



# 2/503d VIETNAM

## Newsletter

September 13, 2009 / Issue 6



*For the men, and their families, of the 2d Battalion, 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep) ~ We Try Harder!*



### VA Simplifies Rules For PTSD Compensation

(Sent in by Larry "Big Dog" Hampton, 1/503d)

#### Department of Veterans Affairs

WASHINGTON -- The Veterans Affairs Department is taking steps to help veterans seeking compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder, VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki announced Aug. 24.

*"The hidden wounds of war are being addressed vigorously and comprehensively by this administration as we move VA forward in its transformation to the 21st century,"* Secretary Shinseki said.

VA is publishing a proposed regulation today in the Federal Register to make it easier for a veteran to claim service connection for PTSD by reducing the evidence needed if the stressor claimed is related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity. Comments on the proposed rule will be accepted over the next 60 days, and a final regulation will be published after consideration of all comments received, VA officials said.

Under the new rule, VA would not require corroboration of a stressor related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity if a VA psychiatrist or psychologist confirms that the stressful experience recalled by a veteran adequately supports a diagnosis of PTSD and the veteran's symptoms are related to the claimed stressor.

Previously, claims adjudicators were required to corroborate that a noncombat veteran actually experienced a stressor related to hostile military activity. This rule would simplify the development that is required for these cases, officials explained.

PTSD is a recognized anxiety disorder that can follow seeing or experiencing an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to which a person

responds with intense fear, helplessness or horror, and is not uncommon in war. Feelings of fear, confusion or anger often subside, officials noted, but if the feelings don't go away or get worse, a veteran may have PTSD.

VA is bolstering its mental health capacity to serve combat veterans, adding thousands of new professionals. The department also has established a toll-free suicide prevention helpline -- 1-800-273-TALK -- and has a Web site available for online chat in the evenings at the [Veterans Suicide Prevention Hotline](http://VeteransSuicidePreventionHotline.org): [suicidepreventionlifeline.org:80/Veterans/](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org:80/Veterans/)

### VA Claims Backlog Tops 900,000

VA's backlog on pending claims and appeals was more than 905,000 as of July 18, according to VA statistics. That represents an increase of some 15% from last year. VA's backlog includes over 737,000 unprocessed claims -- of which about 20% had been pending beyond 180 days -- and approximately 173,000 appeals awaiting decision. *Vietnam Magazine, September 2009*

### House OKs Advanced VA funding

The House approved a bill in July that would provide VA operating funds by the start of the next fiscal year. If so, it would be the fourth time in the last 21 years VA was funded on time.

The bill offers a \$4.4 billion increase for the Veterans Health Administration in 2010. The money is earmarked for mental health services, homeless veterans and medical research. It also includes funding for 28 new Vet Centers, 30 new Community-Based Outpatient Clinics and 1,200 more claim processors.

*"This is an 8% increase over FY2010 and will allow VA officials to plan spending levels for the coming year, meet the continuing wave of new patients and maintain operations at VA facilities,"* said Rep. Bob Filner (D-Calif.), chairman of the House VA Committee.



## Important Find

An archeological team, digging in Washington DC, has uncovered 10,000 year old bones and fossil remains of what is believed to be the first Politician. It's unknown if they are from a Republican or Democrat.



**Repdemus Headinassertus**

### ***WETSU!***

An Army Leg stands in the rain with a 35 pound ruck on his back, 15 pound weapon in his hands, after having marched 12 miles, and says, "*This is shit*".

A Marine stands in the rain with a 45 pound ruck on his back, weapon in hand, after having marched 18 miles, and says, "*This is really shit*".

A Navy SEAL lies in the mud, 55 pound ruck on his back, weapon in hand, after swimming 10 miles to shore, crawling through a swamp and marching 25 miles at night past enemy positions, says, "*This is really bad shit*".

A 173d Airborne Paratrooper, up to his nose in the stinking, bug-infested mud of a swamp with a 85 pound ruck on his back, weapons in both hands, after having night jumped from an aircraft at high altitude into the ocean, swimming 12 miles to shore, killing several alligators to enter the swamp, then crawling 30 miles through the brush to assault an enemy camp, says, "*WETSU!! We eat this shit up!!*"



An Air Force officer sits in an easy chair in his air conditioned, carpeted, quarters and says, "*The cable's out! What kind of shit is this???*"

**Note:** "*WETSU*" was the slogan of the 4-Deuce Platoon of the 2/503d as early as 1965. It's reported "*Show us your dick*", was the slogan of a number of C/2/503d troopers in '67. I don't even wanna ask. Amusingly, the source for this bit of historical lore comes from Chargin' Charlie, *Roger Dick*. And that's no shit!

