. We are college professors engaged in the rational pursuit of the truth about the history or politics or culture of the Vietnam experience. And we are sleepless. Often sleepless.

We pushed paper; we pushed shovels. We drove jeeps, operated bulldozers, built bridges; we toted machine guns through dense brush, deep paddy, and thorn scrub. We lived on buffalo milk, fish heads and rice. Or C-rations. Or steaks and Budweiser. We did our time in high mountains drenched by endless monsoon rains or on the dry plains or on muddy rivers or at the most beautiful beaches in the world.

We wore berets, bandanas, flop hats, and steel pots. Flak jackets, canvas, rash and rot. We ate Chloroquine and got malaria anyway. We got shots constantly but have diseases nobody can diagnose. We spent our nights on cots or shivering in foxholes filled with waist-high water or lying still on cold wet ground, our eyes imagining Charlie behind every bamboo blade. Or we slept in hotel beds in Saigon or barracks in Thailand or in cramped ships' berths at sea.

We feared we would die or we feared we would kill. We simply feared, and often we still do. We hate the war or believe it was the best thing that ever happened to us. We blame Uncle Sam or Uncle Ho and their minions and secretaries and apologists for every wart or cough or tic of an eye. We wonder if Agent Orange got us.



**Jerry Wiles, B/2/503d**  
**a Vietnam vet**



**Jamie Castillo, C/2/503d**  
**a Vietnam vet**



**Mike Hargadon &**  
**Jerry Hassler, Recon 2/503d**  
**Vietnam vets**

*(continued....)*



Mostly--and this I believe with all my heart--mostly, we wish we had not been so alone. Some of us went with units; but many, probably most of us, were civilians one day, jerked up out of "the world," shaved, barked at, insulted, humiliated, de-egoized and taught to kill, to fix radios, to drive trucks. We went, put in our time, and were equally ungraciously plucked out of the morass and placed back in the real world. But now we smoked dope, shot skag, or drank heavily. Our wives or husbands seemed distant and strange. Our friends wanted to know if we shot anybody. And life went on, had been going on, as if we hadn't been there, as if Vietnam was a topic of political conversation or college protest or news copy, not a matter of life and death for tens of thousands.



**Jim Dresser, A/HHC/2/503d  
a Vietnam vet**



**John Searcy, HHC/2/503d  
a Vietnam vet**

Vietnam vets are people just like you. We served our country, proudly or reluctantly or ambivalently. What makes us different--what makes us Vietnam vets--is something we understand, but we are afraid nobody else will. But we appreciate your asking.

Vietnam veterans are white, black, beige and shades of gray; but in comparison with our numbers in the "real world," we were more likely black. Our ancestors came from Africa, from Europe, and China. Or they crossed the Bering Sea Land Bridge in the last Ice Age and formed the nations of American Indians, built pyramids in Mexico, or farmed acres of corn on the banks of Chesapeake Bay. We had names like Rodriguez and Stein and Smith and Kowalski. We were Americans, Australians, Canadians, and Koreans; most Vietnam veterans are Vietnamese.



**The late Dr. Dick Eckert  
B/2/503d  
a Vietnam vet**

We were farmers, students, mechanics, steelworkers, nurses, and priests when the call came that changed us all forever. We had dreams and plans, and they all had to change...or wait. We were daughters and sons, lovers and poets, beatniks and philosophers, convicts and lawyers. We were rich and poor but mostly poor. We were educated or not, mostly not. We grew up in slums, in shacks, in duplexes, and bungalows and houseboats and hooches and ranchers. We were cowards and heroes. Sometimes we were cowards one moment and heroes the next.

Many of us have never seen Vietnam. We waited at home for those we loved. And for some of us, our worst fears were realized. For others, our loved ones came back but never would be the same.

We came home and marched in protest marches, sucked in tear gas, and shrieked our anger and horror for all to hear. Or we sat alone in small rooms, in VA hospital wards, in places where only the crazy ever go. We are Republicans, Democrats, Socialists, and Confucians and Buddhists and Atheists--though as usually is the case, even the atheists among us sometimes prayed to get out of there alive.

