



## **THE ORIGINAL GERONIMO BATTALION**

**Original Geronimo Battalion.** In early 1966, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, Ft Campbell, KY, was ordered to Vietnam. The famous World War II nickname of the 1/501st was "Geronimo" and we were "The Geronimo Battalion." We even had a wooden cigar-store vintage Indian mascot at Battalion HQ. Under command of LTC "Iron Mike" Healy, we received orders to deploy to Vietnam as the 4th Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry, to join the 173d Airborne Brigade in country. Though we changed crests and shoulder patches when we joined the 173d, we still called ourselves, "The Geronimo Battalion."

**June 6, 1966.** On June 6, 1966, (WW II D Day) 820 troopers of the newly-constituted 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion departed Ft Campbell enroute to Vietnam. The advance party flew directly to Vietnam. The main body flew and went by train to Oakland, CA, where they embarked on the SS John Pope, a WW II troop ship. After 18 long days at sea, the Pope landed at Vung Tau and the troops went to the sprawling Bien Hoa Air Base complex north of Saigon. Three future Medal of Honor recipients were on that ship: **Don Michael, Glenn English** and **Lazlo Rabel**. Don Michael's MOH was for actions in April 1967 and the others in later tours.

**Combat Missions.** During its 12 months in Vietnam, the original 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion participated in numerous missions including air assaults, blocking, search and destroy and reinforcement throughout I, II and III Corps. Our AO ranged from Bien Hoa to the DMZ. On one of its first missions, a 4/503d MEDEVAC was captured on camera and became the best-known photo of the Vietnam conflict - *The Agony of War*.

**The ultimate sacrifice.** In the 12 months the original troopers were in country, 51 of our brothers died. Another 17 were KIA on later tours. At each reunion, the names of those fallen are read by their surviving buddies. The wounds of war have caused the premature deaths of many of our fellow soldiers. And, PTSD and Agent Orange have changed the lives of scores of once-healthy young men. Over 100 members of our proud battalion have died since return from Vietnam.

**Geronimo Battalion today.** Anyone who served with the 4/503d between June 6, 1966 and May 30, 1967 is a member of the original battalion. One third of the original battalion were teenagers, 18 and 19-year-olds, who quickly became men under fire. Today, most of us are grandparents, yet our memories of being in one of the finest fighting units ever assembled remain vivid. We are in touch with 390 brothers who served with the 4/503d in that year.



# CONTENTS

This book is dedicated to those who died in Vietnam and those who were forever wounded by that war. It is also a tribute to our families who were there for us while we served and especially, in the uncertainty and dark memories we have had since we returned.

It is a "living" document. Stories will be added all the time.

**Dick Childs & Jack Tarr, Editors**

<b><u>ABOUT OUR STORIES</u></b>	<b><u>Page 3</u></b>
<b><u>BEFORE THE FIGHTING</u></b>	<b><u>Page 4</u></b>
<b><u>IN COMBAT</u></b>	<b><u>Page 10</u></b>
<b><u>MEDICS</u></b>	<b><u>Page 11</u></b>
<b><u>A COMPANY</u></b>	<b><u>Page 14</u></b>
<b><u>B COMPANY</u></b>	<b><u>Page 23</u></b>
<b><u>C COMPANY</u></b>	<b><u>Page 30</u></b>
<b><u>D COMPANY</u></b>	<b><u>Page 37</u></b>
<b><u>HQ COMPANY</u></b>	<b><u>Page 39</u></b>
<b><u>OTHER STORIES</u></b>	<b><u>Page 41</u></b>
<b><u>GOING HOME</u></b>	<b><u>Page 45</u></b>
<b><u>AFTER VIETNAM</u></b>	<b><u>Page 47</u></b>
<b><u>REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN BUDDIES</u></b>	<b><u>Page 50</u></b>
<b><u>DEALING WITH THE MEMORIES</u></b>	<b><u>Page 53</u></b>
<b><u>REUNIONS</u></b>	<b><u>Page 56</u></b>
<b><u>FROM OUR FAMILIES</u></b>	<b><u>Page 57</u></b>
<b><u>TIME FLIES</u></b>	<b><u>Page 58</u></b>
<b><u>ABOUT THE AUTHORS</u></b>	<b><u>Page 59</u></b>

**BAND OF BROTHERS.** "He which hath no stomach to this fight let him depart. But, we in it shall be remembered. We few, we happy few, we "Band of Brothers"!! For he today, that sheds his blood with me, shall always be my brother. Rest in peace brave soldier, you have not been forgotten." (**William Shakespeare**)(sent by **Thom Cook**)

# **ABOUT OUR STORIES**

134 on 12/12/10

“These stories of over 40 years ago are recollections of events in which a matter of a few meters can have a dramatic impact on perception.” (**Hugh Kelley**, B Co)

You have never lived until you have almost died....  
Life has a special meaning that the protected will never know.  
(**Lynn (Doc) Morse**, Medic, C Co, 2d year)

Some have died, some have lived, some can't tell the difference. (**Mike Adams**, B Co & HHC)

**A BETTER WORLD** (**Thom Cook**, Sr. Medic, C Co)  
Maybe more people should share a foxhole; it might be a better world.

“...the act of writing led me through a swirl of memories that might otherwise have ended in paralysis or worse.” (**The Things They Carried** by Tim O'Brien)

**WAS I EVER THERE?** (**Joe Armstrong**, B Co)  
So many years ago, so many stories. To be honest, at times it feels like I never was there, and other times I feel that I have never come home. Not sure if that makes any sense.

**GERONIMO** (**Mike Adams**, B Co & HHC)

We have peered through the gates of hell to seek our enemy  
We've wrestled demons and beckoned God to grant tranquility  
The game is on, the stakes are high, the enemy can't be seen  
Tension builds, we are for sure, on the brink of eternity.

Oh God, we need the presence of your holy might  
Could it be that hell is but an absence of your light?  
Please embrace our brothers who have died to keep us free  
And pray accept our enemies that we have sent to Thee.

Oh, anywhere is the real world, somewhere far from here  
Be it Camelot or the Village, Dylan playing in our ear  
A fantasy that left us all so desolate and alone  
We tightened up our bootlaces and blindly carried on.

Some have died, some have lived, some can't tell the difference  
The vacant look, survivor's guilt, we seek a point of reference  
In our homeland, the rules have changed, betrayal of what is right  
But paratroopers, Geronimo Battalion, fought the ultimate fight.

# **BEFORE THE FIGHTING**

## **LISTEN TO THE NCOs** (Gerry Stesiak, Medic, A Co)

While at West Point in June of 1965, we put on a show of firepower for the Plebes. My role was to fire a rifle grenade which was mounted (if my memory serves me correctly) on an M-14 rifle. Of course, the NCOIC told me to put the rifle butt on the ground because it'll kick back pretty damn hard. Well, at 18 years of age, I thought to myself, how bad could it possibly kick back at me? It was after all, just a rifle with just a grenade attached to it. I decided then to fire the weapon like a man, a U.S. Paratrooper. Airborne!

When I got the signal, I fired that damned rifle grenade, and it literally kicked the shit out of me. And of course, knowing I was told how to fire the weapon correctly, I was too embarrassed to say anything about my injury. However, after many years living silently with shoulder pain, I decided it was time to correct the damage I had rendered on to myself on that fateful summer night back in 1965. I submitted to shoulder surgery in October of 2004. The verbiage from an old song comes to mind, "You will come to know when the bullet hits the bone." Damn, that hurt!

## **THE 11<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ORDER** (Mike Talerco, B Co)

The Army has this thing called the general orders. During my career there were 10 general orders having to do with following military rules: standing guard, etc. When asked what the 11<sup>th</sup> general order is, the correct response is, "To remember the first 10 orders".

One December day, while in our morning formation, **Sgt. Corbett** walked up Pvt. Spence. **Robert Spence** was a skinny, somewhat of a wise-ass hillbilly type. He was a funny guy who always made us laugh. He wasn't very big, and compared to Sgt. Corbett he was tiny.

Standing directly in front of Spence, Sgt. Corbett, in a relatively loud voice looked down at Pvt. Spence and said, "Pvt. Spence, what is the 11<sup>th</sup> General Order?"

Pvt. Spence, with absolutely no hesitation, said in a similarly loud voice, "Sergeant, the 11<sup>th</sup> General Order is, 'Thou shalt not cultivate around thine lip what grows wild around thine ass'."

We all stood in shock. Sgt. Corbett had never been tested or ridiculed by anyone and we were waiting for his anger to befall on Spence.

Sgt. Corbett stood with a surprised look on his face for what seemed like an eternity, but then all of a sudden he cracked up laughing. Still laughing, he just walked away. This was Sgt. Corbett, a military guy through and through, but he was one of us.

## **LOVE TAKES A JUMP** (Charles Vickers, A Co)

I have wanted to go back to Ft Campbell for many years. **Lucille** and I were married in Clarksville, TN, in 1952. We celebrated our 55<sup>th</sup> year together in 2007.

We were married July 5th. We were supposed to be married June 5. However, on June 4<sup>th</sup>, I made a parachute jump and got tangled in my chute lines as it was opening. I spent June in the hospital. I was still in the hospital when we were married. I was 21 and Lucille had just turned 19.

Five of our kids were born at Fort Campbell and Don was born in Clarksville, TN.

## **WELCOME TO THE 101<sup>ST</sup>** (Gary Schindele, C Co)

Upon arriving at the 101<sup>st</sup> Replacement Depot, just out of Jump School, I was told I was being assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup>/501<sup>st</sup>. I asked, "What type of unit is that?" I was told it was an Infantry unit. "But I'm an Engineer", I exclaimed. The clerk then opened up my 201 file, showed me the form I had signed volunteering for Jump School and said, "You waived all previous enlistment agreements and we need Infantrymen more than we need Engineers". So, that's how I came to be in the 1<sup>st</sup>/501<sup>st</sup>.

### **TOP ATHLETES** (Tim Stout, 173d MPs)

I knew **Eddy Crook**, C Co., and **Olin Winfrey**, A Co., (both have died since Vietnam) very well. **Crook** was the 1960 boxing Olympic Gold Medalist in the welterweight division. I have photos of **Winfrey** and **Crook**. I played football with them on the 101st "Screaming Eagles" post football team.

If Winfrey had not been so committed to the Army, he would have joined the New Orleans Saints with another great back from those Screaming Eagles teams: **Ernie "Tracks" Wheelwright**. All three were at one time "All Army" running backs. In addition, **Crook** was a perennial "All Army" boxer.

### **REMEMBERING FT CAMPBELL** (Peter Klausner, A Co)

When I say, remember, I really mean, I THINK I remember!

After Jump School, I was assigned to HHC 2/501. To my luck, they needed a driver for the XO, Major Ewing. He was one fine gentleman who enjoyed liquid refreshments. Some 6 months later, we were reorganized as the 1/501. We then went across the parade field to new barracks. Since I drove for the Bn XO and **LTC Healy** needed a driver, guess who got the job? Yup, me!

Things went well. I was a big shot, no KP, no CQ. I WAS THE BN CO's DRIVER! Driving a highly shined black jeep around, people saluting, the Army was great. Then one day, Bn HQ was abuzz with activities. Col Healy came up to me and said, "We are going to the South East Theater". I smiled, looked on the Fort Campbell map and couldn't find the South East Theater. I asked the CSM and was told in no uncertain terms that I was, in fact, a dumb ass. Things started going down hill.

The Battalion went to some theater on Post (not the South East Theater) and Col Healy told us we were being deployed to RVN as the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 503<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, joining the 173d Airborne Brigade in country. A roar went up. We were going to war! I felt sorry for the Viet Cong.

After attacking Old Baldy on pre-deployment training for what seemed forever, the Battalion was split in half for 2 weeks of leave.

About 2 - 3 days later, the CSM told me to repaint Col Healy's jeep (remember highly shined black jeep). Being an excellent Pvt, I did what I was told. Taking the initiative, I painted the jeep OD Green. After I removed the half doors, I replaced the black leather seats with brand new OD cushions and then I proudly went to BN HQ. As always, Col Healy wanted to see his boys, so out I went to stand by HIS jeep! Col Healy came out, looked at his jeep and said, where is mine? Standing as erect as I could, I replied, "This IS yours, Sir".

Agony. That afternoon, I was in A Company carrying a rifle. Seems Col Healy was attached to HIS black jeep!

That's how I remember Fort Campbell!

### **MY TRIP TO VIETNAM** (Ron Best, B Co Medic)

I went to 'Nam as an individual replacement. I flew from Oakland, CA, to Saigon in May '66

When I got to the tram in Oakland that took us to the "cattle barns" (deployment areas) there was a Sergeant First Class that made it onto the tram, but then passed out. He'd had a lot of alcohol. He was wearing jump wings, so when we got to the cattle barn, I put him over my left shoulder and put his bags in my left hand and my bag in my right hand and into the "barn" we went. I put him on an upper bunk and I sat down on the lower bunk and lit a smoke and watched over him till he sobered up some.

Turned out he was the ranking NCO in that barn, so I got a pass to go and call Cindy. Next thing I knew we were on a '70 Fast' (707) on the way to Vietnam. I never saw the SFC again, but our brief meeting had been beneficial to both of us.

I was assigned to B-Med, 173d, for 5 months, then joined 4/503rd in DaNang in November, '66.

### **NO ENGINEERS IN AN INFANTRY COMPANY (Gary Schindele, C Co)**

We were all lined up in the hallway, outside the C Company First Sergeant's office, waiting our turn to be interviewed by HIM. Me being next in line, on the command of, "Next" I marched in and came to parade rest in front of the 1SG's desk. He looked up and asked, "What's your MOS troop?" I answered with, "62E2P, First Sergeant." "What the #%&# is that?" I said, "Heavy Equipment Operator, First Sergeant." He thought a moment, and then said, "Yeah, you'll make a good mortar man, that's the heaviest God Damn thing we've got in the company." He then yelled for PSG McDonald, "I've got a new #%&#en recruit for you." Thinking I was finished, I came to attention, made an about face, and started to leave when he said, "Come back here troop, I'm not finished with you yet!" Coming back to parade rest, he asked, "Are you married?" I said, "No First Sergeant." Then he asked, "Do you have a car?" I said, "No, First Sergeant." He then said, "Good! If there is one thing I hate more than a #%&#en Pvt with a car, it's a #%&#en Pvt with a wife. Now get hell out of here!" That was my introduction to 1SG Earl J Soucie. As you can see, I've never forgotten him.

### **SHERIFF, COME GET ME - COY TURNER & THE LAW. (Gary Schindele, C Co)**

I would like to share with you a funny story about **William Coy Turner** that "Coy" told me before we left Ft Campbell, with a follow up in Viet Nam. Prior to our departure from Ft Campbell, half of the Battalion went on 2 weeks leave and when we returned, the other half went on leave. I happened to go on leave first and Coy second, so I was there when Coy returned from leave Sunday. He immediately asked if we were still leaving that Tuesday for VN. I told him that's still the plan.

He seemed relieved and said, "Good, I need to get out of here before the sheriff comes and gets me". I asked, "Why?" He then told me this story.

Seems that while he was on leave he was buying half pints of liquor in another county and selling them at a mark-up in a dry county. He got caught. To get out of jail he wrote a bum check for bail, but he had no checking account, and was afraid they'd come after him.

Well, we left Ft Campbell as scheduled and arrived in VN without incident.

Months later, Coy got a summons to appear in court on the liquor charge. All he had to say was, "I wish they would come and get me". We all got a good chuckle over that.

\*NOTE: Coy Turner of Chance, KY, and 4 others were killed in an ambush on May 17, 1967, two weeks before their DEROS.

### **LT PROBST REPORTS TO THE 101<sup>st</sup> (PSG Ken Liles, A Co)**

2/LT **Frank Probst** and I first met at Fort Campbell, KY. I remember the day he reported to Battalion. I was a squad leader with a different company. He was wearing low quarters and saucer hat. I politely said, "Sir, you may not have been informed, but the troops may laugh behind your back the way you're dressed. You are West Point and all, and you should change headgear and blouse your boots." He thanked me for informing him about proper airborne dress.

A few days later, I was promoted to E7 and reassigned to A Company as platoon sergeant. My platoon leader was none other than LT Probst.

He was a real officer, as fine a product as West Point could produce. He was a gentleman, but also a leader in all aspects. He demanded the best from everyone he ever spoke with. He would listen carefully. He was soft spoken, but spoke with clarity. He made my job easy. He always asked for input from his squad leaders and me, then gave orders that did not leave anything out.

When we deployed to Vietnam, he was a fine leader in combat, always looking out for his men. It was an honor serving with him.

### **DFC FOR KOREA BRAVERY (Buddy Davis, C Co)**

I had prior service as an Air Force Aero Medical Tech and served in Korea in Detachment 3, 3rd Rescue Group. I got out of the Air Force in 1953 and went in Army as PFC in 1955. In Korea, in an H5 helicopter, myself and the pilot (he helped little) extracted a downed pilot from enemy-held territory. Two years ago, in 2005, in a large ceremony at Pope AFB (a 4 star general), I was awarded the DFC. Finally, I thought, it got here. I am caught up.

\*NOTE: Buddy died of COPD in June 2010 in NC. He is buried in Ft Bragg.

### **IT'S NOT THE MEDALS - IT'S THE MAN (Gerry Stesiak, Medic, A Co)**

(From a letter by **Gerry Stesiak** to the family of the **SGM Robert Cruz**, our first SGM, after his death in Jan 2008)

I served in the same unit as SGM Cruz and I've never forgotten how he positively affected me. Let me explain:

During a parade at Fort Campbell, we all had our Class 'A' Dress uniforms on. When I saw the number of rows of ribbons SGM Cruz had on his uniform I was stunned. So, I asked him why he never told us how many citations and ribbons he was awarded. To this day I remember his remarks in response to my query:

"Son, it is not that important to show what you earn as a result of soldiering. Rather, it is far more important to be a soldier first and let your actions dictate who you are, not the awards you may receive."

Years later I became a Detroit Fire Chief. Like the old Sarge, I too had earned many citations for bravery and what have you. But, because of SGM Cruz' statement to me, I took it a step further. I never wore the ribbons on my uniform. He made that much of an impression on me.

### **"SNEAKING" TO VIETNAM (Ray Ramirez, HHC & D Co)**

We weren't supposed to tell the public that our battalion was going to Vietnam. I remember that 17 of us in HHC went on airplanes from Nashville, TN, to St. Louis, MO, and then to Los Angeles International Airport. We carried our disassembled M-16s in our duffle bags and told the public that we were going to Ft. Lewis, WA, for a training exercise!! Other guys took trains or other flights to the departure port in California.