## 2009 Ranger Rendezvous

This is a photo of the attendees to the last reunion of LRP, LRRP and Rangers from the 173d. As you can see they had a big turn out. The reunion was at Columbia/Ft. Benning, GA. The picture is of a picnic held each year at Ranger Roger Brown's home. Roger was with the LRRP in 66/67.



**2009 Rangers, LRP & LRRP Reunion.**

## Ceremony for Sgt. Israel Garcia, KIA

Family members of Sgt. Israel Garcia, C/2/503d, KIA 13 July 2008 in Afghanistan, display the posthumous award of the Silver Star, in Los Alamitos, CA.



**Seen here, L-R, are Israel's wife, Lesly, and his parents Mari and Victor Garcia.**

173d Chapter 14 president, Wambi Cook, A/2/503d, and Ray Ramirez, HHC & C/4/503d, participated in the event honoring Sgt. Garcia and his family.

## Note

We are honored to recognize one of our former Battalion Commanders in this edition of our Newsletter as *Sky Soldier Extraordinaire*, and what better commander to name for this special and worthy recognition than the man who took our battalion to Vietnam in May of 1965. Colonel George E. Dexter commanded the 2/503d until he was severely wounded in combat during Operation Phoenix in early 1966.

George was graduated West Point and is retired in Albuquerque, NM, where he lives with his lovely bride, Katy. A private and humble man, little is known about George's life before and following the war. What is known, however, is Colonel Dexter is highly respected by the men who served under his command. As one Sky Soldier recently stated,

***“George Dexter was the finest Leader that I have ever served under in my 20 years service. He was especially an outstanding Combat Leader.” LTC Thomas F. Dooley, USA (Retired)***

In January 2000, Colonel Dexter sent me a letter addressing his army service and the Vietnam War. His letter, below, tells us much about the man and the soldier.



### **SKY SOLDIER EXTRAORDINAIRE**

#### **Colonel George E. Dexter**

**Commander, 2/503d**

**(In a letter dated January 10, 2000)**

Thank you for keeping me abreast of your photo project for 2/503 in 1966. It sounds like it's coming along great and that you're getting tremendous response from the battalion veterans. It doesn't surprise me. Paratroopers have a lot of pride, and the 2d Battalion had much to be proud of.

I've been meaning to write for some time, ever since receiving the series of e-mails concerning your attitude about the Vietnam War. Perhaps you should know mine. To begin with, your feeling about the war does not surprise me. I was a professional soldier of relatively high rank and you a citizen soldier down where the fighting and dying were taking place. Plus there was a definite generational difference. My own children don't agree with me on the war. But I am not one of those hard nosed ultra-righters who feel we were betrayed. I think we lost a war we should and could have won, and I feel we let down the South Vietnamese who depended on us and trusted us. But all wars are political, and the people of the United States by the late 60's had decided to get out. We, the soldiers, had a chance, but we could not achieve victory before the people, in increasing numbers, decided it was not worth the effort.

I spent roughly ten years of my military career involved with Vietnam in one way or another. In 1962, out of the blue, I received orders to attend the Special Forces Officer's Course at Ft. Bragg. That turned out to be a



very fascinating course. We studied the theory of insurgency warfare from a variety of books written mostly by non-Americans, and it was pretty obvious that the Communists had developed and applied this theory pretty successfully all around the world. They were capitalizing on the end of colonialism around the world and gobbling up countries one after another, and it was pretty hard to find any examples of successful counter-insurgencies. While the West was trying to build democracy in their former colonies from the top down (which didn't work -- most soon became dictatorships) the insurgents were building communism from the bottom up capitalizing on hate, hope and fear. From Bragg I was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Group on Okinawa and spent the next two years training A Detachments to go to Vietnam for six months tours to