We are hungry, and we are sated, full of life or clinging to death. We're injured, and we are curers, despairing and hopeful, loved or lost. We got too old too quickly, but some of us have never grown up. We want, desperately, to go back, to heal wounds, revisit the sites of our horror. Or we want never to see that place again, to bury it, its memories, its meaning. We want to forget, and we wish we could remember.



**Tome Roubideaux, A/2/503d  
a Vietnam vet**



**A.B. Garcia, HHC/2/503d  
a Vietnam vet**



**Bob Carmichael  
HHC/2/503d  
a Vietnam vet**

*(continued....)*



Despite our differences, we have so much in common. There are few of us who don't know how to cry, though we often do it alone when nobody will ask "what's wrong?" We're afraid we might have to answer.



**L-R: Mike Sturges & Jack Ribera, A/2/503d  
back in-country looking in the direction of where they  
both nearly lost their lives to a VC mine.  
Vietnam vets**

Adam, if you want to know what a Vietnam veteran is, get in your car next weekend or cage a friend with a car to drive you. Go to Washington. Go to the Wall. It's going to be Veterans Day weekend. There will be hundreds there...no, thousands. Watch them. Listen to them. I'll be there. Come touch the Wall with us. Rejoice a bit. Cry a bit. No, cry a lot. I will.

I'm a Vietnam Veteran; and, after 30 years, I think I am beginning to understand what that means.

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**Note:** This report appeared in Jack Tarr's on-line 4/503d Newsletter, and sent to him by Steve Konek, Sr., 173d Bde Hq, credited to Mike L., a 1/9th Cav Scout vet). Photos added.

## Sky Soldier

### Frank Joseph Denryter, Jr.

(February 26, 1950 - May 3, 2012)



Frank Joseph Denryter, Jr., age 62, a resident of Clinton Township, Michigan passed away on Thursday, May 3, 2012. He was born on February 26, 1950 in Mount Clemens, MI to the late Frank J. and Donna (nee Duggan) Denryter, Sr. On June 16, 1973 in Mt. Clemens, he was united in marriage to the former Kathleen "Kathy" Ellen Ackerman. Together they celebrated their 38th Wedding Anniversary.



Mr. Denryter was a veteran of the United States Army, serving during the Vietnam War with the 4th Battalion, 173d Airborne Brigade. Receiving his bachelor degree from Grand Valley State University, he was employed in technology sales, using contract placement for the State of Michigan and Blue Cross Blue Shield. Serving as a voluntary vice-president for Michigan Babe Ruth Leagues, he was involved with youth baseball. He followed the professional baseball leagues and enjoyed playing baseball and golf himself. Among his other interests, he enjoyed hunting, American History and visiting Gettysburg.

His survivors include his wife Kathy, children; Patrick, Andrew, Kristin, and Jennifer Denryter, grandson Nickalas, siblings; Fred (Jean) Denryter, Debbie (Fred) Stadlebaur, William Denryter, nieces and nephews, and his mother-in-law Barbara Ackerman. Besides his parents, he was preceded in death by his infant daughter Mary Elizabeth, and sister Kathy Gorecki.

### ~ From a Buddy ~

I just returned from the Detroit area after attending Frank Denryter's funeral and burial. The internment was at the Great Lake's National Cemetery. It is a beautiful site with a large lake in the middle of 541 acres. White marble military stones were aligned with absolute precision. Pavilions and benches were placed in areas for families to visit their loved ones.

The ceremony for Frank, his family, and friends was impressive, with a National Guard E-6 and E-5 folding the flag and presenting it to Mrs. Denryter. The VFW's Honor Guard performed the rifle salute.

I was proud to be there for him and represent the 173d Airborne. Frank would be very pleased to have been remembered in this way.

**Jerry Sopko, D/4/503d**

*Rest easy brother*