**AIRBORNE PATH TO USA**. Several 4/503d troopers came from different countries.

**Guadalupe Garza Gonzales** came from Mexico. He was a cop in Chicago. He died in 2010.

**Eduardo "Ox" Oxford** was from Venezuela. He died in Florida.

**Danilo (Dan) Perez** came from Cuba. He lives in Florida.

**John R Prince** was born in Hungary. He was KIA 1/15/67.

**Laszlo Rabel** was a Hungarian freedom fighter. He was KIA 11/13/68 and received the MOH.

**Sam Rogers** was from Ireland. We have not found him yet.

**Rudy Richter** was from Germany and served in the French Foreign Legion. He is in Georgia.

**Arnie Thorvik** was born in Norway. He died in Michigan in 1990.

**Aneoues (Roy) Vanderstappen** immigrated from Holland in 1965. When he got to New York City he had to register for the draft. He was mad and said he was going back home when he got out of the Army. We have not found him.

**Gordillo J (Julio) Vargas** was born in Guatemala. We have not found him yet.

**Wladyslew (Wladslaw) J Zbucki** served in the Polish Army. We have not found him yet.

**Leonard Zugby** came from Peru. He is disabled and lives in Arizona.

### **THREE MEDAL OF HONOR WINNERS ON TROOP SHIP (Ray Ramirez, D Co)**

On the USNS General John Pope, we had 3 members who would one day receive the Medal of Honor while serving with the 173d. The original orders for the 4th Battalion that were "cut" in April of 1966, did not include **Glenn English** and **Lazslo Rabel**. I have a copy of an additional set of orders with about 12 names of people that were added to the 4th Bn. and **Glenn English** and **Lazslo Rabel** are listed.

**Lazslo** was in A Co. **Glenn** was in HHC, S-3 Section, drove the 3/4 ton truck and was an RTO. **Glenn** died on a later tour serving with the 3d Bn, 173d, in September, 1970. **Lazslo** died in November, 1968 while serving with the 74th Inf. Det. LRP. **Glenn** is buried at Ft. Bragg, NC, and **Lazslo** is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

**Don Leslie Michael**, C Company, died during Operation Junction City and is buried in Lexington, AL. His sister is **Sharon Goens** and we have been in touch with her and another sister who lives in Alabama.

### **FIRST REPLACEMENT TO THE 4th BATTALION (Wendell Vega, A Co)**

When I arrived in 'Nam in early July 66, I was sent to Long Binh Replacement Detachment. There, for whatever reason, they chose me to be in a documentary as the first replacement to the 4th Battalion.

They sent my khaki uniform to be cleaned and pressed. Then, they took me back to the airport. When a plane with new replacements landed and troops came out of the plane, they made me the 10th person in the stick as if I had been on that plane. The camera started filming, and for one month they filmed me doing everything but going to the bathroom.

When I went to Bien Hoa where the 4th Battalion was, I remember reporting to Col. Healy, and then reporting to "A" company.

Many of the guys did not like this. They thought I was an actor and that I came to do this movie and go home. Some called me 'Hollywood' and others, 'John Wayne'.

On the first search and destroy mission, I asked some troopers what I should take with me in my rucksack. They told me to take 3 T-shirts, 3 underwears, 3 pairs of socks, 3 towels and other stuff I did not need. When we lined up, my rucksack was very b-i-g and heavy compared to what the other guys were carrying. Then, we went out and some contact with the VC was made.

After a month, the camera and news people were gone and I was there to deal with the troopers. After a while, they realized I was just another soldier like they were. My family back home saw the report on TV. But to this day, I have not been able to locate that documentary.

Oh, I want to add: I want to thank all those troopers that made me take that unnecessary stuff in my rucksack.

You see, there is something called combat stress. That's what I got in my first search and destroy mission when we made contact with the VC. Combat stress gives you many things. That first time, I got diarrhea.

So what did I use to clean myself? 3 T-shirts, 3 underwears, 3 pairs of socks, 3 towels. Thank you guys and God bless you all.

### **A BARREL OF LAUGHS (Ron Best, Medic, B Co)**

I have a short story about an M-60 machine gun and my friend, Rue, before I left B Med (173d HQ) in Bien Hoa and joined 4/503d. Rue's full name was **LaRue Wilson**. He was a surfer dude from California - smoked grass almost every day. Rue was a big, strong, blond haired, good looking guy who was very popular with the girls - the kind of SOB that I would have liked to have been. He had been an infantryman in the 1st or 2nd Battalion, I can't remember which, and he transferred to Graves Registration.

When I was still in B-Med, in the ambulance platoon, I helped him with his work a few times. The NCOIC gave Rue the M-60 when we were doing some forward aid work because we were almost all medics and Rue was the only one who knew how to work it.

One day, Rue was fooling around with the M-60 and pulled the bolt back hard. It jammed and the barrel fell off and we realized that it wasn't going to be much help. Yelling insults and throwing rocks would have been more effective. I said, "If 'Charlie' catches us with this SOB, we won't have to shoot him, he'll die laughing."

### **NEW YORKERS CAN'T DRIVE** (Thom Cook, Sr Medic, C Co)

One day at Bien Hoa, within a month after the 4th Battalion arrived in Country, someone in the Battalion fractured his leg in an accident in the Base Camp. All the Medics were near the accident, but I was the first to the soldier. Medic **Chuck Huller** showed up along with about four or five of the Medics. Our ambulances were parked about 30 meters away. I turned to Chuck and asked him to get the first Jeep, make sure there was a litter in it, and to bring it over to our position.

Well, Chuck ran to the Jeep, jumped in and started it. When he let the clutch out, it jumped about a foot and died. He repeated this a few more times when I decided it was time to lend a hand. I trotted over to him and asked, "Chuck, can you drive?" "No, Thom" came his reply. I told him to get in the other seat and I would drive.

I had forgotten about this incident till I was in Washington, DC, for Richard Stillwell's funeral in 2003 and met Chuck there. I asked Chuck if he ever got a driver's license. His reply was about the same. "No, Thom, I never needed one in New York City."

I had to laugh as I was transported back 40 plus years when he and I were at that ambulance and he gave that great smile of his. He is a lovable and great human being and I am proud to know him, to have served with him at Fort Campbell, KY, and Viet Nam and still know him today.

# IN COMBAT

## The Agony of War



"The Agony of War", mistakenly called "Death Watch" by many.

On August 14, 1966, **PFC Daryl R. Corfman**, Sycamore, OH, A Company, 4th Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate), was killed by mortar fire during Operation Aurora Two. His squad leader, **Sgt. Dan E. Spencer, Jr.**, Bend, OR, stares down at his fallen comrade. **Sgt Spencer** was later killed in action with the 1st Special Forces in 11/12/68. **SP4 Ruediger Richter**, Columbus, GA, (a former French Foreign Legionnaire) watches the sky for the MEDEVAC chopper, his battle-weary eyes to the heavens as to ask why?

[www.173rdairborne.com/agonyoofwar.htm](http://www.173rdairborne.com/agonyoofwar.htm)

Photo by then **PFC Paul Epley** in Long Khanh Province, Vietnam

## MEDICS

### WHAT A MEDIC IS (Thom Cook, Sr Medic, C Co)

Medics are the five guys in a Rifle Company that get GRUNTS out of HELL's way. Sit with them all night in a foxhole when they are hurt, check them every day to make sure they are OK to fight that day, and be their father and mother for that year.

### 4<sup>th</sup> BATTALION MEDICS (Ron Best and Mike Goodwin, Medics)

I remember Medic **Steve Stewart** really well. Stewart was a real tough black guy from Philly who was sent to the Army instead of going to jail for man slaughter. When we hit a rice paddy one day, I had been real sick with a high fever and I couldn't get out of the paddy by myself. Two of the guys hauled me out on the edge, but I still couldn't get up. Stu took the patrol as the only remaining medic and one of the guys stayed with me while all the rest did the patrol. When I left Vietnam, I left my guitar with Stu since he played a bit.

**James Brooks** was real tall and strong and actually pulled point occasionally for his platoon. He carried his .45 in a shoulder holster. One day I asked him why he carried it that way. He replied, "That's the way I always carried it at home." He was from Chicago.

**Ray Tipton** was a medic also. He had severe problems with PTSD and alcohol after Vietnam and was admitted to treatment at a VA hospital in Arizona. All his records were mixed up, so I wrote a letter to the VA for him to explain and verify his service in Vietnam with the 173rd. He had been hit in a firefight and had some shrapnel in the neck as I remember. He was released from the VA treatment program and called me to say he was coming through Iowa and he'd stop to visit. I never saw him. At the 173d reunion in 1995 in Rochester, MN, **Eddie Sullivan** told me that Ray's ex-wife had called to tell him that Ray had committed suicide.

**Guadalupe Palos**. We got in a firefight in heavy bamboo and jungle. A few minutes into the fight, Lupe got hit, with some shrapnel, I think. He yelled "Medic". Then, he said, "Wait, I'm a medic." He handed a dressing to someone and said, "Put this on me." I worked with Lupe in A Co in DaNang and in B Co the rest of the next year. He was a good medic.

### CREDIT THE MEDICS (posted on 173d Web site 1/13/2004 by **Jim Lakatos**, C Co)

On this date in 1967, on operation Cedar Falls, I was one of the wounded. I want to thank medics **Richard Choate** and **Thom Cook** for actions that day which saved my arm from being amputated. I also want to thank ALL members of C Company for covering me when I was down. Special thanks to **John Mack**, **Dave Drown** (later KIA), **Jim Satterfield**, **Dan Moreau**, **Arnie (Ken) Thorvik**, **Bill Millstein**, **Harold Sanford**, **Ken "Smokey" McCullough**, **Sgt Davis** and the rest of my platoon brothers. I'll never forget those times or you guys. AIRBORNE, ALL THE WAY!!! AND THEN SOME!!!

### REMEMBERING BRUCE DARBY, MEDIC (Chuck Huller, Medic, HHC)

**Bruce Darby** saw more action than any medic in the battalion. He spent his entire tour with our hard core Recon Platoon, D Company He was a standup guy and I was proud to call him a friend. Bruce died too young of cancer in 1986 or 1987 and is buried in Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Francisco.

### ONE LUCKY GUY (Thom Cook, Sr. Medic, C Co)

I am one lucky guy that GOD got me assigned to the 1/501st Airborne. I came over from the 1/502nd and could have come down on an individual-replacement levy instead of being transferred to the 1/501. The Battalion had leadership, training and esprit de corps that are alive today.

### **GERRY BARTRAM - MEDIC (Ron Best, Medic, B Co)**

Gerry Bartram was a B Company medic when we took a base camp away from the bad guys. I think he was working for **Lt. Jeffcoat's** platoon. A trooper was wounded and Gerry went to assist him. The first round apparently hit Gerry in the hand, but the second round hit him in the chest and perforated his left ventricle.

I was with the 3rd platoon which had taken the center of the NVA base camp and was occupying a trench on the edge of the camp. The word came down that a medic was needed in the 1<sup>st</sup> platoon area so I went over and applied dressings to a couple of wounded troopers.

Then, word came to my platoon that the big medic who wore glasses had been killed. They thought that was me because Gerry didn't always wear his glasses but my eyes are so bad that I never take mine off.

Years later, as **Thom Cook**, C Company Senior Medic, was returning from the Chicago 173d reunion and stopped by my house in Des Moines. He had met Gerry's sister at the reunion. He gave me her number to call and we talked and cried. She is a really neat lady and she really appreciated all the 173d troopers who talked with her at the reunion.

### **HOW A MEDIC WORKED IN VIETNAM (Thom Cook, Sr Medic, C Co)**

Through the eyes of the Company Commander, it was his company. Through the eyes of the senior medic, it was **my** company. The CO was in charge of combat operations and I was in charge of every single foot that put that FOOT on the ground. I thought that way back then and still think that way. It was never out of disrespect, but a different view from two jobs in combat.

I remember one time in the field one of my medics came to me about his platoon leader and platoon sergeant who would not let him check their feet. I was big on that. I went down to his platoon and dressed down the LT and sergeant. I ordered them to sit down and take off their boots and we checked out their feet. It was not the most fun thing to do, but one of the most important jobs we did next to treating wounds. Both of them needed foot powder and clean socks.

When **LTC Healy** came to get me 23 December, 1966, he was in an OH-13. When I started to get aboard, the pilot told me I couldn't take my ruck and rifle as there was too much weight. I gave my rucksack to LTC Healy and he asked how much it weighed. I told him about 100 pounds. He told me to cut it down when he saw me again.

I had five (5) bottles of saline solution plus everything else a senior medic would need. My job was to support the platoon medics. What ever platoon was in a firefight my job was to go to that platoon to support that medic with his platoon and then to move to the next one that was taking casualties. It was a super job that I will never forget.

There were a few times when I did not want to make "house calls". But, when the word, **MEDIC**, came; we went. There was really no training for that - just pure guts by our medics. We had the best.

### **CAPTAIN PRICE (George Coker, A Co)**

Captain (**Bob**) Price was the Battalion Surgeon. Every time Captain Price went on patrol with us we got into a fight or something.

One time, as we crossed a rock hill, an artillery round fell short. We had one KIA and PSG (**Roger**) Goodwin took shrapnel in his right leg. It cut the major artery about 6" below his groin. Blood was spurting just like in the movies. Captain Price cut a large incision and tied off that artery in one motion. It was the damnedest thing I have ever seen.

The next time he went with us was Easter Sunday, 1967. We really got into a firefight. Captain Price and I were behind a big ant hill. One of the bad guys with an AK-47 was trying to shoot our ant hill away. I actually saw Captain Price's hand shake. That was my only proof that he was mortal.

**TRIBUTE TO A SENIOR MEDIC** (Letter to **Tom Cook** from **Mike Goodwin**, Medic, **B Co**)

You once told me I helped a lot of troops make it thru our tour in Vietnam because of my attitude, my humor and a smooth line of Bull, etc.

But, I don't think I ever told you how much you meant to me.

I don't know when it was, maybe at Bragg in '65, but for some reason, you took me under your wing and stood by me so many times. As I look back, it was almost as if you were assigned to cover my ass. Even when I wanted to say, "Screw it", you reminded me that I had a wife and little girl, and I'd suck it up again.

Your fearless demeanor and profound stability, quite frankly, fortified my attitude and reassured me that, no matter what may happen, all was going to be A OK. And, sure enough, we've both been good soldiers and we can both be proud of what we have accomplished. God has been gracious to both of us.

You were and still are, a great friend even though I don't get to see you as much as I wish. I think of you every day at one time or another. Let's get together soon; I miss your old ass, Thomas Enright Cook, SGM retired.

**SP6 – ONE OF A KIND** (Gerry Stesiak, Medic, **A Co**)

I am not sure if **Buford Cook, Jr.**, wants it known or not, but he was a Specialist Sixth Class (highly skilled medic) in the Medical Platoon. He was one of many who came to the battalion to bolster the ranks to max capacity.

**MEDIC TAKES CHARGE - THOM COOK, C Co** (from letter to **Jack Tarr**, **C Co**)

I remember January 13, 1967, very well. On that day, we had 16 wounded and all the platoon medics were busy. I was going from one platoon to another checking on the wounded and my medics. We couldn't get Dust-off in due to the intense fire.

I heard some tracked vehicles behind us over the roar of the fire. I walked by myself (young & dumb) outside our perimeter and back to the tracks which were about 400 meters behind us. I told the track commander I needed help with my wounded to get them to a safe LZ. He told me to lead the way and they would get our wounded. I walked back the same way just going by the sound of the gun fire.

Charlie Company had engaged a Battalion of NVA that day and of course we won again with our training. We loaded the wounded up on the four tracks and moved back to a safe LZ. The track commander wanted to know what to do then so I told him to get each track to a corner of the LZ and clear it with their .50's. We were then able to safely call in Dust-off. It took four choppers to get all the wounded out.

At one time, I had the names of all the WIA from that day. I later checked the Wall and none of Charlie Company's guys from that fire fight was on there. I never had the chance to put any of the medics in for medals that day. I felt bad about that as all deserved at least Silver Stars for their heroism that day. We did get a lot of thanks from the wounded troopers we saw again as you can tell from **Jim Lakatos'** email. That in itself is priceless.

**LOW BIDDER IN A FIREFIGHT** (**Ron Best**, Medic, **B Co**)

When I was in my first firefight, I couldn't get the quick release on my bulky rucksack to open up. I thought, "I'm gonna die cause this SOB was made by the low bidder."

## ALPHA COMPANY

### HOW WE GOT TO 'A' COMPANY (George Coker & RJ Pool, A Co)

My #1 Buddy in Vietnam and fellow RTO, RJ Pool, and I will be sending in a few stories. If anyone has anything to add or correct any mistakes, feel free. Putting these stories together has been more difficult than we thought.

RJ's uncle was a paratrooper. His stories of floating down from above were really exciting. RJ said somehow they didn't include humping a radio thru the jungle for a year. So, after being drafted, going thru Basic and then Sewing Machine Repair School, RJ signed up for Airborne. The plans to float to the ground and then repair sewing machines were dashed when he reported to Fort Campbell and was issued an M-16 and a PRC-25.

I had signed up for Airborne School to keep from going to Korea. At Fort Campbell, I was the company clerk. One day, Captain Bailey, the company commander, asked if I could get a Secret clearance so I could handle maps. Goodbye office, hello XO's RTO.

Some of my favorite memories are hearing or being told of my relatives' war stories. My Great Grandfather was a wagon master in the Civil War. His son, Lurie Coker, was in the Artillery in WWI. His favorite story was in 1917 when he was 19, living at Rock Springs in Drew County, Arkansas. He looked up and saw two men across the field, coming toward him. The men shook his hand and told him his country needed him and he could see Europe. Sure enough he said, "I crawled all the way across France".

My mother's brother, Albert McClain, was a real war hero. The only time he ever talked to me was when I returned from Vietnam. We sat for a couple of hours exchanging experiences. As it turned out, we both were radio operators, and how much everything has changed since WWII. When you entered the service in the 1940s, you stayed until the end of the war. Uncle Bud's unit trained in Ft. Lewis, Washington, for two years then went to the Pacific. Before shipping out, he was given a two week pass. It was a five day train ride to Arkansas and a five day trip back, for a four day visit.