work with indigenous people (mostly montagnards), organize them into local self defense groups (company sized mostly), train them, and use them mostly to try to cut down on the infiltration of supplies and units from the north. I made two trips to Vietnam during this period to visit A Teams, who by and large did a good job with more than a few casualties. In the summer of '64 I transferred over to the 173d and took command of the 2d Bn, which I was fortunate enough to take through a complete training cycle on Okinawa and then deploy with to Vietnam. Anyway, after I was wounded and evacuated and spent 2 ½ months in the hospital, I attended the Army War College and in '67 was assigned to the Joint Staff in the Pentagon where I worked for two years, first on the Washington end of the pacification program and then the Vietnamization program to turn the war over to the Vietnamese Army. After a tour in Panama with the Special Forces, I returned to Vietnam in 1972, where I was involved first with the ARVN advisory effort in the Delta and then in Saigon with the pacification effort. This tour gave me a much deeper appreciation for the South Vietnamese and their end of the war.

I point all this out to show that my experience with the Vietnam War was pretty broad -- first in the Special Forces working with the montagnards in a very low level effort, then commanding an American combat infantry unit in the hot war, then in planning at the Washington level, and finally in the advisory effort to the ARVN and to the pacification program. Needless to say, a lot of me went into that war, and so I inevitably have some strong feelings about it.

A few personal thoughts about the war:

1. Should we have gotten involved in the war, and particularly, should we have gotten into the ground fighting side of it? In hindsight, the answer would certainly seem to be no. But Kennedy and Johnson didn't have the advantage of hindsight, and the situation at the time looked pretty grim. But I have to admit that when the battalion was deployed from Okinawa to SVN, I was not convinced that it was necessary.

Keep in mind that we would not have earned our own independence if France hadn't come to fight for us. It is a popular myth that the South Vietnamese people were not really interested in independence from North Vietnam and not willing to fight for themselves, so we should not have

done it for them. The facts are that for almost twenty years they did fight against being a part of North Vietnam, that they were able to build up and maintain an Armed Force of half a million -- something they could not have done without popular support -- that throughout the war they sustained far more casualties than we did (I think that there were only two or three weeks during the whole war when American casualties exceeded the South Vietnamese) and that there was no 'General Uprising' against the South Vietnamese government at Tet (this was what the Communists expected, and it never came to pass). They finally fell to a conventional attack in overwhelming force -- a gross violation of the peace accords.

What were the results of the war? The dominoes fell in South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, but they did not fall in Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines or Indonesia. I think our willingness to stand up and fight in South Vietnam had a lot to do with that. Further, the whole tide of rampant Communist expansion came to a halt, and eventually it began to fall apart. Today only China, Vietnam and Cuba are Communist, and both China and Vietnam are certainly developing more capitalistic economies. Maybe we won after all, though I must admit that I didn't feel I was fighting for economic systems but rather for individual rights.





**Maj. Bob Carmichael, Sen. Scoop Jackson, LTC Dexter**

2. Were bad decisions made? Yes, lots of them, by everyone in leadership positions, including definitely myself. That's part of being human. In war, both sides are trying their best to destroy the other side (there's nothing really like it in other fields of human endeavor), and both sides are trying their best to conceal what they are doing from the other side. In Vietnam, the VC/NVA knew a lot more about the terrain and about our situation than we did about them. We depended on maps, which were inevitably out of date and showed far too little detail for small unit operations, and we depended a lot on radio intercepts. They infiltrated spies into the civilian population to watch our movements and into key places within the South Vietnamese military. They knew about our operations ahead of time, at least at the higher levels. We had the big advantage of tactical mobility with helicopters, which allowed us to shift around troops relatively rapidly and to resupply in the jungles so that we did not have to protect extensive lines of communications. But basically all leaders at battalion and below were operating in the dark, trying to find the enemy, then fix him in place while we pounded him and maneuvered to finish him off. The point to remember is that most decisions at the lower level are made with very little good intelligence and usually have to be made rapidly. It's a recipe for mistakes. Unfortunately, delaying decisions is often worse. Of course experience helps, but as you pointed out, most leaders at the lower level are pretty young, and you really don't get appropriate experience in civilian life. Higher commanders and staff may have had experience in previous wars, but at a lower level. All we can do is try to train for our jobs, and training is not the same as combat.

Anyway, you may have passed on some mistaken decisions in combat as an RTO, but I don't think you should have any conscience about it. Be assured that the person making the decision based it on the best information he had, which might not have been very good.