When they got to the Pacific it was a series of island invasions. At night he was assigned to a .30 caliber machine gun position. The gun required three men, one for ammo, one to put water in and one to shoot. One night the Japs mounted a suicide charge. The guy putting water in the gun was killed early, so Uncle Bud ended up handling the water and firing the weapon. He said the Japs would scream and yell and charge the machine gun. Then, they'd fall back, regroup and charge again. It continued all night. When the morning came, from about five feet out you couldn't even see the ground for the bodies. He got a Bronze Star for that. After that he went into a booby-trapped hooch and spent a year in the hospital with a lot of metal embedded in his legs. As soon as he was well enough, he was assigned to the Army Air Forces as a tail gunner on a B-29. That was late in 1944, so it was a real boring job. A 16-hour round trip to Japan, drop bombs and return for more. Most of the time, you couldn't see the ground for the clouds.

My great uncle Lurie's son, Jessie Coker, was also in the Pacific. He wrote a book about the war. I loaned my copy to someone and never got it back. Jessie ended up being a college professor at Arkansas A&M in Monticello, Arkansas.

I was watching the History Channel about D-Day and one of the guys that was in a reserve division said it was tougher being in reserve than going in first. To which I added...Bullshit.

### AMMO BEARER (Frank Veldey, A Co)

I started out on "B" Gun, Weapons Squad, 1st Platoon, A Company. Started out as 5th Ammo Bearer with only 2 canteens, 7 mags, 400 rds of 5.56, 800 rds belted 7.62, 4 frags, 1 claymore, 2 trips, 3 "C's". That only left enough room in the jungle ruck for a spare pair of socks and I kept 4 packs of Camels inside the helmet liner.

### WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES (Frank Veldey, A Co)

When I first got to 'Nam, foxholes started out 3 to 6 inches deep. At six months, they were 3 to 4 feet deep. After 9 months, I had to stand on my tip toes just to see over the top (and I'm 6' 3").

When it was time to DEROS to the world, I turned in 5 canteens, 4 ea 1 qt water bags, 6 bottles of Iodine tabs, my M-16, a .45 auto, 20 fully loaded M-16 mags, 300 extra 5.56 rds, all the rest of the belted 7.62 ammo, 8 frags, 4 trips, 2 claymores, 2 smoke grenades, and 4 bottles of Kaopectate.

I ate all the pound cake and peaches and threw away 3 pairs of rotted socks.

I did want to keep the bayonet 'cause I had a lot of kills with it but turned it in too. Those kills didn't really matter; nobody cared that I had the highest dead Leach body count in the platoon. Somehow, they always managed to find me, even in the highlands.

### FIRST COMBAT OPERATION IN VIETNAM (George Coker, A Co)

After a couple of weeks at Bien Hoa getting used to the heat and our gear, A Company went on a search & destroy operation north of Saigon. After getting off the choppers, we poked through the jungle until late afternoon approached. I'm guessing there hadn't been a VC in that area for a couple hundred years.

We ringed a small hill for the night. We put out trip flares, dug holes, filled sandbags and waited for sundown. With sundown, came the usual -- rain and wind. The rain and wind set off a couple of trip flares. Then, someone with an M-60 opened up. That caused several grenades to be thrown.

About that time, a rabbit ran across the edge of my foxhole. I would have shot my foot off it I could have found the safety on my M-16.

In the midst of all that confusion, First Sergeant **Charles DuPont**, who had been in WW II and Korea, spoke these words of wisdom, "Cut that shit out!" After that, everyone calmed down. The wind and rain stopped, the stars come out, and our first night in the field ended. The choppers picked us up the next morning.

Whenever guys get together and talk about their first operation, this is what I remember.

### 'A' COMPANY'S FIRST PURPLE HEART (George Coker, A Co)

On our second search & destroy Operation, SGT **Danilio Perez** stepped in a bear trap. The trap was old and rusty and was tethered with a wire that ran into a clump of bushes. No one was strong enough to get that bear trap off SGT Perez's foot. Plus, we were sure that the wire was attached to a 500 lb bomb.

SGT Perez had come to the US from Cuba. In the dictionary, under "hot tempered", there should have been a picture of him. After an hour attached to the bear trap and bush, SGT Perez had enough, so he grabbed the wire and yanked. It came loose from the bush. He was dusted off back to Bien Hoa where they cut the trap off with a torch. Not too big a deal, especially since it wasn't my foot in the trap.

**Peter Jennings** of ABC was covering the 4th Battalion in Vietnam. When he heard about the Purple Heart from a bear trap, he wanted to interview Perez when we got back to Bien Hoa. SGT Perez was nowhere to be found. We found him later hiding under his bunk. No way was he going to tell how he got a Purple Heart stepping in a bear trap.

If you ever hear of a sergeant called "Bear Trap", this is the story. I don't think anyone ever called him that to his face, though.

SGT Perez was the strongest man I ever met. One of our medics had a heat stroke and had to be dusted off. They wouldn't take his heavy medic ruck sack on the chopper. The medic's ruck weighed at least 100 lbs. SGT Perez threw the medic's ruck over his shoulder and carried it the rest of the day.

### **THE LONGEST NIGHT (George Coker, A Co)**

After getting our feet wet on our first operation, they became routine. On one op, we were up next to the Cambodian border. We walked up to the border and could see a VC camp with guard towers and everything. That evening, we set up our perimeter. The monsoon season was just starting. When the rain of the monsoon comes, it goes from daylight to dark in about 3 seconds. All at once it is dark.

I was busy getting the radio checks up and operational. I had my rucksack and radio on and put my M-16 down so I could use both hands. When the rain and darkness suddenly hit, I couldn't find my weapon. I crawled around for 10 minutes trying to find it, but never did. I sat in the company CP all night monitoring the radio, but with no weapon. I didn't sleep a wink. About 2:00 am, I heard voices. "You stupid ---; what the Hell are you doing and who are you?" The answer was, "I'm **LT Wood**". The first voice said, "Sorry. Sir, but you're pissing real close to my head".

The next morning, I found my M-16 about 4 feet away. After that, I always knew where my weapon was.

### **WHEN DARYL CORFMAN WAS KILLED (George Coker & RJ Pool, A Co)**

August 14, 1966, the day **Daryl Corfman** was killed. If you look closely at the photograph named, "*The Agony of War*", you can see how rocky the area was. We didn't run into many rocky hills, but this day we were going up and across a ridge. The lead platoon stopped for a break and left me, RJ and **Capt. Hampton** out in the open near the top of the ridge. **Capt. Hampton** called the lead platoon and told them to move on a couple hundred meters to clear the open area.

We moved about 50 meters when artillery round fell short and hit the top of the ridge. When we got back, Daryl was laying near the spot where we were standing when the company stopped. Fortunately, **Capt. Price**, the Battalion Surgeon, was with us. A couple of our guys were hurt bad.

### **PREMONITION - JOHN JAMES, KIA MARCH '67 (Gerry Stesiak, Medic, A Co)**

I remember a guy named **John James** in A Company who carried the M-79. Rank may have been a Spec 4. I'm relatively certain he was in **LT Frank Probst's** and **PSG Ken Liles'** platoon. I remember him well in that he had a premonition he was going to get killed. He tried to get me to give him what we Medic's called a "Profile;" a reason to get out of the field. He was killed soon after that.

**NOTE: Sp5 John Henry James**, 24, NYC, NY, was killed March 26, 1967, in a firefight that took the lives of two other A Company soldiers

### **L.T., YOU OWE ME ONE (George Coker, A Co)**

After a hot day of search and destroy, we set up base camp and **Captain Taillie** called the platoon leaders in for a powwow. It was the first time I had seen Lt. **Dick Ordway** since he got back from Japan. He had malaria and was gone two or three weeks. We all figured the boys from Alabama had figured out a way to get an extra R&R. Not so, he really looked bad. The next day, after humping a long way, we stopped for a lunch break. Everyone was drinking except Lt. Ordway. His canteen was empty. Malaria will make you thirsty. There aren't many things worse than being thirsty. So, Richard, if you remember that full canteen I gave you that day, you owe me a cool one now.

### **THIS ONE'S FOR YOU (George Coker, A Co)**

One afternoon, I was sitting on the side of my foxhole reading my "Dear John" letter. I was already having a bad day when, off in the distance, a single 155 round exploded. It was a long way off, but I quickly picked up my steel pot and put it on anyway.

The next second, a piece of shrapnel hit me right above my right eye. It put a large crease in the helmet. I know I would have lost my right eye if I hadn't been wearing a helmet. So Mitzie, you saved my eye. I know you are someone's great grandmother now, but if you show up at the reunion, I'm running your fat ass over with my new truck!

### **I WISH I HAD..... (George Coker, A Co)**

I had been home from 'Nam for 10 or so years. One night watching the news, the head of the United Nations Delegation from Vietnam was giving an interview. The Vietnamese told a story about the 173d. It was a battalion-sized operation and he was trapped inside the Battalion perimeter for 4 days. He said he didn't have any water, so at night he would sneak out and try to find a drink.

Now, let me tell you my story about saving the little bastard's life. **R.J. Poole, Ed Miner** and me would rotate radio watch, 2 hours on and 4 hours off. One night real late, somebody called me. He wanted permission to shoot someone sneaking around the fresh water tank. He was sure it was a V.C., but since we had a couple ARVNs with us, I said, "Wake your platoon Sergeant." Now, if you want love and admiration from a platoon Sergeant, don't have someone wake him about 2 am. By the time either **Sgt Gibbs** or **Sgt Thompson** checked out the water tank, the VC was gone. We stayed on that LZ for 4 days. It was the only time I remember HQs sending us a fresh water tank.

The guy at the UN said the VC was without water for 4 days and was within hours of surrendering. If I had just gotten my M-16 and walked over to the water tank, I could have been a hero instead of a story teller.

### **THAT WAS ME (Mike Torrence, A Co)**

The story above by George Coker, "I Wish I Had", told about the VC who spent the night in our perimeter. I believe I was that RTO who called in the report of someone or something moving inside our position. If this is the same incident, I did wake SFC Gibbs. He told my squad leader, SSG Thomas, to take a few guys and do a sweep of the area. He made me go along since I supposedly heard something. Of course we never found anything. I don't remember SFC Gibbs being upset, but SSG Thomas was really PO'd. For weeks he would say, "Torrence, did you hear that?"

### **"YARDS" (By George Coker, A Co)**

We were on patrol up next to the Black Virgin Mountain. I remember looking out the front window of our helicopter and seeing the mountain rise from the rice patties. I've heard stories about the Special Forces camps up there and how they worked with the mountain yard tribesmen. This morning we were walking up a hill, when we discovered a small village. The houses were about 20 ft. in the air on large poles. The women and children were in the houses and the men were standing between us and the village. They were not happy with our intrusion. I don't know if the guy I walked by was the chief or not but he sure should have been. I would guess he was about 4 ft. tall, wild looking, dressed in a loin cloth and carrying a crossbow. It was like being dropped back into the Stone Age. I have since learned that they built extensive tunnel complexes under their villages for emergencies and that the VC and North Vietnamese were scared of them. Me Too!

### **BEST OF THE BEST MEMORIES (George Coker, A Co)**

In my 64 years, I often look back at my life. Being an Airborne soldier provides the best memories.

**Most beautiful:** The first time I got outside a C-130 at 1200 feet and looked up at the T -10 parachute open above me. That big green parachute will be embedded in my mind to the day I die.

**Best food:** We had been on patrol for several days. It had been wet and humid like never before. We were crossing a large, open area when this chopper landed beside us. **Captain (Dennis) Taillie** (Company Commander), who always seemed to know what to do at the right time, went over and talked to the pilot. The pilot said he was looking for an ARVN battalion and couldn't find it. He had a couple of 125 lb ice blocks and cases of root beer and vanilla ice cream. Since the chopper couldn't find the ARVN battalion and had stuff that was melting, Captain Taillie talked them into giving it to us. The door gunners of the chopper began chipping the ice into canteen-cup-size blocks. I poured my root beer over the ice and ate my ice cream in about 9 seconds. Then, I put the ice in the next guys' cup. Nothing has ever been that good again.

**Best beers:** The night I had a couple of beers with **LTC Healy** and CSM Cruz. Each company had its own bar in the Bien Hoa base camp. One night, I walked LTC Healy and SGM Cruz. I don't know if they were lonesome or just wanted to tell WW II stories. There were 5 or 6 of us from A Company. Colonel Healy told one story with a saying I still use today. In his unit they rotated point men. When his turn came, his first sergeant would always end up screaming at him, "Hurry up, Mike". Colonel Healy said his answer was always, "It may not look like I'm hurrying, but I am". I guess, of all the places I have been, I never felt like I belonged more than that night.

### **JANUARY 22, 1967, THE DAY RON PENDERGRIST WAS KIA (George Coker & RJ Pool, A Co)**

What we remember most about Operation Cedar Falls in the Iron Triangle was the easy walking. Not really rain forest, not jungle, occasional rice patties, and some woods with large open areas.

We had stopped for a break when someone saw a tunnel cover move. He ran over, pulled the cover back, fired a few rounds and dropped in a grenade. After setting up a defensive parameter, **Ron Pendergrist** volunteered to go into the tunnel, with a flashlight and a .45. He had a running gunfight for a couple hundred meters. Then, four VC climbed out of another entrance and were promptly captured by B Company. Ron came back thru the tunnel to our CP. He said he was surprised that the .45 report wasn't very loud when he fired; the tunnel absorbed the sound. **Capt. Hampton**, the CO, called for the engineers to blow up the complex. After that was completed, someone asked if the tunnel collapsed. Ron jumped up and said he would check. A few minutes after he disappeared in the tunnel, **Sgt. Spencer** went to see what was taking so long. After about 40 seconds, he crawled back out coughing and gasping for air. The C4 explosives had used up all the oxygen in the tunnel. Several guys went in to bring Ron out, but by the time they had completed the task, it was too late.

A couple months after returning home, I went to his memorial service. His son was about 2. I stayed in contact with his wife, Sandra, for a couple of years. The last letter I received was from Zachary, Louisiana.

I have said a thousand times, I am going to see if I can locate Ron, Jr., maybe one of these days...

## **SAME INCIDENT, DIFFERENT MEMORIES (George Coker & RJ Pool, A Co)**

Easter Sunday morning, Operation Junction City, 3-26-67, the day **Sgt. Ivy Anderson, Sgt Steve Minick** and **SP5 John James** were KIA.

In October 2009, my wife and I flew up to Cape Cod for a reunion with **RJ Pool**. RJ and I were RTOs in A company. We re-counted our year in Nam with a great bottle of scotch RJ had been saving for a special occasion.

We each had different perspectives: I was the XO's RTO and RJ was with the CO. I was usually in the left column with the XO, 1st Sgt and whoever decided to come along. This day it was Capt. Price, the Surgeon, the Vietnamese interpreter, dog and handler.

We were beating our way through the rain forest, starting up a small hill, when all at once, the dog got real nervous. The CO called up front and notified the point platoon. Within a few seconds a claymore went off, then seconds later, a burst of automatic rifle fire. Silence followed. On the radio we heard the call for "medic" so we escorted Capt. Price to the front.

By the time we got up front all hell had broken loose. I remember hitting the ground and it being sticky with blood splatter. I scooted over behind an ant hill. Looking down, I saw a grenade on my webbing; I thought to myself, John Wayne would jump up and stick it up the bad guy's ass. Then I realized I wasn't John Wayne and this wasn't the movies.

I sure hope I never get into another fire fight, but if I do, I am going to make sure I'm nowhere near an M-60. The M-60 machine gun is a great weapon and it puts out a lot of firepower, but if you are next to one in a rain forest the smoke will choke the life out of you. I know, I had my nose on the ground trying to get a breath of air, when here comes a family of leeches. I squirted the leeches with mosquito repellent from my helmet band, when a voice I hated to hear the most came on my PRC-25, "Parablast-Alpha - Uncle Jack." General Deane never called to chit chat or when things were calm. I wanted to give him a 'Wait Out', but I knew better.

So, with the AK-47 rounds digging at my ant hill, popping the trees above my head and the gun smoke from that M-60, I explained to the commanding general, why I couldn't get to the CO. He told me to stay down; that was one order I did my best to obey.

RJ said General Deane called him next on the company net. General Deane told RJ to "calm down". I guess he thought he was still talking to me. The F.O. came on the net and asked for smoke. Air Force jets got there real quick and dropped napalm real close, followed by 20mm cannon fire, adding to the poor quality of the air.

It's surprising how things can go from chaos to calm in a heartbeat. We pulled back with the wounded and KIAs. The second wave of planes raked and burnt the top of that hill. RJ, **Minor** and the CO went down to a clearing to supervise the dust-off. RJ saw **Mazewski**; who was wounded and was being dusted off. He said, "RJ, they got Steve". The three had been great buddies at Fort Campbell.

We ran patrols the next day on the other side of that hill. We found two bad guys, one burned up and the other almost cut in half by a 20mm. We came back by the ambush site. There was a large stand of cane next to a trail leading to a gate.

I have relived that day a thousand times. Why didn't we react when the dog got nervous? What possessed Anderson and James to walk up to that gate? Why did Sgt. Minick run toward them seconds after the claymore went off?

One of our medics said James had asked to get out of going on this operation. He had a premonition about dying. The only time I ever remember taking to him, he asked me to take his picture with my Polaroid camera for his girlfriend in New York City.

I have been totally scared twice in my life. The first time was at Ft. Benning Jump School when I first went off the 34 foot tower. Standing on the ground it didn't look bad; as usual everything looks easy when someone else is doing it. I later asked one of the D.I.s why it was so scary. He said it was just above the horizon, you go from slow to fast instantly, just like landing a plane.

The second time, I was behind an ant hill next to a foxhole occupied by Capt. Price. He was bandaging a wounded G.I.'s hand. He had had been hit behind the knuckles, moving the fingers over about ½ inch. He asked Capt. Price if he was going to lose his fingers. Capt. Price said, "Not necessarily". I have often wondered about that injury.

RJ said that day was also his scariest. He added the whistling sound wasn't the jets, it was his ass sucking air.

Fate? Luck? I don't know. I do know we lost three great guys that day. I think of them every time I hear the National Anthem.

After 40 plus years, we can't agree on some of the details: who was our CO, **Cpt Don Hampton** or **Cpt Dennis**? Did I have the battalion radio? Who was the 1st Sgt., **Charles Vickers** or **Olin Winfrey**? We were both shocked about each other's recollections being different even though we were only a few feet apart. We hope we got our part correct. After so many years it seems to all run together.

### **PK RATCLIFF COULD DO MOST THINGS BUT SWIM** (George Coker, A Co)

The 2008 reunion made me both happy and sad. I'm sad because of the guys that have passed.

The one I miss more and more is **1/LT P.K. Ratcliff**. P.K. was one of those officers who was absolutely sure there was nothing he couldn't do or at least get done. Except SWIM! It was the monsoon season and in the northern part of the Iron Triangle there were a lot of small rivers, creeks we call them in Arkansas. They were generally 5 to 10 feet across. The locals had put trees or bamboo across them for foot path bridges. Sure enough, in crossing, P.K. lost his balance. Into the swift water he went. I wasn't there, but I was told there was excitement, yelling and screaming, etc. Not only was P.K. wet, he lost his M-16. Adding insult to injury, the Army wanted him to pay for it -- more yelling and screaming.

When we were back in Bien Hoa, we were assigned "Army Duty". The Engineers had constructed our huts replacing the tents. The huts were 30 or so feet long and wide enough for 6 or 8 cots on each side. They had doors at each end. Someone decided we needed evacuation diagrams posted at each door. That assignment fell to P.K.. For some reason, he always looked for me to do the work. I guess it was the reminders I made about the lost rifle. His last command that day was, "One more smart-ass comment, George, and I'll get you some Crayolas and we'll have multi-colored evacuation plans".

P.K., if you are looking down from above, or up, whatever the case may be, I miss you. There are a couple more stories I know you wouldn't want everyone to know, but Hell, they are too good not to share.

Up close to the Cambodian border there is a series of hills -- mountains if you are hauling a PRC-25 up one. Anyway, we popped out of the jungle at the base of a big hill. A group of G.I.'s were setting up a radar station on top of the hill. Four of them were clearing brush at the base of the hill. They were 100% legs, white tee shirts and totally unarmed. I don't know if they thought they were on R&R, stateside or what. But, when we came out of the jungle about 40 meters from them, you could see by the look on their faces they were scared. By the time our company had passed them, **Captain Hampton** called P.K. and told him to remind these guys that the war was real and if they didn't want to end up in a body bag to remove their heads from their asses. Oh, my goodness, if ever an ass chewing that should have been caught on film this was it. General Patton would have blushed.

Somewhere there are four legs telling their grandchildren about the time a bulldog got hold of their ass. I bet they still sleep with their rifles, scared P.K. will show up again. When he caught up with the company, P.K. was beside himself. The second happiest I ever saw him. The first was when he danced through the orderly room. He had won \$1650 in a poker game in the back of the mess hall.

### **SOM-BE, VIETNAMESE INTERPRETER (RJ Pool & George Coker, A Co)**

Som was a real piece of work. As a member of the Vietnamese National Police, he was constantly on the move. Hence, he had a wife in Bien Hoa and one in Saigon. One day we were on a search and destroy, the Air Force had just bombed a tree line, so we went to check it out. They were using cluster anti-personnel bombs that contained several hundred grenades. The grenades were painted yellow and had fins on the back. As we entered the area, Som found one of the unexploded grenades. He picked it up and ran to Capt. Hampton, our CO, shaking it in front of his face. It scared all of us. Som saw our fear and it scared him, so he dropped the grenade. Needless to say it was still a dud. All of us had a few choice words but all was forgiven quickly.

For all his faults, Som could dig a foxhole faster than anyone.

One night we were sitting around the company CP foxhole, chit-chatting. As usual someone would bring up a subject and RJ would talk about it for an hour (gift of gab). That is if Lt. Ordway didn't show up and try to explain why Alabama was the only state from the south. Anyway, the subject ended up being the VC. RJ lifted his hand and pointed to the jungle but also in the direction of Som, while making a derogatory comment about the VC. Som, whose English was not the best, was sure RJ was calling him a VC. I'll bet he said, "Me no VC" 50 times in the next few minutes. We didn't tease Som after that.

One evening he got on a slick and was never seen again. He was one of the few Vietnamese we got to know.

### **SERGEANTS GIBBS, SCHULTZ & GOSS (George Coker, A Co)**

If ever someone missed his calling, **Sgt. Richard Gibbs** should have been a standup comedian. One night we sat up on the edge of a rubber plantation. I think most of the VC day jobs were on rubber plantations. At night they were really spooky. It was getting late; just at sundown, RJ was on the radio when the first platoon RTO called and said there was a light coming down one of the tree rows. Everyone prepared for combat. A couple minutes later, Sgt. Gibbs came on the radio and told everyone to go to bed, the moon was coming up.

I can't remember what operation **Sgt Gibbs** was wounded in. After he was wounded in the wrist, it turned out a piece of hot lead from an AK-47 was a bit more serious than he let on. He was the only one that took time to drop us a line after returning to the world. In that fire fight, the bad guy had a real good position and everyone was pinned down. **Sgt. Gerald Schultz** belly crawled around behind the enemy position, coming up from behind. He killed the bad guy and had to crawl back to our position to keep from getting shot by our guys.

Later, on patrol, crossing a ravine and up an embankment, most of the company had passed when one of the guys was bitten by a snake. We called for dust off. **Sgt Alton Goss** got his machete, went into the bush and cut the snake's head off, then wrapped it in a poncho liner and sent it with the snake-bit kid. The Doctors at Bien Hoa said they would have had to amputate his leg if the snake's head had not been with

### **GOT A MATCH? LT PROBST & PSG LILES (George Coker, A Co)**

**Lt Frank Probst** and **PSG Ken Liles** were our platoon leader and platoon sergeant. These guys ran a tight ship, solid airborne infantry, by the book. That is until they found that VC staging area. It was a large complex full of supplies and of course a tunnel. Lt. Probst and PSG Liles always led, so into the tunnel they went. Their mistake was not changing their flashlight batteries before entering. The tunnel was full of methane gas, so when the flashlight got dim someone struck a match. They were both burned bad and never returned to the company. I saw Sgt. Liles at the Fort Campbell reunion in 2008 but the subject never came up.

**NOT MY MATCH (Frank Probst, A Co, in response to the above story)**

Never knew what ignited the gas. Always suspected someone outside at the escape opening end might have lit a cigarette. My flashlight was fine. I went in leaving PSG Liles in charge. Never suspected he would come in after me. Next thing I know, I see a fireball coming. I only had time to think “Aw shit!” Guys on the outside said it blew out both ends of the tunnel at the same time, but I know I saw it coming from the far end. I was surprised when I got out to find that Ken had come in after me and we were both out of commission.

We spent about two months in the hospital in Japan before coming back to the States. I only saw Ken once after that on a prisoner delivery. He was/is a great guy. I’m pretty sure neither of us lit a match. The tunnel was being used as a VC Claymore factory and there was some type of lacquer in there that was used to paint the finished pie-shaped claymores to protect the metal. That got spilled and made the gas. One of those days you never forgot.

**WHERE DO WE GET THESE STORIES? (RJ Pool & George Coker, A Co)**

A couple days ago, RJ called. I was in Huntsville, headed to my cabin in the piney woods. He asked if I remembered this guy from A Company. The name didn’t ring a bell so RJ explained. The deuce and a half’s had picked us up and were transporting us to the airfield for a C-130 flight.

The road went between Bien Hoa and the airfield. This GI had a girlfriend whose house was on the road. As luck would have it, she was standing in the doorway. The GI yelled out her name and when she recognized him, she pulled up her blouse. Most Vietnamese women were thin, flat chested, etc. Not this girl. Hello!! She made quite an impression. When RJ reminded me of this, my instant reaction was, “She was the one with the big #####.” For the next few minutes two old guys, one in Mass and one in Texas giggled like a couple of little girls. We have this guy’s name, but he’ll have to give it out. We cleaned this story up a good bit.

## **BRAVO COMPANY**

### **RTO SAVED OUR LIVES** (Ron Best, Medic, B Co)

Have we found **Danny Varner**? Danny was from Tennessee. He was the RTO for **LT (Marvin) Jeffcoat**. We were in a firefight with some bad guys. The jets were coming in from our backs and dropping high explosives and napalm. Suddenly, one of them changed direction and came in focusing on us. Danny yelled, "Out, Out, Out" into the radio to get him to avoid dropping anything on us.

The pilot didn't drop anything, but he strafed with 20 mm cannon and he put a round in front of one of our buck sergeants. The round exploded on a rock or something and put shrapnel into the sergeant. I put a dressing on his forearm.

If Danny hadn't called him off, we'd all have been dead.

### **A BROWN HEART** (Mike Talerico, B Co)

When a soldier is wounded in combat, he is awarded a Purple Heart. This signifies that he sustained wounds while in the service of his country.

The second week of Operation Junction City, I was assigned to go on a clearing patrol at dusk. There were four of us and we only had to clear the area in front of the 12 positions of our platoon, a quick trip. We started out at my end of our line and went out about seventy-five meters. Everything was quiet. Then, we heard some mortars. At first we thought they were outgoing. Then, we quickly realized they were incoming. By this time we were at the other end of our platoon perimeter.

We started running in, yelling "Rawhide" the running password (Vietnamese pronounce it "Lawhide"). As we were running we were setting off trip flares. Mortars were dropping all around us, in front of and behind us. It was getting bad, just like a previous mortar attack. By this time, we were getting close to our perimeter; now I had to get to my foxhole. There were too many mortars dropping and I didn't have time to get to my hole, so I decided to go in the closest bunker.

The guy ahead of me was heading towards a bunker; it had an opening at the back that would allow you to jump right in. He jumped, feet first into the opening and disappeared. I followed him into the hole. As I started to jump in the bunker, a mortar round hit directly behind me and I was hit in the middle of my back.

It hit hard and I knew what it meant. I was wounded. How bad I didn't know, but I knew I was hit. It felt like someone punched me in the middle of my back as hard as they could. I landed in the bunker and moved away from the opening. I just stood there, not moving, I thought I may already be dead and this is what it was like.

I tapped on the shoulder of the trooper who had jumped in ahead of me and asked him, "Am I talking?" He turned and looked at me and said, "What?" Again I asked him if I was talking. He said I was and wanted to know why I asked. At that time, I reached behind me as best I could and felt around my back. In the middle, where I was wounded it was wet and hot -- blood. I was scared that I had sustained a severe wound. Although I was conscious, I was thinking that the reason I didn't feel bad was because I was going into shock.

I told the other trooper that I think I was hit in the back. He told me to turn around and he would take a look at it. I turned around and with his lighter he looked at my back. I felt him touching it and thinking, "Why doesn't it hurt?" He turned me back, facing him, and said, "You're hit alright, with mud, hot mud." He held his finger up in the light and showed me the mud. Somehow, when the mortar exploded behind me, the shrapnel went around me and only mud from the explosion hit me.

I always felt the Army should have awarded a "Brown Heart"... not for the mud.

### **MAKING RANK (Mike Talerico, B Co)**

My name is spelled correctly in the list. My rank was PFC (E-3). I made PFC 3 times.

### **TAKING CARE OF HIS BUDDY - RAY LOFTON (Hugh Kelley, B Co)**

I have another name to add to the 4/503d casualty list - **Ray Lofton**, 3rd Platoon, B Company. He drowned August 23, 1966, during a hasty river crossing. The river was swift and deep. We used a single rope bridge. Ray volunteered to carry another trooper's gear because his buddy was a weak swimmer. Ray was halfway across the river when he lost his grip and was swept downstream. A couple guys jumped in and tried to save him, but were unable to. We recovered his body the next day submerged under a fallen tree. Ray was from Chattanooga, TN, and was 21 when he died.

### **RAY LOFTON'S DROWNING (By Noah McBride, B Co)**

On Operation Toledo, Aug - Sep 1966 in the My Tao 'Secret Zone', I was in the lead fire team, 3d platoon, providing point security for B Company. We came to a monsoon-flooded river approximately 100 feet wide and 12 feet deep at our point of crossing. The current was raging and the water was completely muddy with no visibility. **Pete Williams** and I swam across the river and established a single rope bridge for unit crossing.

After establishing the rope bridge, Pete and I provided security on the opposite bank while approximately two squads crossed the river. At that time I swam back across the river to get the rest of my gear to make the final river crossing.

While waiting for my turn to make the crossing, I and others observed **Ray Lofton** lose his grip on the rope and go down. **Charlie Smith** and I dropped our gear and dove into the river with others trying to save Lofton.

I located Lofton on the bottom on my second dive. He was fighting with his gear trying to get it off as I tried to free him.

He locked his arms and legs around me as I reached for him. I got the LAW loose from his gear, but still could not lift him from the bottom of the river. I surfaced for air and went back for the third time. I got him by the back of his shirt and belt and pushed against the river bottom with my feet, thrusting him up as hard as I could.

**Charlie Smith** barely missed grabbing Lofton as he broke the surface. I thought someone had gotten hands on Lofton when I pushed him to the surface. I surfaced with no strength left. I was physically expended. I couldn't continue to swim or dive.

After not being able to find him, the company had to make a night defensive position as dark was coming quickly. We finished the crossing and established a perimeter. We spent a long night in the company perimeter thinking about our buddy who had not been found.

At daybreak the next morning, we went back to the river. The water level had dropped and the current had lowered dramatically. Another platoon was given the recovery mission. Lofton was recovered where **Charlie Smith**, I, and the others had almost saved him.

Afterwards, our team tried to deal with Ray's death, the first in our platoon, as best that 18-year-olds could, but it was hard.

\*NOTE: Accidents have something in common: as many opinions as actual witnesses.

### **COURAGE. (Mike Talerco, B Co)**

Courage comes in many ways. Usually when you least expect it. How you handle a hardship is one of the ways that requires the most courage. When things seem to be the worst, when you feel you have nothing left, that all is lost, is when a person's level of courage is tested the most.

### **HOT EXTRACTION - LZ STUMP (Noah McBride, B Co)**

In the second phase of Operation Canary/Duck in early January 1967, the 3d Platoon of Bravo Company was the last to be extracted from a hot LZ. During previous extractions, there was ground fire away from the LZ and choppers were changing directions entering and exiting the LZ. My fire team was to move from outer security inside the tree line to the center of the LZ for the last extraction.

With enemy firing around us, we were on high alert in this situation. As I stood up ready to move to the LZ, I saw about 15 NVAs (North Vietnamese Army) 20 yards away and coming up the trail to the LZ. Almost without thinking, I responded with a couple of knee-to-waist-high bursts on automatic and saw them falling and screaming as I dove behind a log.

I pulled a grenade off my harness and threw it from behind my log and then lifted up and sprayed a second magazine. I heard screams from the NVA but was getting incoming fire back. I then threw a second grenade into their location which slowed the noise in front of me. I loaded a third magazine, but when I chambered the first round, I encountered a double round chamber (jam) situation. It was really dicey now with just me facing off against a bunch of them. I threw my third and last grenade very hard. Then, I extended my LAW (light anti-tank weapon) and started to fire. Before I could fire, I heard a scream from behind me, "NO!" My squad leader was directly behind me, in the back blast area of the LAW. If I had pulled the trigger it would have barbecued him. He tossed me his M-16 and I threw mine to him. I provided him with covering fire as he moved back to the LZ.

Then, he yelled, "Pull back. Air strikes on the way". I was firing and backing up and realized what was happening as 20 mm casings from the jet started hitting around me and the jungle was disintegrating in front of me. That F-100 showed up with a vengeance, saving my life for sure.

Claymores had been set as a departing gesture for bad guys and they kept the NVAs heads down long enough for us to load that last chopper. It was like riding a wild horse on that last chopper out of LZ Stump with the pilot doing maneuvers and dodging incoming ground fire.

LTC Healy met our chopper as we landed at the forward fire support base. He asked me, "How many dead?" My reply was, "I was too busy; no time to count dead enemy". I never heard from him or anyone else again about the extraction.

The Good Lord was smiling on us that day as we survived LZ Stump extraction. This remembrance is a tribute to all the guys I served with that day and the others.

### **A JOB WELL DONE, Joe Armstrong, B Co**

I remember a time when we were on patrol and all of a sudden small arms fire was coming in from all around us. As we had been trained, we returned fire immediately. I was assigned to carry the PRC-25 radio for our platoon leader that day (I can not remember his name. Lately I have a hard time remembering a lot of things!)

As I was monitoring the radio I heard the company commander making a call for a fire mission to our mortar squad. To my amazement, he no sooner finished calling in our location when **Sgt Oxford**, the NCI in charge of the mortar squad announced, "ON THE WAY". It turned out that as our platoon was moving, he was monitoring our position and was having his mortar crew make adjustments to the mortars just in case of a situation like this.

The quick and accurate mortar fire disrupted the enemy attack and we did not suffer any casualties.

I recently found out that Sgt Oxford passed away. I am so saddened by this as I had hoped to be able to thank him and his crew in person for saving our lives that day. Their professionalism and quick response turned what could have been a terrible defeat into a victory as the intense incoming rounds stopped almost immediately.

I am hoping that members of Sgt Oxford's crew will read this and accept my heart felt Thank You for being there that day when we needed you the most.

### **EDUARDO “OX” OXFORD (Harold Snider and Roger Bray, B Co)**

**Eduardo Oxford** was a Buck Sergeant and Squad Leader, Weapons Platoon, at Ft Campbell.

His first tour in ‘Nam, he deployed from Okinawa. He returned to the 101<sup>st</sup> and was assigned to B Company and promoted to E-5. The experience he shared from his first tour went a long way in preparing others and me in the platoon to cope with life in country. Another interesting tidbit, Ox, warned us many times to use condoms because they had sexual diseases in that country that would eat your brain. Yeah, he also told us the razor blade stories.

He went back with B/4/503d for his second tour. Ox stayed 6 months with B Company and then rotated out of the company with other NCOs from the original deployment. He was my squad leader at first and then I was left carrying the 81mm Mortar sight.

We heard later that Ox had gotten out of the Army and was in Venezuela. My nephew, Gary, travels around the world (big time) and some years ago, while in Venezuela, he tried to locate Ox. He was unsuccessful--Ox was somewhere else, so they didn't link up. But, Gary did make contact with one of Ox's sisters. Gary and the sister exchanged addresses. Nothing was heard for a couple of years. Then, Gary got a phone call from Ox's sister who was in the States.

Ox's sister said that Ox had gotten sick and was in a VA hospital in Orlando, FL. Gary told her that he would immediately go to visit him. However, she told Gary not to bother--Ox didn't recognize his own family and wouldn't know who Gary was. He had contracted something which was causing him to mentally degenerate. The sister said the family was trying to get Ox moved back to Venezuela so he could die there.