3. Did we cause too many casualties among Vietnamese civilians? Yes, we probably did. I'm not a fan of aerial bombing except in close support of ground troops or to interdict lines of communications. But as far as the ground war is concerned, we tried to fight it in the jungles and mountains, as far as possible from populated areas, but we could not completely avoid populated areas. The other side tried to bring it to the cities and populated areas, and when they did, we had to drive them out. There is no way to fight in populated areas without causing casualties, but it was sure not our intent.

Anyway, those are some of my thoughts. I respect your feelings about the war. They pretty much mirror many of your generation. And I recognize your pride in the 2/503 and those you served with, even if you really question what we were doing and how.

I'd be honored to be a member of your kitchen cabinet, Lew. I'll come to Cocoa Beach if it doesn't interfere with some other trips my wife and I are planning for the summer. Just let me know when. It will be great to see Bob Carmichael and Tom Faley again and to meet the others who are contributing to the project."

George



**Colonel Dexter following his presentation to men of the 2/503d at 173d reunion in Rochester, MN, 2000.**

*Colonel Dexter: On behalf of the men of the 2/503d, thank you for the privilege of serving under your command, and thank you for your honorable service to your battalion and your country. All the way, Sir!*



## Let 'Em Eat Cake?



Who can tell us about this cake, baked and decorated by men of the 2/503d? Photo by Jim Robinson

### **“Operation – Next Generation” 2/503 Sky Soldier Doing Good Work In Vietnam**

Sky Soldier Mike Thibault, A/2/503d, a severely wounded survivor of the ferocious battle on 29 Jun 66, when the VC overran 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon of Alpha Company (the same battle for which Charlie Morris earned the Medal of Honor), did not allow his war experience to keep him from giving something back to the people of that war torn country. As a way of honoring the memory of his father, and to help build harmony between the people of the United States and Vietnam, Mike undertook a new mission.

Mike singularly took on the monumental task of building a school dormitory on the outskirts of Saigon for needy kids who, without the facility, may have been destined to a life in the rice fields without the opportunity to further their education beyond the elementary level. Following years of work, coordination, fund raising, fighting red tape, multiple trips back to Vietnam at his own expense, and an unwavering commitment, Mike saw his dream come to fruition. In 2001, Mike was there with buddies from the 1/503d and 2/503d to witness the dedication of his newly built school dormitory.



**Dedication of Mike's school dormitory near Saigon.**



## **2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER**

September 13, 2009 / Issue 6

To mark this special and meaningful event, Mike's Sky Soldier buddy, Dale Olson of A/2/503d, had smuggled a rose bush into the country which was offered as a gift of friendship to the children of the school. Each Sky Soldier in attendance fed the fledgling plant a small glass of water.



Mike's dormitory, with both boys and girls wings, is a fine structure and one built to last, including bunk beds, lockers and tables and chairs for the students.



Some months later, Dale's rose bush blossoms, in hopes of a new beginning for the next generation.

Mike Thibault accomplished his mission. As of today, countless children have him to thank for their early and ongoing education. Job well done G.I.



**Mike with kids and teachers at the dormitory he built.**

**Mike, near site of the  
29 Jun 66 battle.**



# Medal of Honor

*Milton L. Olive III*

MILTON LEE OLIVE III

Private First Class  
U.S. Army  
Company B, 2nd Battalion (Airborne),  
503d Infantry,  
173d Airborne Brigade (Sep)  
Republic of Vietnam, 22 October 1965



For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty. Pfc. Olive was a member of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon of Company B, as it moved through the jungle to find the Viet Cong operating in the area. Although the platoon was subjected to a heavy volume of enemy gunfire and pinned down temporarily, it retaliated by assaulting the Viet Cong positions, causing the enemy to flee. As the platoon pursued the insurgents, Pfc. Olive and 4 other soldiers were moving through the jungle together when a grenade was thrown into their midst. Pfc. Olive saw the grenade, and then saved the lives of his fellow soldiers at the sacrifice of his by grabbing the grenade in his hand and falling on it to absorb the blast with his body. Through his bravery, unhesitating actions, and complete disregard for his safety, he prevented additional loss of life or injury to the members of his platoon. Pfc. Olive's extraordinary heroism, at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty are in the highest traditions of the U.S. Army and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.