Gary called a few months later and spoke with other family members, who wouldn't tell him anything. He tried to contact the sister again but she had moved--they wouldn't provide a number and Gary lost contact with her. Sad, sad story! Ox was a great buddy and I hate to see something like that happen to him. Ox was a very humorous and likeable guy with many friends. Certainly, there are many others that would want to know what happened to him.

### **STOP FROM THE FRONT (Mike Talerco, B Co)**

This day we were on another patrol. It was all of “B” company. I didn't know who was bringing up the rear and really didn't care. Our company was at full strength so I figure the patrol was about one hundred strong with me somewhere in the middle.

Whenever a problem occurs at the front of the patrol, for whatever reason, it may have to stop. To avoid soldiers from closing in like an accordion, we use a procedure to eliminate that from happening. The person in front turns to the person directly behind him and say, “Stop from the front; pass it back.” If the problem occurs at the end of the patrol, the last person should say to the person in front of him, “Stop from the rear; pass it forward.” This would help eliminate the accordion effect and keep the soldiers spread apart. This stopping of the patrol was not uncommon and didn't cause any problems.

One day on patrol, nature called and I had to go bad. It was getting bad and something had to happen soon or I was going to go in my pants. I didn't know what to do.

Then I got an idea. I turned to the person behind me and said, “Stop from the front; pass it back.” And he did. I turned to the person ahead of me and said, “Stop from the rear, pass it forward.” And he did.

The entire patrol came to a halt. I quickly stepped to the side of the path and did my business. When I got back in line, the person in front of me said, “The CO wants to know what the problem is?” I told the guy in front, “I don't know, but go from the rear.” As soon as they started moving, I told the guy behind me, “Go from the front.” The patrol started moving.

I felt good, in more ways than one.

### **HANGIN' OUT (John Pratt, B Co)**

We had just come from the jungle back to base camp at Bien Hoa when we learned of a new outdoor open air latrine for urinating only. It was across the road from our buildings. Looked harmless enough but a few of us were concerned with that far a walk when we need to pee. We usually just turned, let go and went on about our chores. But, **First Sgt Poe** made us use the tubes shortly after they were installed.

One day after a spell of drinking and getting wasted, we all walked over the tubes. We stood there hangin' out and taking a wiz when two deuce and a half's full of 'Doughnut Dollies' passed by. There we were exposed and no place to hide.

So, we just turned toward the trucks and waved. The girls all gasped and laughed as they rolled out of sight. Who said exposure was not good?

### **LT J. MICHAEL DEEMS (Mike Talerco, B Co)**

Second LT. **J. Michael Deems** was my platoon leader. He was the person who we took orders from. He must have been twenty-two or twenty-three, blonde hair and a fair face. He was about my size and he was in good shape.

The thing I remember the most was his personality. He was not like the other officers I met. He was the first "true" leader, someone we felt comfortable talking to. We could ask him anything and he would answer without making us feel like idiots.

Everyone in our platoon looked up to Lt. Deems. He was one of us.

I heard he graduated from West Point, which probably made him the smartest officer in the company.

When we had any kind of inspection, he and the platoon sergeant would check us and if something was wrong Lt. Deems would simply point out the problem, tell us to fix it and then he would move on to the next guy.

Lt. Deems was the one officer that anyone would want as his or her leader in wartime.

### **PSG CORBETT (Mike Talerco, B Co)**

**Sgt. J. D. Corbett** was our platoon sergeant. He was the enforcer of **Lt. Deem's** orders. Sgt. Corbett was about six feet two, black, and about 200 pounds. He also had a pencil thin mustache.

He was a "lifer" and loved the army life. Sgt. Corbett was a tough, but fair NCO. He would tell us what we had to do and help us when we needed it. For a "lifer", Sgt. Corbett was an intelligent person.

He knew the Army and everything about the infantry. He would carry on occasionally with the other "lifer" sergeants. He was also laid back and didn't give anyone any unnecessary hassle.

He was probably this way because of **LT. Deems**. The two of them worked together, not against each other like some of the other platoons.

### **SAM PROCTER - KIA JUST BEFORE HIS DEROS.** (Told by **Ed Sullivan** in June 2006 for **John Daly, B Co**)

The day **Sam** died, his squad had just come across a structure which appeared to be a charcoal factory. A Claymore mine exploded and Sam was hit by the flying pieces. **John** held Sam in his arms and tried to encourage him, as it initially appeared that his injuries were not serious. However, the injuries were severe and Sam passed away fairly quickly.

Sam was a good soldier. He was so close to going home when he was killed on May 22, 1966. He was only 2 weeks from DEROS. Sam was the last man killed from the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion which had deployed June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1966 and returned to the US in early June 1967.

### IN THE KILL ZONE (Noah McBride, B Co)

It was March 9, 1967, a couple of weeks into Operation Junction City II. B Company came on a large NVA base camp and assaulted it head on. We'd been in country for 9 months and had been bloodied in other battles and skirmishes. We knew what Death was and how that 'magic bullet' could send you away forever.

Incoming fire from the big base camp was withering - it seemed that no one could walk out of this one. Our assault started out tree-to-tree and progressed to trench and up-personal muzzle-to-muzzle combat. We lost three of our greatest brothers that day; they were not able to come out the other side. I think that **Freddy Friar**, who was 22, was possibly the first to die. I'm not sure who fell next, but was probably **Gerald Bartram**, our beloved medic who died trying to care for his brothers of the 3d platoon. The "Soldiers' Sergeant", **Willis Lee Furney**, of Macon, GA, was next to go down.

The enemy position was so strong that it was lucky that our entire company was involved - our platoon alone wouldn't have made it out. Even though we got to the outer trenches, the fire from the ground and the trees was so intense and the WIAs mounting, that the order for withdrawal was wisely given. Had we continued, we probably would have suffered massive casualties.

We were able to pull back without losing order. We grabbed our dead and wounded except for Freddy Friar who had fallen on the edge of the base camp where some of the worst fire came from. As we pulled back, we were still taking casualties.

When we had pulled back and secured a perimeter, B-52 strikes were called in. It seemed as if the jungle floor rose up like waves in the ocean with the concussion of 500 lb bombs dropped not far from us.

The next day, we recovered Freddy. We all hated to have left him overnight, but knew there would have been many more body bags had we tried to recover him that afternoon.

### MY LAST DAY IN THE KILL ZONE, 7 APRIL 1967 ( Noah McBride, B Co)

My original squad had suffered combat losses thru-out the year with only a few original members left when we started Operation Junction City 2. Daybreak of April 7, 1967 came tear-assing thru the hellacious Asian darkness.

**Robert Spence** and I sensed that we might be entering a kill zone as **Ole Sgt. Perez** ordered us on point. We said a prayer asking, "Let this not be the last Asian sunrise we would see." We fired into the jungle, i.e. had a 'turkey shoot' to prevent enemy ambush prior to moving out. Our squad took point heading for the objective several "clicks" (kilometers) away.

At 1100, our squad was approximately 300 yards ahead of our platoon and the company when an ambush occurred. Our squad was almost decimated by a large explosive device larger than a claymore mine. We saw VC running just as the explosive force knocked everyone in the squad down, putting us in a daze.

As my mind cleared, I tried returning fire in the direction of the blast and VC sighting. My rifle stock and buffer were damaged and inoperable so I could not immediately return fire. My right leg was broken at the knee and I was bleeding from the left side of my face which I bandaged. Spence was wounded in the lung and bleeding from his mouth. I applied a bandage to his shrapnel wound. Spence was still random firing in spite of being severely wounded.

I crawled to one of the new guys whose kneecaps had been blown off and a finger amputated by the blast and applied tourniquets. This kid was surely in severe pain and trauma. I heard Spence explicitly tell me that if he passed out not to let the Gooks take him alive. I told him we would get out of this. Hell, I was an 18-year-old thinking Death could come any time.

Radio contact was established with the company which was on line and coming to pull us from this death trap.

I was one of seven WIA survivors and one brother who was KIA who were dusted-off (Medevaced) at approximately 1245 hours. No words can express my appreciation to the brothers who pulled us from the jaws of death that day. They are: **Maxey Myers, Bob Canuel,**

**Pete Williams, Charlie Smith, John Daly** and others who were wounded 2 hours later as they assaulted a VC base camp. A report had another 25 WIA and 3 KIA from Bravo that day. They will have to tell the rest of the story from their perspective of the remainder of this day's battle.

## CHARLIE COMPANY

### LTs DIG IN TOO (Mike Strange, C Co)

I was **LT Bruce Cobb's** RTO for a while. We were getting mortared most nights. We would move all day, dig in at night and catch a few incoming rounds. One evening, I was digging my one-man prone shelter and Lt. Cobb was watching. I said, "Sir you'd better dig in. We're gonna to get hit tonight." "Naw, they won't hit us tonight." he said.

Well, after dark, the VC lobbed in a couple of mortar rounds. LT Cobb said, "Strange, let me in that hole with you." Another round came in and I said, "I told you you'd better dig in." The next thing I hear is, "Ten Hut! Outta that hole, soldier." I laughed and said, "Come on in."

The next evening when we stopped, he helped me dig a 2-man hole.

### GRUNT TO CHOPPER; 3 TOURS IN RVN (Andy Roy, C Co)

I arrived in country about April 29th, 1967. I went through the 173d Jungle School in Bien Hoa. The class the week before us had a firefight and a cadre was WIA. Our class set up a series of drop-off ambushes the next week. We ambushed a group of VC trying to flee the area after they popped a few mortar rounds into Bien Hoa airfield. It was payback for the wounded Jungle School cadre. So, in my first week of Vietnam, I was in on combat.

I served my first tour as a grunt with C Company, 4/503d. We went through Hill 875 and more. The casualties at that time were about the highest ever for the 4th Battalion.

My second tour was with C Company, 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 1st Cav. Division, as a door gunner. It was sure different seeing the war from above. But, then you felt pretty vulnerable as a target in the sky when you couldn't see the bad guys who were shooting at you.

How dangerous was it flying? When I volunteered for my third tour, it was as a grunt again. I came back again to serve with D Company, 1/327th, 101st Abn Div. I considered taking a short and coming back again, maybe as a LRRP, but by then I saw demoralization starting in the rear (not the field) and decided to ETS.

### REPLAY (Mike Strange, C Co)

As far as I know, **Tommy Humphrey** still lives in Hot Springs, Arkansas. It's called Hot Springs, Lakeside.

Our senior year in high school, Lakeside had a state championship football team. "**Humpy**" was the starting center on that team. I played tight end and linebacker for Bauxite when we played Lakeside. On Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, they beat us 54-6.

In Vietnam, a casual conversation in the jungle turned into the realization that we had played against each other on those teams. I had to listen to him replay the game and the score for a solid year. I threatened to shoot him and claymore him, but he just kept talking.

We left VN together and processed out of the service in Ft. Lewis, WA. Then, we got on a commercial flight to Arkansas. We landed in Little Rock where I got off and he went on to Hot Springs. We were both so scared I almost flew on to Hot Springs and he almost got off in Little Rock. When we landed in Little Rock, I said, "Humpy, I'm scared. I'm not getting off. I don't know what to say or how to act around people." He said, "I'm scared too. I'd like to get off here and not go on to Hot Springs, but they're waiting on us." We had become so uncivilized we were afraid to face our families. We didn't know what to say or how to act.

That was the last time I ever talked to him.

(NOTE: We located **Tommy** and they have talked)

### **CHEWED OUT BY 'IRON MIKE' (J.L. Beacham, C Co)**

My squad, with a an M6 machine gun crew attached, occupied a saddle-shaped piece of terrain on a very high mountaintop outside DaNang area for the purpose of defense, observation and early warning of any VC movement. I was awakened one very rainy and cold night by my team leader, **SGT Spurgeon D Watson**, who informed me that we had VC on the wire.

After being roused from my warm and dry bunker, I listened and strained every muscle in my ears to hear something. Nothing. Watson kept insisting there were VC out there and suggesting that I call for illumination. I radioed the platoon CP which alerted the 81 mm mortar gun crew assigned to cover our platoon. I told them to fire the pre-registered fire plan with illumination rounds, which lit up the whole hillside well enough to spot anything that was out there. But, no VC were detected.

Early the next morning, the Battalion CO, "Iron Mike" Healy, radioed that he was enroute to our location and to secure the LZ. When the old Marine CH-34 chopper carrying him touched down, "Iron Mike" jumped off the bird and immediately began to chew me out. "Who in the H \_ \_ \_ authorized the firing of those illumination rounds? Only higher HQ can authorize that type of fire".

As we proceeded toward my CP, "Iron Mike" was noticeably irritated (pissed off) and began to ask me in a, "You'd better have your S \_ \_ \_ together manner", "Where are your defensive positions, where are their fields of fire, where is the M60 emplaced, how many men do you have, where are your claymores placed". At the same time, all these questions were being answered as we toured the perimeter without a correction or a need to be changed from "Iron Mike".

When we arrived at the squad CP, "Iron Mike" turned around, took a long look at the entire AO, and seemingly was satisfied. He turned back to me and said, "SGT Beacham, you are doing a damn fine job".

### **SGT BOXLEY'S WAY OF SAYING, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY" (Mike Strange, C Co)**

I have written **Sgt. Boxley** two letters. He was an ole sour-puss, but I liked him and he took good care of us.

On my 20th birthday, we were going out on a squad patrol. I told him since it's my birthday I should get to stay behind. He handed me a machete and said, "You're on point. Happy birthday."

### **SERGEANT BOXLEY (Mike Strange, C Co)**

I wrote Sgt Boxley a letter after you sent his address knowing he wouldn't answer.

**SSG Alexander Boxley** was like the Six Million Dollar Man, almost as if he were created for the military. He was hard and seemingly cold. He liked me because I knew when to keep my mouth shut and I had a little education so he liked to debate with me and took time to give me map reading and compass instructions.

When we were in base camp he drank Old Grand Dad until he was blind.

After an operation in the Iron Triangle we had a decoration and award ceremony, **General Deane**, I think, was giving the awards.

Sgt. Boxley and another NCO were drunk with a capitol 'D', which was perfectly acceptable after an operation. While the General was talking, Sgt Boxley would say really loud, "Speak up, Can't hear you back here." The enlisted men would snicker and the officers would roll their eyes. Louder, "Speak up, can't hear you back here." The general never batted an eye, but **Capt. Sanchez** couldn't take it any longer. He told **Sgt. Tiara** (I think) to take Sgt. Boxley back to the company area.

"I can't," said Sgt T, he's getting an award."

We couldn't wait for the general to call his name to come forward. I think he got a Silver Star. (NOTE: He earned 2 Silver Stars during his tour). He died in 2009 in the Richmond, VA area.

### **THE 'HUMAN SNIFFER' (Mike Strange, C Co)**

I was lying in bed staring at the ceiling about 3:00 a.m. in the morning as I usually do and "The Human Sniffer" leaped into my thoughts.

Remember that thing? My memory is fuzzy about it, but as I remember, we hadn't been in country too long. The Human Sniffer attached to an M-16. It had a sensor near the muzzle of the rifle and a dial and needle near the stock. It was supposed to pick up human scent and the needle would jump when it picked up the scent.

It was great. It picked up the scent of water buffaloes, frogs, lizards, birds, vegetation.... Some guy could fart in the rear of the column and we would stop and send out a patrol. We moved about 50 yards every 5 hours. Plus, the point man was so busy watching that damn needle jump he was a sitting duck. I think we used it part of one day.

I'm sure the thing came out of the inventor's garage-shop and he showed it to a Washington buddy, who showed it to a senator or a General, and of course everyone had to get a piece of the action to send it on. I'll bet that worthless (and dangerous) piece of crap cost millions before it was attached to some poor bastard's rifle (like mine) for in-country test.

The bunch of teenage boy paratroopers who turned into VC-killing Charlie Company would have told the Army Test honchos where to insert their Human Sniffing machine.

It's funny, but kind of embarrassing to be the butt of a joke.

### **PANTS DOWN (Mike Strange, C Co)**

We were in the Hobo Woods, I believe. Had a new guy with us. When I say new, he was new to us, but not new in country. He had gone AWOL from another unit, so he was sent to us to deal with. Just where do you go AWOL in Viet Nam? Do you sit out in a bunker and read old *Playboy* magazines? But anyway, we had him. I don't remember his name, but we nicknamed him **Smiley** because every morning he would wake up and say, "Good Morning, Viet Nam," and then the rest of the day he griped and cussed and hated everyone and everything. A real ray of sunshine.

One night, our squad was sent out on an ambush. **Sgt Boxley**, our squad leader was a non-sense, "I'll bust your head," kind of NCO. We reached our location, trampled down the elephant grass for a position and put out our Claymore mines.

Smiley said he was going to relieve himself. We didn't know it at the time, but he had a habit of going out from our location, dropping his pants like he was going to the bathroom, and lighting up a joint. This time he dropped his pants about 10 feet behind one of our Claymores. Well back in the elephant grass, **Rock (John Rochfort)** and I were wrestling, as boys do. I threw him down and he landed on the detonator of a Claymore and the thing exploded. BOOM!!

The first thing Rock and I thought of was we're in deep trouble from Sgt. Boxley. But, Smiley thought it was incoming. Someone said, "Look," and we turned to see Smiley approaching the perimeter. We would see his head above the elephant grass, then it would disappear for a second, appear and disappear. He looked like a kangaroo coming toward us. When he reached the clearing, we saw that his pants were still down around his ankles and he was indeed hopping like a kangaroo. He was so scared the joint was still in his mouth. Then he realized what had happened and said, "A man can't even go take a shit without someone trying to blow his ass off."

Sgt Boxley never did jump us about it. But even though he never cracked a smile, he had to be dying inside because watching Smiley hop through that grass was hilarious.

Another Smiley story later.

### **ORDINARY MEN (Jesse Beacham, C Co)**

We were all perfectly ordinary men, but in those extraordinary circumstances of our war, we became extraordinary men. I am proud to have served with all of you.

### **ANOTHER INCH AND.....** (Mike Strange, C Co)

I don't know where we were or what operation we were on; I just remember the jungle was thick, too thick for a dust-off. We had found a tunnel complex and it was one of those good days that I wasn't told to go into the tunnels. I was milling around doing what I did best, talking and visiting with anyone who would talk.

I stopped and talked to a guy. I don't remember his name, but if he reads this, he will know it's him. He lit a cigarette and then lit mine. At that instant, a single shot rang out. It knocked him off his feet and he went down moaning. My first instinct was to get down to avoid a second shot and to scan the foliage for the sniper. As I turned my attention to him, he was saying in pain, "They shot it off, they shot it off, they shot my dick off." Over and over, "They shot my dick off."

The medic was there quickly to treat him and a dust-off was called in. A harness was lowered down into the jungle and the last I saw of him he was dangling from the cable below the chopper.

Word got around of the nature of his wound. "Did you here about so and so? He got his dick shot off." The guy that was talking and the guy listening would both grimace and unconsciously move their hands down to their crotch, both feeling the unusual pain and life sentence of their wounded buddy. Occasionally, someone would say, "A man can't go through life without his dick." or, "Man you may as well go ahead and kill me because I couldn't make it without my little buddy bringing me joy."

That night in my foxhole, I had vivid images of a bloody stump that was once a penis.

After Viet Nam, I was stationed at Ft. Campbell, KY. Once I got settled in my barracks, I went down to the dayroom. There, shooting pool, was the guy with the shot-off penis. After exchanging heartfelt, "Glad you made it back," pleasantries, I said, "Man I have to know, did they shoot your dick completely off?"

Without hesitation or embarrassment, he quickly dropped his pants and underwear. "Naaah, they missed it, but if the little bastard had been any longer they would have." And he proudly showed me his scar just a millimeter below his penis. I was just overwhelmed with relief, because 'a man can't go through life without his dick.'

### **NAMETAG GAMES** (Mike Strange, C Co)

I remember one time on an operation they gave us magic markers and told us to print our names on the blank nametag on our replacement shirts and rank on the collars so they would know who we were if we got killed. Naturally, everyone printed **NAMETAG** on their shirt and **GENERAL** or **ADMIRAL** or **PRESIDENT** where our rank went. So, they gave up on that idea.

### **WRONG SIDE OF THE TREE** (Thom Cook, Medic, C Co)

I have joked with **1/LT Bob Stowell** a few times about him blowing up a tree and almost killing himself.

The day it happened, we expected a chopper resupply, but a big tree blocked the approach to the LZ. LT Stowell wanted to take it down with C-4. When he placed the C-4 on the tree, I told him the tree was coming back on us. He said, "I am a Ranger, Sergeant." I told him I was Recondo and that tree was coming back on us if he set the charge where he was putting it.

I walked back to the Company CP area. I heard 'Fire in the Hole' three times, then the explosion and sound of the big tree coming down. The next thing I heard was, 'Medic.' When I ran back up the trail, some PFC told me the tree had come down on the LT. I guess at that time I was like a parent: I was scared that he was dead. When I found him under the tree and pulled him out somehow, he had a broken shoulder and broken leg.

Captain Tarr, the CO, came up and asked me if I was going to give him morphine. I said, "F---, No, Captain; he's an Airborne Ranger and can go with two Darvon." I was glad he was alive, but mad that he almost killed himself. One very fine officer.

### **AN NCO LIKE A PARENT (Mike Strange, C Co)**

I'm going to see my 87-year-old dad. Which reminds me, when I got to VN I didn't smoke or drink. I started bumming cigarettes from **Dave (Richard Davis)** at night in the foxhole. I was like a kid with a new toy. I could drop down in the hole and take a puff and it made it easier to stay awake and alert. Well, I started smoking during the day too. Even though he smoked, **Sgt. Boxley** wouldn't allow me to smoke. So, I actually had to sneak around and smoke behind his back. One day we were out on an operation going down a trail. The column stopped for a break. You remember how we stayed wet with sweat and those old rucksacks were so heavy? I laid back and unconsciously lit a cigarette. When Sgt Boxley was scolding, instead of saying your name he would say "Young man." He stood over me and said, "Young man, what have you got in your mouth?" I was caught. From seeing names on letters we got from home, we all knew the names of relatives. In all seriousness, he said, "When we get back, I'm going to write Roy (my Dad) a letter and tell him you're smoking."

Over the years, I smoked 2 packs a day and became an alcoholic. I can proudly say I have done neither one in 23 years. I think I married someone who scared me as much as Sgt. Boxley. She wouldn't tolerate my drinking.

### **DON MICHAEL'S COURAGE UNDER FIRE (Chuck Huller, Medic, C Co)**

**Don Michael** was one of the bravest individuals I ever met in my life. I was assigned to Charlie Company in February 1967 when we got into a heavy firefight and were pinned down. A nearby NVA opened up on **SGM Torres, SGT McGee, SSG Watkins, Don Michael** and myself. The bullets came dangerously close to us. We all hit the deck and for some reason we thought it was a little funny.

When McGee suggested we get on line, the NVA opened up again. I told McGee to shut the f-- up because this guy was only a few feet away from us, however we couldn't see him. I, for one, could hear my heart beat and we were waiting for this NVA to make another move.

All of the sudden, **Don Michael** stands up, walks over to a small hill and pulls this NVA sergeant out of the hole by the back of his neck. We all stood up and McGee asked SGM Torres if he was okay. Torres said he was and McGee told him, "Sergeant Major, your helmet is on backwards!" We all started to laugh.

I walked over to Don Michael and asked, "How did you know that guy ran out of bullets?" Don replied with his big Alabama southern drawl, "Well, I guess if he stopped shooting, I figured out he was out of bullets". I told him that that was a hell of a lot to assume and you can only be wrong about something like that just once.

With that, everybody started to laugh and I thought to myself, "I never thought that almost getting killed could be so funny".

Another vivid memory I have was going back to base camp and seeing people getting Air Medals as well as promotions. In interesting contrast, guys like Don Michael, a hard-core PFC, who made the reputation of the 173rd what it is today, never received a medal for that action or worried about their careers. As far as they were concerned, they didn't have a career, they had a God Damn job to do and they lived down their lives, as Abraham Lincoln referred to, on the Altar of Freedom.

A few weeks later, **Don Michael** was KIA on April 7, 1967, along with five others from Charlie Company. For his actions that day, he was awarded the highest medal for bravery our country has to offer, the Congressional Medal of Honor. **Tom Cook**, C Company's Senior Medic, wrote him up for it. Don was only 19 years old, a big gentle giant, a real southern boy from Alabama. When I heard that Don died, I was in the 93rd Evac Hospital myself and the guys with Charlie Company that were there told me what happened.

### **ZUGBY – DON'T SHOOT! (Mike Strange, C Co)**

A funny memory - I remember **Leonard Zugby** was half Indian (India) and half something else. He could speak English pretty OK, but couldn't write it worth a darn and I wrote several love letters for him.

We were in D Zone and he was on the .50 caliber one night. I was on an LP with, I think **John Rochfort**. One of the LPs fired at movement in the dark and we were called back in. Approaching the perimeter, we heard Zugby jack a round into the chamber of that big bad boy. Afraid he wouldn't remember the password or understand us because of his foreign blood, all I could think to yell was, "Zugby, for God sakes, don't shoot."

### **BUDWEISER MADE MY DAY (J L Beacham, C Co)**

We were somewhere in the thick jungles of Viet-Nam, after a long, hot all day "hump", on one of our extended operations. We were all exhausted from the search and destroy mission for that day, not to mention the gruesome flank security duty for some of us, and we were settling in for the night. Just before our one hour "stand to", **Lt Bruce Cobb** called for a squad leader's briefing for the next day's mission. **Sgt Don Byron, SSG Alexander Boxley, SSG Charlie Perrin** and myself assembled at the platoon CP, including the RTO, **Jesse Meddler**, who had just returned from R&R.

During the briefing, as expected, nothing much was changed: more S&D, more flank security, what squad will be on point, the LT location during the move, and other good-to-know infantry information.

Once completed, **LT Cobb** informed us that **Jesse Meddler** had given him a gift upon returning from R&R. He pulled from his "ruck" a can of Budweiser and popped the cap. He offered it to us (minus the words, but we felt it) as a token or camaraderie, respect and appreciation for what we were all trained to do, and "We're in this S\_\_ \_ together".

We passed that one can of warm Budweiser around, each taking a sip or two, while I'm sure each one of us reflected on how we took things for granted and never realized how one can of warm Budweiser could taste so damn good.

I went back to my position with a good feeling about why we were in 'Nam, looking forward to the next day, and thinking, "Man, that was the best beer I've ever had".

P.S. I still drink Budweiser, and nine times out of ten when I pop a cap, I remember how that one Budweiser made my day

### **NOISE IN THE NIGHT (Jerry Downard, C Co)**

In October 1966, our battalion moved to some high ground outside DaNang. We took over bunkered positions from the Marines. We slept in sandbagged bunkers.

One funny story I have about the sandbagged bunkers was that I shared one with a Sgt. named **Gary Schindele** who was the fire direction plotter for the weapons platoon. We kept hearing things moving around inside the bunker at night and we assumed it was rats. So we set a rat trap and caught a big, big scorpion! Scared the hell out of both of us. After that, we made sure our mosquito netting was on good and tight.

### **CHRISTMAS IN 'NAM (Mike Strange, C Co)**

Christmas 1966 I remember being in a tent in a secure area. Might have been Bear Cat. As we all remember, a tent and no guard duty was the 173rd version of a tropical holiday.

A couple of us started singing "Silent Night" and almost immediately everyone, even the grizzled old NCOs, joined in. That was a good Christmas.

Merry Christmas to all 173rd brothers

### **THE LAST AMBUSH (Alan Boyle, C Co)**

One of the most important lessons we learned in 'Nam was ignored that day. We left our location on the same trail we had come in on and we paid the price.

After 11 months in country, including being wounded earlier, my jungle skills were well developed. Left on my own, I felt confident and safe in the jungle. The jungle was no longer my enemy, but my friend.

That day, however, we were being moved by the 11th Armored Cav and were riding on APCs (armored personnel carriers). We rode on top of the lightly armored tracked vehicles as they ground through the jungle. My squad of 6 plus 7 APC crew members were on one APC. My jungle skills now meant nothing - we were now dependent on the APC driver's skills.

Being moved by chopper or ground vehicle was a trade-off. A "grunt" carried his weapon, 20 mags of ammo, trip flares, grenades, six quarts of water, entrenching tool, C rations, poncho and liner. Many of us carried two 81mm mortar rounds. The trade-off for a free ride was that someone else had control over your life. You suddenly became part of a big, slow target.

I rode on the left rear corner of the APC, my M-16 facing the jungle. Suddenly, I noticed a wire in the weeds and yelled, "Wire." That was the last thing I remember for a while. In what could have been seconds, I regained consciousness and was lying face down in the dirt. There was heavy firing all around me and I could hear screaming. 30 yards from me, I saw a machine gun shooting at me, kicking up dirt all around me.

The joke in 'Nam was that, when you're being shot at, you could make yourself 3 inches tall. I saw a depression in the ground in front of me and started to crawl towards it. My lower body didn't move and I knew then that I was paralyzed below the waist. As I pulled myself with my arms, I could feel my body as if it were separate, the lower from the upper. The enemy machine gun continued to fire at me and I was sure my life was over. Any chance of survival seemed impossible; death was inevitable.

With this realization came more peace than I had ever known. There was nothing I could do that would change anything. I remember very calmly looking at the machine gun firing at me, putting my head on my arms, and passing out.

I came to as I was being lifted on to a poncho and put on a chopper. Other wounded troopers were put on with me, some screaming in pain. I soon passed out again.

Later, I learned that the incredible bravery and professionalism of my fellow paratroopers saved my life. The wire I had seen detonated a huge booby trap as the APC went over it. The APC was blown into the air and everyone on it was killed except me and one other soldier. The detonation set the stage for the vicious ambush which caught me in the middle. A ferocious counterattack by my buddies not only prevented the loss of many other lives, but allowed them to put me on a helicopter in time to save my life. The incredible heroism of my unit on that day and many other times in my tour still brings tears to my eyes.

### **NEVER WALK AGAIN (Alan Boyle, C Co)**

People have asked me, "What was it like to know you won't ever walk again?"

At the time of my early hospitalization, I believe that pain pre-empted all (other) thinking. My life for the next year would be about pain and not much else. Not only was my back broken and my spinal cord injured, I also had 2d and 3d degree burns over 40% of my body. My existence was broken down into blocks of procedures to be endured. Yet, before any of this could be acknowledged, one other issue had to be addressed: survivor guilt. Lying there (the first few days), I felt intense exhilaration. I survived, I lived, I made it out alive. I would see my home again.

For the next month, my days were spent in pretty much isolation for which I was grateful. Every procedure was pain. If I had my way, I would have been left alone. Silver nitrate was constantly poured over my burns. This helped somewhat when they changed my bandages,

pulling off skin. My life was like living between awake and asleep; things seemed to float around me.

After two weeks or so, I had visitors from my company. They told me what had happened. Everyone on my APC had been killed except for me and one other guy who had died a week later. The exhilaration of surviving had to make room for the tremendous guilt I now felt. My life was forever changed and the shadow of this guilt cast upon me is always present. All things in my life now are measured against this.

## DELTA COMPANY

### LZ STUMP REMEMBERED (Ray Ramirez, D Co)

The operation started out at Bear Cat on Dec. 22, 1966. **Joe Thigpen** broke a leg jumping from a chopper onto LZ Stump. I ended up in a bomb crater with **Cpt. Larry Sanchez** (who I had gone to high school with). The VC were in the trees shooting up the choppers and everything down below.

I had a PRC-25 on my back and it drew some fire towards our position. I remember that we received some mortar fire that night and the VC missed, and **LTC Healy** was all shook up. I thought the mortars were part of a celebration for my 21st birthday!

When we were extracted out of LZ Stump, I remember going to Mass and **Father Watters** (later earned the CMH) was the Chaplain that day.

### BOOBY TRAPS (Ray Ramirez, D Co)

**William Blakely** from Los Angeles was wounded in D Zone in Jan/Feb '67 when he opened the door of a truck that we found in the jungle. His injuries were not that serious. A few steps away from the truck, I walked into another booby trap. I was lucky that the Chicom grenade didn't go off as I lifted my foot. I cut the grenade from the vine and threw it into a B-52 bomb crater.

A few minutes later, we had contact with VC across the road from our location. This was during a cease fire (Tet of '67), and we were supposed to keep the VC from hitting Long Binh and Bien Hoa. Well, we could see Long Binh ammo bunkers blowing up one day from our position on a high plain in D Zone.

### MP RESCUES OUR TROOPERS (Tim Stout, 173d MP Platoon)

I won't be able to make the 2010 reunion or the 173d Memorial ceremony. I will be in the northeast US to visit some of the guys in the MP platoon.

Enjoy the reunion. If **Rudy Richter** of D Company shows up, please say Hello. He sent me an email, and he was still amazed that I let him walk out of the leg MP station in downtown Bien Hoa. My men were waiting for him and they took him and **Ray Ramirez** back to the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion area and released them. No MP reports. They owe me one.

### MARIO RAMIREZ'S LAST OPERATION (Ray Ramirez, D Co)

**Sgt. Mario Ramirez** was a draftee from Pontiac, MI, but he volunteered for Airborne. He was originally in the Anti-Tank Platoon. Mario then became a member of D Company (Provisional). Mario was killed on his last day in the jungle. The day before he was scheduled to rotate, there was no new squad leader so he went out to the field during Operation Cedar Falls.

When my squad returned to the Battalion CP, people were in tears because they had heard that Sgt. Ramirez had been killed and they thought it was Sgt. Ray Ramirez! I stayed in touch with the family for several years.

### BOOZE AT THE PLATE (Ray Ramirez, D Co)

**Al Booze** was from Michigan. He was in HHC Commo Platoon and then volunteered to join D Company. He was my machine gunner for a while. Booze was left-handed. I think he played baseball in high school and was sought after by some professional teams, but joined the Army. I remember him throwing hand grenades at a VC position and he was trying to do a little bit of pitching while he threw the grenade.

I told the guys to give me their grenades and I started throwing them at the VC just like a catcher throws a baseball.

**FIGHTING COMMUNISTS** (Dan Perez, A & D Co)

**Laszlo Rabel** was in D Company. He was one of the strongest men I ever knew. Like me, he was a refugee from a communist country. He was from Budapest, Hungary and escaped from Hungary after the 1956 revolution and eventually made it to the US. I was a refugee from Communist Cuba. Laszlo was a very good trooper. He later received the *Medal of Honor*.

**"MY BABY..."** (Ray Ramirez, D Co)

Sorry to see that **Murphy Lloyd** died of cancer in February 2008. Murphy came as a replacement to D Company. He was in my squad the night a mortar round landed in front of our position. I remember him being down in the foxhole and then covered up by pieces of wood and part of the sandbags on the roof of the foxhole. He was hit in the back and was saying, "My wife just had a baby, my wife just had a baby".

**NOTE:** When Ray's message was sent to Mrs. Lloyd, she responded.

"Thanks for forwarding the note -- that baby is now 40 years old, and looks just like Murphy did when he was born. You don't have to tell anyone, but reading that note brought tears to my eyes. Thanks for your prayers, Janice Lloyd"

**FRANK HOWARD LASKIN, KIA** (on "Virtual Wall" (Doug Gilstrap, D Co on 7/28/08)

I was there the day Laskin died, January 17, 1967. He died due to a command detonated mine that exploded under the APC we were riding in and on. We often rode in the troop compartment to escape falling ants, sniper fire, etc. But on this day, I chose to ride on top for whatever reason. Our PC was the lead vehicle in a convoy when a command detonated mine blew up the APC behind us. Those of us on top ran back to help those on the overturned APC. The APC we were just on, with Laskin inside, began to back up to help, but was also blown up by another command detonated mine.

Was he killed by small arms fire or the command detonated mine? I don't know. Just trying to set the record straight as Laskin would have wanted. He was a fine Jewish kid, age 19, from Washington, DC, that I'll forever remember. (And I'm now 60 years old.)

## **HEADQUARTERS COMPANY**

### **CORDOVA SAVES THE MARINES** (Ray Ramirez, HHC & D Co)

Sp4 Arthur Cordova was the Battalion S-2 Jeep Driver/Clerk. He and PSG Ken Liles went into the Navy Supply Activity in Da Nang one day to get a US flag for PSG Liles. Cordova slept in the jeep while waiting for the Sgt Liles. Then, some VC sappers came into the base to blow up the ammo dump. Cordova grabbed his M-16, looked down in the creek bed and saw the Cong and shot them up and stopped the attack. The AP's and Shore Patrol were chasing these guys and Cordova stopped them dead in their tracks.

When they came back to the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn CP, PSG Liles said, "Sgt. Ramirez, Cordova just killed some 'Cong". I answered, "What did he do, run them over with his jeep?" Well a few minutes later, the land line from the III MAF (USMC General. Walt's office) rang. The Marines were mad because we were in their AO. I answered that we were brought up to Da Nang because the Marines couldn't handle things!