## 2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

September 13, 2009 / Issue 6

*"It is our dream and prayer that some day the Asiatics, and the Europeans, and the Israelites, and the Africans, and the Australians, and the Latins, and the Americans can all live in one world. It is our hope that in our own country the Klansmen and the Negroes, the Hebrews and the Catholics will sit down together in the common purpose of good will and dedication, that the moral and creative intelligence of our united people will pick up the chalice of wisdom and place it upon the mountain top of human integrity; that all mankind, from all the earth, shall resolve, 'to study war no more.' That, Mr. President, is how I feel and that is my eternal hope for our Great American Society."*

Milton B. Olive, Jr.  
March 10, 1966

In a letter to President Lyndon Johnson dated March 10, 1966, from the father of Milton L. Olive, III, killed in action while serving in Vietnam with the 2/503d, 173d Airborne Brigade, and read by the President at the White House during the posthumous award ceremony for the Congressional Medal of Honor.



President Lyndon Johnson presenting *Medal of Honor* citation to Milton's father, Milton B. Olive, Jr., at White House ceremony.

### Our Newsletter

Please send all stories, opinions and other submissions, including photos (JPEG), to [rt0173d@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rt0173d@cfl.rr.com) This Newsletter will be issued periodically. If you do not wish to receive the Newsletter please send a note to the above email address. *Airborne! All the way!!*



## The Battle at Dak To

In an upcoming edition of our Newsletter, we will feature the brave men of the 2/503d who fought the battle for Hill 875. Please send in your recollections as well as any photos you have to [rt173d@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rt173d@cfl.rr.com)



Buddy helping a buddy at Dak To.

### St. Michael Pendant on Another 'Tour of Duty'

I kept the St. Michael pendant on a dog tag chain at Fort Benning in jump school, figured it couldn't hurt. I wore it around my neck during jump school; stateside with the 101<sup>st</sup> (including a night jump and jet blast). It got me through Nam, 4 months with the Herd, 7 months with the 51<sup>st</sup> Inf. LRP (formed mostly from 173<sup>d</sup>); I did contract malaria and received a Purple Heart. I continued to wear the pendant until the Gulf War started then gave it to a co-worker for her husband who was in the military. It turns out he was never deployed. She returned the pendant and I gave it to another co-worker who was in the Ohio National Guard who did an extended tour in Iraq. He was stop-loss a couple of times. He made it home ok. I most recently gave the pendant to another co-worker for her son who had been deployed to Iraq.....so far, so good.



I will be the first to admit I am not real religious and when I got the pendant at Benning I didn't notice the St. Michael at first. Being a Hunkey I live by the credo, kat vicuska (pure life), The Gypsy Way. But it's clear to me this little pendant has got some serious Mojo going for it; so much so, it continues to protect 'legs' and not just Sky Soldiers. The pendant continues its tour of duty.

Steve Vargo C/2/503d



## 2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

September 13, 2009 / Issue 6

### "Sky Soldiers"

*(Excerpt from Militaryvetshop.com)*

The Sky Soldiers can trace their lineage back to the forming of the 173d Infantry, 87th Division in 1917.

The Brigade went to France with the 87th Division, but was not involved in any major combat action. The Brigade was demobilized at Camp Dix, New Jersey in January of 1919. Between wars, the 173d went through a series of reorganizations and re-designations. By the start of World War II, brigades were eliminated from divisions. Therefore in February of 1942, the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 173d Infantry Brigade was assigned to the 87th Division as the 87th Reconnaissance

Troop. The 87th Division was part of Patton's Third Army and the 87th saw extensive combat in Europe including the Battle of the Bulge and the crossing of the Rhine River. The future Sky Soldiers were deactivated again in 1945, at Fort Benning, Georgia.







# 2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

September 13, 2009 / Issue 6

Additionally, two maneuver battalions of the Brigade trace their history with the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment which participated in the taking of Corregidor in the Philippines.



The 173d ABN BDE earned several nicknames during their training for their noteworthy service during the Vietnam War. The 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) was activated into the regular army on the island of Okinawa on March 26, 1963. The Brigade was to serve as the quick reaction force for the Pacific Command. Since this unique and aggressive unit was to be ready to insert into Southeast Asian countries as a crisis revealed itself, the unit was known as the "Fire Brigade." Their first commander, Brigadier General Ellis W. Williamson established realistic training throughout the region. Nationalist Chinese (Taiwan) paratroopers gave the 173d Airborne their nickname of Tien Bing or "Sky Soldiers" due to the number of training jumps conducted on their island.