SP4 Cordova received the Silver Star for his actions in Da Nang after we returned to Bien Hoa.

### **WHY WAS GOD WITH ME?** Rev Billy Smith, 4/503d Chaplain

After 54 years in the pulpit, I have never had a church I loved as much as I did "The Church of the Herd." We were all scared shitless at times, but the Good Lord stood by our side.

Let me share a quick story. While returning from DakTo to DEROS, I was kicked off the chopper that had to fly some ARVN from Da Nang to the field so that was the end of my ride. But, I noticed a 'meat wagon' (medical vehicle) backing up and I then saw a young 2/LT lying beside a body bag. He was bloody all over but ready to talk and pray.

After the prayer, he looked at me through young and innocent eyes with tears flowing and asked, "Chaplain, was God with me today?" I replied that his continued breath and heartbeat was a testimony of the presence of God with him. The next reply brought me to my knees again as he asked, touching the body bag, "Why was God with me? This is my platoon sergeant. He was married and had 4 children. Why did God spare my life when I only have a father living and allowed my Sergeant to die leaving a wife and 4 young children?"

There is no answer to a question like that. But I have lived my life, and I am sure you have too, with a guilt feeling of, "Why him and not me?" So, as you all gather to dedicate the 173d Memorial at Ft Benning, I will be remembering the Herd. What did I do in God's sight to be spared and another person die?

God bless you Fellow Herdsman and we will keep in touch.

Billy T. (Keeper of the Sheep - The "Herd" that is)

### **30 YEARS AIRBORNE - 4TH BATTALION WAS THE BEST** (Al Barlowe, Hq Co)

I served 30 years with airborne units and retired in 1994. After my tour with the 4/503d of the "Herd", I was re-assigned to the 82d Airborne. 93days later, I was back to 'Nam with the 82d for another tour. I just want to let everyone know that the 4th Battalion of the 173rd has and will forever be my favorite and the best unit I ever served with. God bless each and every one of you guys from the ROCK.

### **WE LEFT AS BOYS.** (Guadalupe Gonzales, HHC)

Most of us left as boys and came back as men. I am proud for the opportunity to have served with all of you.

**DON'T TRUST THE LITTLE KIDS** (Ray Ramirez, HHC and D Co)

I have some After Action Reports from the 335th Aviation Company which have comments by **Captain Davis**, Cowboy 6, who was in charge of the 3 Hueys sent to Da Nang to support the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

One Huey was damaged at the LZ where Charlie Company was located in an old French fort. I was with Battalion S3 Air and was supposed to fly to Marble Mountain for the night and visit the pilots and crew of the Cowboys and the Casper H-13 pilots based at Marble Mountain. But, the USMC in DaNang wanted an aviation report, so I had to kick it out ASAP and told the Cowboys that I would meet with them on another day.

The Huey came and picked up an RTO at the BN CP and then flew out to Charlie Company's position. We received the report that the chopper had been damaged in an explosion and there were a few injuries.

After a brief investigation, it was determined that a young boy in the local village, under threat of the VC, had put the booby trap into place. The boy was given a hand grenade by the VC and shown how to make a booby trap using string, and a paper bag and by placing the grenade under the PSP (pierced steel planking) on the LZ.

The damaged chopper was picked up the next day by a Chinook and taken back to Marble Mountain.

## OTHER STORIES

### ARTILLERY 'GRUNT' (Jim Baskin, FO, 319<sup>th</sup> Arty)

**Pappy Patchin** was one of the Recon Sergeants who did his best to train me as an Artillery Recon Sergeant for the 'grunts' in the 4/503d line companies. **Jim Conley** was another one.

On Operation Junction City, I was Pappy's RTO. After the combat jump by another battalion, the 4th Battalion set up as perimeter guard around the 155 mm SP artillery unit from the 1st Infantry Division. After we had dug our 2-man foxhole and applied top covering, I was sitting on top watching these 155's do their thing and awesome it was. Suddenly, after maybe 30 minutes of artillery fire, a check fire was called. The 155 SP near me evidently did not punch out the 'joe' (projo) from the tube when the mission was interrupted for several minutes.

When the 'All Clear' was given and they opened up again, all of a sudden this BIG explosion hit us. It knocked both of us off our bunker. The tube on that howitzer just split open next to the turret like a sardine can. One artilleryman came stumbling out the back door of the SP or what was left of it and staggered over and fell down.

Some cameraman ran over to take a picture of the fallen soldier. All I remember was this grunt with his M60 going up to that cameraman and saying, "Uh, Uh. You ain't taking no picture of this!"

If not for Pappy and the way he trained me to deal with combat, I often wonder if I would be ready to deal hot steel for my grunt brothers. But, thanks to his TOTAL training approach, I don't think I ever had a grunt come up to me and say, "Where was that steel?" It was always, "Man, that was close, but thanks!"

The best compliment I ever got was an email from **Captain Dick Stilwell** (who had been B Company CO) shortly before he was killed IN LA when he called me one of his best 'artillery grunts'. I hold that compliment dear to my heart.

### TOUGH TEAM – 173d LRRPs (Reed Cundiff, HHC, A Co & 173d LRRPs)

**Laszlo Rabel** was born in Budapest and escaped from Hungary after the 1956 revolution. He eventually made it to the US. Laszlo really hated Communists. The tale that we got from him was that he had lost a number of family and friends in the revolution and that he led a blinded friend across the mined border into Austria.

He deployed with 4th Bn in June 1966 and stayed with the 173d until he was KIA November 13, 1968. He earned the **Medal of Honor** and was named to the Ranger Hall of Fame.

Laszlo and Sgt **Patrick "Tad" Tadina** were buddies. Tad took over my LRRP team with Laszlo as his assistant. Tad had 50 months patrolling, 116 confirmed kills and about 20 captured. They had a pact that if either was permanently maimed, they would do in the other. Now-retired CSM Tadina's brother was also Infantry. When his brother was killed, Tad wouldn't leave 'Nam until he was forced to by a general.

One of the guys still left from my team was a nice Catholic kid from California who told me, "Sergeant, my job in this world is to kill Communists for Christ!" So, at least three members of Team 4 at that time were Crusaders (or mujahadeen or whatever, but absolute true believers).

### BARGAIN ROLEX (Mike Goodwin, Medic, B Co)

Did I ever tell you about the Rolex I bought the day before we left 'Nam? Paid 5 Dong for it. I had an offer for over \$100 bucks for it when I showed it around. I was back in the "world" about 2 weeks when it quit. I took the watch to a high-dollar jewelry store in Oklahoma City. I told the high-brow jeweler that I bought it on the street in Saigon for \$5 bucks before I left. He popped the back off the watch, and ... you guessed it... the rubber band had broken. I've told this true story over 1000 times so it was worth the \$100 I turned down.

### **GERONIMO'S JOURNEY TO 'NAM (Elmer "Buddy" Davis, C Co)**

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

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

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

I had to convince the Brigade Commander, a full colonel, that I was sent by LTC Healy. He was surprised, but gave approval to send our buddy to Vietnam. There was no problem lifting and loading Geronimo in my pickup. I put him in the front seat with me. Nothing else to do, so I talked to Geronimo on the way to Post Transportation. I asked Geronimo if he knew he was dropped from the rolls of the 4th Battalion as a deserter?

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

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

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

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

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

**\*NOTE:** See **GERONIMO FOUND** under **THE LATER YEARS**

### **DEFINITION OF A 'BASE CAMP BETTY' (Mike Strange, C Co)**

A "Base Camp Betty" did nothing but burn crap and write home with war stories.

### **MISTAKEN IDENTITY - BOB STOWELL (Reed Cundiff, A Co & Bde LRRPs)**

**LT Bob Stowell** (C Co and LRRPs) and I both wore glasses, had somewhat prominent noses and similar-shaped heads and had receding hairlines even then (things haven't improved over the years). One day, LT Stowell and his LRRP driver were going somewhere in a jeep and they gave a bunch of 173rd Admin Company guys a lift and they got in the back.

The Admin types had known me when I was one of them before I joined LRRPs. They joked with LT Stowell and slapped him on the back and asked him, "Reed, so how is LRRP treating you?" LT Stowell had a hard time convincing them that he was not me.

LRRP/74th Inf Rangers earned two DSCs in five years and Bob was one of them. He got the **DSC** leading a patrol near Katum when he took Team 3 out (it had been **SSG Guill's** Team, but Guill was retiring as an E-6, having been busted from E-9 to E-5 in SF).

The LRRP team got into a fight with at least a platoon of NVAs. All except one of us got a bullet through boot, pack, clothing or M-16, but Bob was the only one wounded. He took three rounds in the torso and no one knew about it until they had been lifted out. The rounds managed to miss anything vital. He was back in the field two weeks later.

Later, when the Brigade was waiting at Plantation Tierra Rouge (the one with the swimming pool and huge trees) before the jump at Katum, I was wandering about with my team (I had led six infiltrations by then). We ran into some 4/503rd Admin guys. One of asked, "What the heck is our payroll clerk doing out here?" I told them they had me confused with my REMF identical twin brother at Admin. That got them even more confused and apologetic.

### **GLENN ENGLISH, MEDAL OF HONOR (Ray Ramirez, D Co)**

**Glenn English** was from Altoona, PA. He had prior service in Germany with a LRRP unit in the early 60s. He got out of the Army and then joined up again and ended up in HQ Company, 4/503d in the S-3 Section. He was a 3/4 ton truck driver and RTO. He was on the ship with us taking the unit to RVN. The Headquarter "rats" were way down in the bottom compartment on the USNS General John Pope and we had all kinds of living space!

Glenn extended his tour with the 173d after most of us from the original 4/503d left RVN in June '67. He was KIA with E/3/503d in 1970 and received the **Medal of Honor** for his actions.

I spoke with his father years ago and also spoke with his daughter in PA. I found out that the MOH was with a sister in Alaska. Glenn also has a sister living in Sacramento, CA; she came to a memorial service in Sacramento, CA, and someone mentioned to me that someone in the audience was Glenn's sister. But, by the time I looked around, she had left the area. Damn, it!

Glenn is buried at the Ft. Bragg cemetery just as you enter the cemetery from the parking lot. The Education Center at Ft. Campbell, KY, is named after **SSG Glenn English** and there is a photo of him in the building.

### **SUPERMAN ARTILLERY F.O. - CHARLES (PAPPY) PATCHIN** (from a message)

You asked what company in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion I FO'd for. The answer is all of them. I was an FO from B Battery, 3/319<sup>th</sup> Artillery. I was a Corporal, Recon Sgt/FO 13F4P. I was assigned to the 4th Batt from when it came arrived in Vietnam in June 1966 till I rotated in May 1968. **Mike Healy** was the guy who gave me the nickname "Pappy". After you all rotated, I stayed on and D Battery was created and became Direct Support for 4th Battalion in Jan '68.

The 4/503d rotated between Dak To and Tuy Hoa when we moved up from Bien Hoa to II Corps with our HQ at An Khe. While we were doing that I was sent to Tuy Hoa AFB with my RTO and we were the Arty LNO for the base. The AF had real stupid rules of engagement. Somebody actually had to be shot in order for them to return fire! We, being Army, had different rules. We fired the shooters up whenever we got the call. VC activity cooled down for a while. When we got back to Dak To, I was sent to the SF and did some cross border ops with them to observe the Ho Chi Minh Trail - this I was told was because of my "signature voice" on the

radio. After Hill 875 Dave Eaton, the Engineer, and I went home on extension leave. Dave and I were at Bde Repple Depple (replacement) at An Khe and took a bunch of cherries to the airstrip to repel the VC assault when TET '68 started. The next day had us at Tuy Hoa when the D Co CO, **Cpt Jim Jackson**, led a bayonet charge at "The Cemetery". He was nicknamed "Cpt Midnight" because he was black. He got a Silver Star.

For the year before the 4th came over, I FO'd in the 1st Bn, LRRPs, E 17th Cav, D-16 Armor and the Australians. I'd made all the big battles from Sep '65 to when I went to 4<sup>th</sup>. I FO'd for all the companies. I did DaNang with Bravo and stayed with them most of the time while we were in III Corps. Then, I spent a lot of time with A and Dog and a bit with Charlie. I wound up as a SSG E-6.

I FO'd once for B Co, 2d Bn when Jack Leide was the CO. Jack had been my Platoon Leader in the National Guard before I graduated from high school! He retired as a 2 star and was Schwarzkopf's CJ-3 in Operation Desert Storm.

After I left the Bde I went to Inf OCS at Benning and ran into a lot of the original 4th Batt men.

### **SMALL WORLD** (**Ray Ramirez, D Co**)

Geraldo (TV show) Rivera's 3rd wife attended high school with me at Montebello High School in California. The same school was attended by **Cpt. Lorenzo (Larry) Sanchez**, Medic **Fred Ortiz**, RTO **Louis Costello**, **Pete Ramirez**, and **Peter Vasquez**, all Airborne troopers. Another guy from Montebello High named **Gossef** served in '65 or '66. He died in Pleasanton, CA a few years ago.

**Pete Ramirez** (my oldest brother) served in Okinawa with the 2/503d. I got **Fred Ortiz** into the 4th Bn in Vietnam when I saw him at Brigade headquarters processing into the 173d. After **Cpt. Sanchez** joined the 173d, we were playing football one day in base camp and he was playing QB. I asked him where he was from (I knew the answer) and then told him I knew his brother and his sister-in-law from high school days.

**Fred Ortiz** was shot in the leg a few months later and went home. **Louis Costello** came in as a replacement in March or May and he was in the Battles of Dak To as the RTO for **Sgt. Larry Okendo** (3 CIBs).

**Pete Vasquez** came to Viet Nam in 68-69 as a SSG. He worked for the LA County Sheriff's Dept after Vietnam and I got him to finally join up with our 173d Chapter XIV.

# **GOING HOME**

## **GOING HOME - THE FIRST STOP** (Alan Boyle, C Co)

"Tomorrow, you're going to leave here and go to a hospital in Japan," the doctor said. "You've been stabilized enough to travel and your burns need more attention than we can give them. We'll change your bandages this afternoon for the trip tomorrow."

Morning came early. Nurses scurried about me making last-minute checks on my tubes, my drainage bags and IV tubes. They put my records and belongings on my bed - my entire world now. Six nurses lifted me onto a stretcher and wheeled me out of the hospital and out to the big plane waiting on a runway near the hospital. It felt strange to be outside; the air, the hot sun were alien to me. I had become isolated from life beyond my hospital bed.

My journey now would be inward, physically and emotionally. Healing would require my total focus. The next year would demand more of me than I would sometimes be able to give

The plane was a specially-configured C-141 with the tail ramp down so you could see inside its wide belly. It was filled on both sides with stretchers three levels high. In the middle were two more stacks of three which made for a pretty full planeload of people. Doctors, nurses, medics and crew all went about their duties, checking straps, tubes, records, patients, and the aircraft itself. When it was my turn to be loaded on, they lifted me on the plane and strapped me down on the bottom of one of the rows. It was dark, quiet and womb-like, even though all around me the activity continued. Lying there, it hit me: I was leaving Vietnam, the place where, for the past 11 months, I had struggled to survive and feared I wouldn't. Being on the plane was more proof to me that I was really going to go home. A year of all that fear, craziness, so much death and now these injuries had changed me forever.

"He didn't make it," said the nurse as they unstrapped the stretcher above me and carried it off the plane. Fear that it could have been me mixed with sadness for that soldier who wouldn't go home alive. Again, it reminded me that I was glad I did make it and would get home somehow.

The plane door closed, the lights dimmed, and lying at the bottom of the tier of patients, I felt peace. Unable to move anything but my nose, lying in the dark, I was carried into the sky in a big steel can hurtling forward through time and space, disconnected from all of the things that I had called Life. With the realization that I had left Vietnam, the hum of the airplane engines, and the Demerol, I fell asleep. Next stop was Yokohama, Japan.

## **GOING HOME - OAKLAND ARMY TERMINAL** (Mike Talerco, B Co)

We landed at Travis Air Force Base and were loaded onto buses and taken to Oakland Army Terminal for processing. We arrived 6:00 am, exactly four hours after take-off, only in a different time zone.

The flight from Vietnam home had been 18 hours, non-stop. As we drove along the highway in California, the simplest things became things of beauty: roads for instance. (it had been almost a year since I'd seen a paved road); buildings more than one story high and not made of straw and mud; automobiles, with women in them. These all looked fantastic.

The drive back to Oakland Terminal where we had departed a year ago was the beginning of our healing process; we were starting to get used to the familiar surroundings. We arrived at the terminal around 8:00 am.

Most of the guys returning were directed a different way than me and a few others. I was getting out of the Army, finished, complete, and Adios, MF.

I was given a physical, a new dress uniform, complete with the 173rd patch on my left shoulder signifying my last unit, and a 173rd patch on my right shoulder signifying my combat unit, and I received a "Recon" patch to go over it.

I also received the most important thing of all, my "Combat Infantry Badge", which, along with my jump wings, were the only two things I cared about.

Processing out of the service took all day. I remember calling home and telling them I would probably get home sometime tomorrow. I was discharged at around 9:00 pm.

I grabbed a cab outside and headed to San Francisco airport; I was going home.

At the airport, I wanted the next plane headed to JFK, LaGuardia, or Newark airport, it didn't matter. I got on a flight to JFK airport. It was to land in NY around 5:00 am.

I was wearing my new dress uniform and was looking good. At the airport, I was a little concerned because I had heard that some assholes actually spit on soldiers returning from Vietnam. I could not imagine why anyone would do that.

### **HOME AT LAST (Mike Talerco, B Co)**

When I arrived at JFK, I immediately went outside and got into the first cab. I asked the driver how much it would cost to go to Little Falls, NJ. He looked it up and said \$20. I agreed and we took off. As we drove, he started asking me questions about my service. I told him I was returning from Vietnam and I hadn't been home for a year. He didn't ask the usual stupid questions like, "Did you kill anyone?" or things like that. He asked my opinion of the war. We had a nice conversation all the way to Little Falls. He asked if I was in the Air Force because my patch said "Airborne", and I explained. He was impressed. When we got close to my home I asked him to let me off on the corner of Main Street and Route 23. This was about a half-mile from my house and I wanted to walk it. I got out of the cab and went to give him his \$20. He told me, "Forget it. Welcome home." I thanked him and off I went.