Frankie Laine's old song 'Rawhide' from the TV series of the same name. The colonel on returning to camp played the song over the PA system during all battalion formations. We as paratroopers had to run to and from all these formations, and with the roads being unpaved, kicked up quit a cloud of dust. One of his staff remarked that we looked like a herd of cattle and you can guess the rest. Colonel Boland was given the name Rawhide and the battalion was referred to as the Herd. The rest of the brigade adopted the name once in Nam and no one is sure when or how that began. Colonel Boland is still alive and kickin' at 88 years of age and still signs his name as 'Rawhide Boland.'"



Our thanks to John "Dutch" Holland, a Vietnam Veteran with Bravo Company, 1/503d for his recollection of how the 173d Airborne got the nickname of *The Herd*:

*"The term Herd is used with pride by veterans of the 173d Airborne Brigade. This nickname was coined by Colonel 'Rawhide' Boland of the 1/503d. Colonel Boland while on leave heard, liked and bought a copy of*

The 173d Airborne Brigade was the first Army unit sent to the Republic of South Vietnam. In May of 1965 the majority of the Brigade landed at Bien Hoa Airfield. They found the area frequently battered by enemy raids and shelling attacks. The Sky Soldiers were the first to go into War Zone D to destroy enemy base camps and relieve pressure on the Vietnamese capitol. The 173d was the first to introduce the use of long range reconnaissance patrols. They fought in the Iron Triangle, a Viet Cong stronghold north of Saigon. In November of 1965 the 173d took part in Operation

Hump, north of Bien Hoa on the outskirts of Saigon. In 1966 they participated in Operation Crimp to root out enemy forces from the Tunnels at Cu Chi.



## 2/503d VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

September 13, 2009 / Issue 6



brigade conducted an amphibious assault against NVA and VC forces as part of an operation to clear the rice-growing lowlands along the Bong Song littoral.

The Battle of Dak To took a heavy toll on the Brigade and hence they were transferred to the An Khe and Bong Son areas. They saw little action during 1968 while the Brigade was rebuilt. The unit stayed in An Khe until mid-1969. In May of 1969 the Brigade conducted Operation Darby Punch II, which was the Sky Soldiers fiftieth operation in country.

The 1st and 2nd Battalions, 503rd Infantry were the first Army combat units from the 173d sent to the Republic of South Vietnam, accompanied by the 3rd Battalion, 319th Artillery. They were supported by the 173d Support Battalion, 173d Engineers, E Troop/17th Cavalry and D Co/16th Armor. The First Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment and the 161st Field Battery of the Royal New Zealand Army were later attached to the Brigade during the first year.

From April 1969 until its withdrawal from Vietnam in 1971, the 173d Airborne Brigade served in Binh Dinh Province. They participated in four additional operations: Washington Greene, Greene Lightning, Greene Storm, and Green Sure. From April to August, 1971 the Sky Soldiers redeployed back to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The unit was deactivated on January 14, 1972.

In late August of 1966 the 4th Battalion, 503rd Infantry from Fort Campbell, Kentucky joined the 173d Airborne Brigade in Vietnam. The 3/503d joined the Brigade at Tuy Hoa in September of 1967. Also joining the Brigade was Company N, 75th Rangers. At its peak strength in Vietnam, the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) had nearly 3,000 soldiers assigned.



The 173d Airborne Brigade was reactivated on 12 June 2000 on Caserma Ederle in Vicenza, Italy, where it serves as European Command's only conventional airborne unit. The Brigade has seen numerous tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan.



The Vietnam Veterans of the 173d Airborne Brigade are deservedly proud of their service with the Sky Soldiers. During just over six years of combat, the 173d earned 14 campaign streamers and 4 unit citations. The Brigade soldiers were awarded 13 Medals of Honor, 46 Distinguished Service Crosses, 1736 Silver Stars and over 6,000 Purple Hearts. Sadly, 1736 of the Sky Soldiers died in Vietnam.

On February 7, 1967, the 173d Airborne Brigade took part in Operation Junction City, conducting the only (U.S. mass) combat parachute jump of the Vietnam War. During some of the toughest fighting of the war, the Sky Soldiers blocked North Vietnamese Army incursions at Dak To during the summer and fall of 1967. This period culminated in the capture of Hill 875. Elements of the