It was around 6:00 am, May 7th. The weather was clear and cool. I threw my duffle bag over my shoulder and started walking. I wanted to take my time and just look at all the

A guy pulled up and stopped to offer me a ride. I explained how I just wanted to walk. He said, "Welcome home and thanks".

I walked past my old grammar school, School #3, Little Falls. Past my aunt's and uncle's house, my grandmother's street, and several more familiar places. It was unlike any other time in my life; I felt like I was in heaven. Then, I turned the bend and saw my home. I could feel the swelling in my chest, my eyes started to tear; I was almost home.

# AFTER VIETNAM

## REMEMBERING. (Juan (John) Herrera, D Co)

We were young and brave then. Now we are old and wise. Remember our lost brothers for they will live forever in our minds.

## A GHOST RETURNS AFTER 40 YEARS (Jim Baskin, Arty FO, B Co)

I got a phone call the other day (in 2008) from a "ghost"!

I had taken R&R just before Hill 823 with a guy named **Timothy Williams**. When I got back to B Company, I came down with malaria. After I was released from the hospital several weeks later, I went back to the company and looked for Tim. Someone told me he got killed on Hill 823 or 830.

For over 40 years, I had this emptiness in me because I had become close to Tim and had not been able to say goodbye.

Then suddenly, out of the blue, Tim called me up. Brother, I cried like a little baby. Talking to Tim was so good on my heart. I had tears and felt choked up all day and through the night.

Tim lives in Michigan City, Indiana and has Agent Orange prostate cancer. Said he was going to try and make the 2008 reunion.

## GERONIMO FOUND (Dayton Herrington, HHC)

I came across the story of Geronimo by **Sgt Buddy Davis**, so I called him. Buddy can't come to the 4/503d reunion in 2008 because he has COPD. But, he told me the story of Geronimo again. Of course, he asked, "I wonder where Geronimo is now?"

My response was, "I know where Geronimo is and I've seen him since we came home. He's in Alaska and I had my picture taken with him at the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment."

My trip to Alaska came about because, in the planning phase for a D Day celebration in 2003, the 501st in Alaska decided that a veteran of each of the Regiments should be present. Ft Campbell was contacted and my name came up. I was invited and I accepted.

I hit the road on 28 May for the June 6th event as I knew it was a long drive (up and back just over 8800 miles, 5 days driving each way). But, what a drive and I have seven rolls of film to show for it.

Upon arrival, I reported to the Commander, LTC John Glenn. Much to my surprise, can you believe that just outside of the Commander's office there was Geronimo "on duty" as always, looking good? You can bet pictures (more than one) were taken and I will bring them to the 2008 reunion.

Anyway, after talking to **Buddy Davis**, I called the 501st in Alaska that night and talked with the Duty NCO, Geronimo being the subject matter. He said, "Sure, Geronimo is here. I'm looking at him". So, you Geronimo guys of the 4th Battalion, 'Heads Up'. Geronimo is not lost. He is at home in Bldg #661, Headquarters 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, Ft Richardson, Alaska, standing proudly "on guard" for them as he did for us 40 years ago and Sergeant Davis knows it.

## JOHN ROCHFORD WHO BECAME A MINISTER (Mike Strange, C Co)

I'm not surprised to find **John (Rock)** is a minister. In an environment where profanity was the number one language, English second and Vietnamese third, I never heard him utter a single bad word.

**AIRBORNE SPIRIT AT 75** (2008 Letter from **Dayton Herrington** to Jack Tarr)

You know what I say??? Live every day with an Airborne Attitude and get the most possible out of that day. A lot has happened since I last was in touch with you so allow me to bring you up to date on some of it.

I am the **Honorary Sergeant Major** for the 101st Air Assault School at Fort Campbell. As such, I go to the school 2-3 times a week or more. Once a month, I do a 12 mile road march with the graduation class which starts at 0430 and has to be completed in 3 hours or the student does not graduate.

On most mornings, I'm out of the sack at 0600, go to Campbell and run with some unit. 2 miles is enough, and I'm done by 0745, go to the school to show myself and get a handle on things, then go to a mess hall and suck on coffee and talk with the troops. OK, so it's a big deal, but much better than a bottle of pills.

By the way, for the D-day celebrations in 2003, I was invited, as an old member of the Geronimo Battalion, to Ft Richardson, Alaska. I accepted with the condition that I lead the Task Force in a 4 mile run, the first event of the day, on 6 June. What a drive to Alaska -- 5 days each way, 8000 plus miles. When I arrived and reported in, the first question the TF Commander, LTC H.C. Glenn, asked was, "Are you sure that you can do this run?" "Well", I replied, "guess we will just have to wait and see". After some 3 miles, I dropped back and called cadence for A Company (in drag). Well, was he ever surprised -- he thought that I had "fallen out".

As a result of my effort, I was given a very nice picture of a winter jump at Malamute, vicinity of Ft Richardson, signed off on by the TF CO and the CSM. During the trip, I took 7 rolls of film and put them in an album. I will bring the album to the 2008 reunion.

Now for the best of the best. I always make the 101st Airborne Division Run, the first event of the "Week of the Eagles". 2006 was the last one and I was there with a special T-shirt that drew the attention of the Division Commander. One thing led to another and I finished the week with a parachute jump (free fall) from 14,500 ft. What a deal...when is the next one?

**MY NEW EMAIL ADDRESS** (Mike Strange, C Co)

I don't like my new email address, but my wife was on the phone with AOL trying to find a name that wasn't taken. I came out of the shower and she saw the tattoo, **SAT CONG 66** (Kill VC 1966) on my lower back and used it. If I had been facing her it would have been Anaconda, or perhaps Worm.

**THE SPIRIT OF OUR CHAPLAIN - BILLY SMITH** (from a letter he wrote in 2008)

I was especially blessed with the poem, *Bury Me With Soldiers*. I have made a copy for future military funerals. I will always mention the Chaplain's name that wrote it.

I am glad you and your wife had a good time in England. I really like the English breakfast. I wanted so bad to go back to Germany one more time but that is history. The reason it is history....the VA put me in a wheel chair. I can get up from the chair and walk, but the strength in my legs is very little. But, God has given me 78 years of wonderful living. The "Herd" is my second family and I wake each day filled with piss and vinegar.....go to the pot, and with a successful "Passing of the guard", I shout "Good morning Vietnam".....loud enough for my wife to hear it as she cooks breakfast.

One of the men in the baptismal picture of 1966 lives In Illinois. He drove down to visit me two weeks ago and we acted like two women.....never stopped talking. He got here at 10am and left at 5pm. What a terrific guy. He built his life around that baptism and today is a strong church worker. He was one of the MP's assigned to the 4th Battalion. Gen Healy called the young man in and told him he was putting him in for a CIB. He got it and is very proud.

I have a new grand daughter so we are getting ready to make our way to Atlanta. It is great to be retired.

Keeper of the flock,

Billy T.

### **COUNTRY ROOTS (Mike Goodwin, B Co)**

**Mark Severn** grew up in Tom, OK. He was a barber before he was drafted. He was a guy who actually came to town on a dump truck. When I lived in East Texas, I went to see him. My Granddad hunted deer and birds on his Dad's property. Seems my Granddad may have helped the Severn folks move a little white lightening back in the good old days. My Dad didn't tell me that until one day we stopped at the only store in Tom, OK.

Severn was RTO for **1SG Poe** and the Company XO. He did a great imitation of **Sgt Thompson**, the platoon sergeant. Thompson would say, "Severn, you and Amaya are ass-kissers and brown-nosers". Severn and Amaya would retort, ".....you very much, Sgt Thompson, Sir. Air-in-Barn!" When they DEROSSED, they mooned Sgt Thompson from the back of a deuce-and-a-half, I swear.

After I got back from 'Nam, I visited his place with my Dad and asked about Severn. My Pop and the Severns had been good friends. Mark had just left. We caught up with him and he took us to his Momma's house. When Pop got out of the car, he said, "Wait a minute, I've been here before. What's your Daddy's and Momma's name, Son?" About that time, Mark's Mom stepped out on the porch and said, ""Good God, Mr. Shelton. (my Dad's name). What are you doing here? We haven't made any 'shine since Mark's Daddy died".

Mark and I went out to the well a while later to have a smoke. Mark said, "Grab that big flashlight ". He started pulling up the rope of the well. After about two minutes, up comes a gallon jug of the most mellow tasting home brew you ever saw (Yes, we tested it). When we finally left, Mrs Severn gave Pop a grocery bag of purple hull peas and said, "Shelton, you give these to Miss Clara (my Grandma)". When she said that, I just about busted a gut.

The last I saw Mark, he had built his wife and baby a huge house, had 50 or so cattle, worked off shore, made big bucks, and was doing great. Hadn't seen him since 1979.

### **I'D DO IT AGAIN Joe Oliverio, B Co**

Back in 2005, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. They hit me with all they had and I was cancer free until I had another biopsy done in October of this year, and it is back in all its glory. Now I am diagnosed with advanced prostate cancer. Cat scans and bone scans are next in order to make sure that it didn't spread. I think that about now I can use all the prayers that I can get. Am I afraid? Sure, as any man would be facing this shit. But, always remember that even though I contacted this while in Viet Nam, I would not change anything, and I would do it all over again if I had to.

I love all my 4/503 brothers and I will die loving you all.....Sincerely Joe Oliverio

# **REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN BUDDIES**

## **THEN AND NOW**

### **REMEMBERING AT THE WALL (Reed Cundiff, A Co & Bde LRRPs)**

**Joe Kegley, Co Company**, was one of the first from the Battalion who were killed when a chopper went down on an air assault and 6 Charlie Company men died. Kegley and I played Scrabble a lot on the troop ship going over. They were the only times I have ever played the game that we ran out of tiles numerous times. He was a great friend.

I visited the Wall when I was on a 10 or 11 month detail at the Pentagon. My wife, Elaine, was able to get the kids out of school for a month (they had to do their lessons and keep a diary). They were both in accelerated programs so there was no problem. The last night, we walked down the Washington Monument Mall and over to the Lincoln Memorial under a late November moon.

I looked up **Joe Kegley's** name on the Wall. I really didn't feel anything until our daughter, Elisa, (now at NYU, and then six years old), reached for my hand and said, "Daddy, I know how much you must miss your friends!" I couldn't help crying and letting loose the feelings I had kept bottled up.

### **REMEMBERING COY TURNER (by LV Turner, nephew)**

**NOTE: Coy Turner, C Company**, was KIA May 17, 2007, two weeks from his DEROS out of 'Nam. The letter below was sent to one of Coy's buddies, **Jerry Downard**, who had made contact with the family.)

Mr. Downard,

It is a GREAT honor to finally have contact with someone Coy shared the last several months with. As Margaret said, my Mom and Dad helped raise Coy when his mother left my uncle when Coy was only 2 or 3.

I remember the Christmas before he left for Vietnam. I received a toy gun and handcuff set and Coy played with me. He captured me and handcuffed me. It is a memory I can keep stored in my mind forever.

The picture I have attached is from the day he left "Harvey's Ridge" or Chance, KY (15 miles south of Columbia, KY). I look upon my face and on the face of Coy.....I am so proud to be standing beside him and his face now tells me the pain he felt in leaving home.

I have also included a picture of the cemetery, which is across the road from the house my mother and father built. This resting place is where, first my father was buried in 1965, and then Coy was placed beside him in 1967. If you look to the left of the cemetery, you see one stone in front followed by a couple of stones in the next row back, and then three stones with a larger one on the left. The one on the right with a big wreath and the middle stone is Coy's. He is buried between my father on the right and his father and aunts on the left.

To honor YOU and all those who have given so much to this country, we keep a flag on his grave year-round. It is not enough, but seems to be all we can do to honor Coy, YOU, and so many others. As Billy Ray Cyrus put it so well, "You all gave some and SOME GAVE ALL".....but such a high price for ALL of you to pay. THANK YOU.

The picture of Coy between my brother James, my sister Margaret, and myself hangs on my wall near my desk. Again, THANK YOU for being there for Coy.

L.V. Turner

### **WE WON'T FORGET - SGT KENNEDY'S GRAVESTONE (Steve Becsi, D Co)**

On March 7, 1967, a friend of mine in Dog Company died in an ambush while attached to the 11 Armored Cav. The platoon (recon) was riding on top of the tanks while busting jungle. **Sgt Charles F. Kennedy** died immediately in the ambush. I talked to **Sam Schroeder**, the soldier who pulled him away from the line of fire, and he said Kennedy had already died.

During a trip to eastern Arkansas, I made a special trip to find the family and gravesite of Sgt. Kennedy. The people of Blytheville, AR, were especially helpful. The library helped with locating a 40-year-old obituary and printed it from the original newspaper which they had never permitted before. The funeral home which handled his arrangements showed me exactly where he was buried and attempted to help find next of kin so that I might tell them how he died and that he was a good soldier and a good friend to all that knew him.

I never found any relatives or friends in town. When I paid my respects at the cemetery, I noticed that vandals had shot out the picture of Sgt Kennedy that was attached to the gravestone. I asked **Morrell Woods** when he visited the reunion in Fayetteville to see if anyone had a picture of Kennedy. Sure enough, Woods received a picture that was probably taken at DaNang when the 4/503d went up there in 1966. I think someone named **Schultz** from HHC sent the photo. However, if that person would contact me, I would like to thank him personally. Anyway, a few months later, I was pleased to attach the new photo of Sgt Kennedy on his monument. To all his friends, I want you to know that it was my pleasure to be able to do this for a good friend. Airborne!

### **A SOLDIER'S PROMISE - JERRY HAGUE'S WALLET (Jesse Rizzo, B Co)**

**Jerry Hague** and I served together on the machinegun team of weapons squad of B Company's 1st platoon. I think Jerry arrived in country around August, 1966. We were on many operations together assigned to the same gun. Jerry and I had a lot in common and became good buddies. On Junction City 11, April 7th to be exact, I was wounded in an ambush and evacuated to a hospital near Saigon. After my recovery, I was given the option of going home or staying and rotating with my unit. I chose to stay and rotate with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

On or about May 20, 1967, Jerry was wounded and evacuated to the same hospital I had been in. I went to see him a few days later and was at his hospital bed for about an hour. He had been shot in the chest and was stitched from his belly button to his neck. He had breathing and feeding tubes in his mouth and nose. Although groggy and barely conscious, he looked at me and gave a big smile. We spoke very little, however, because he could hardly talk. His wallet was on the side table and he signaled to me to take his wallet for safe keeping.

As it turned out, Jerry died a few days later and his body was sent home. I rotated with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion on June 5, 1967 and brought the wallet with me. I tried to find Jerry's family to return the without success.

I put the wallet away, but every so often over the years, I would take it out and tell my children about Jerry and our time together on the machine gun.

During the 173d reunion in Reno in 2005, I asked **Ray Ramirez** to help find the Hague family. Ray did. Thanks to Ray, I finally made contact with Jerry's first and oldest son, **Thad Hague**. After several phone conversations with Thad, we agreed that I would go to River Falls, WI, and to return the wallet to Jerry's family. In 2006, after almost 40 years, I finally returned the wallet at a ceremony organized by the Chapter of 173rd in River Falls, WI. The wallet was give to Jerry's grandson who has the same name as Jerry.

A friend of Thad Hague put all the news clips from the various TV appearances (including the *Today Show*) on a DVD. It's really very well done. Also, there was a story published in a local community newspaper. The whole experience was very emotional and it took me several months to get back to normal.

### **“Z” SAYS GOODBYE (Harold Snider, B Co)**

You must remember **SSG Salvador Zavala** (1st Platoon, Weapons Squad, B Company). "Z" was a First Sergeant in the Infantry Officer's Basic Course Battalion at Ft Benning in '68 or '69 after we returned from 'Nam. I was in the Basic Training Brigade and we saw each other occasionally.

One day he came to the company and told me that he was there to say goodbye. He had terminal cancer of some sort and was put on terminal leave the following day. He was going home to California to die! Yep, I was shocked! Still am! Another great guy gone.

**NOTE: Ray Rodriguez** said his ashes were spread on Bastogne DZ, Ft Campbell, by his ex-wife in an Army chopper.

### **ARNIE THORVIK – KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY (Jack Tarr, C Co)**

I tracked down **Arnie Thorvik's** widow, **Darlene**. Arnie was killed by a druggie in 1990 while working as a security guard. He had also done undercover work. Darlene has remarried, but talks warmly about Arnie. Their daughter, Ann, now in her 30s, was very close to her Dad and it was tough. Darlene will send me photos of the funeral which they sent to Arnie's parents in Norway.

Arnie came to the US from Norway and was in Charlie Company. Many of his buddies wanted to find him and were deeply saddened by the news that he had died.

### **GETTING TOGETHER – A PROMISE KEPT (Bob Canuel, B Co)**

I wanted to share a meaningful experience I had recently by keeping a promise to my M79 man and good friend, **PFC Harry Spier**. Harry and I always said we would get together after returning back to the "world". Regretfully, on 10 July, 67, Harry was killed by enemy hostile fire.

In early 2007, I searched out Harry's mother, **Vera Spier**, who still resides in Tyler, TX. On 9 May 2007, I visited with Mrs. Spier, and my friend, Harry, who was laid to rest also in Tyler. Bev and I had a great visit with Mrs. Spier and felt great keeping my promise to Harry and spending time at his gravesite.

I printed out a lot of Gold Star information for Mrs. Spier and she assured me she would be filling it out and returning it to the 173rd Abn Association.

Just thought I'd share this honor with you. Airborne all the way!!

### **CALLING DON MICHAEL'S MOM (Mike Strange, C Co)**

For years, I knew I should call **Don Michael's** Mom, but I was afraid to and felt I wouldn't know what to say. And then in 1988, I think, I finally got up the courage to call. Rather than dig up painful memories, she was so thrilled to hear from me. Wish I had done it years before.

# DEALING WITH THE MEMORIES

## HOW WE DEAL WITH IT... (Thom Cook, Sr Medic, C Co)

Thanks for giving my phone number to **Frank**. He always called me **T.C.** which not too many people have. He said he had spoken with you for about an hour. Frank got somewhat emotional as did Mike and a bunch more. They never realized there was help and what PTSD was.

We all left something in Viet Nam; mostly our youth. Being Paratroopers, I believe, helped us all in later life. But, with the 4th Battalion it was not just being a Paratrooper, but being a part of a great organization with leadership from the top to the bottom and back up.

I have met veterans that are envious that I served with a complete Battalion which arrived together from the States instead of being a FNG.

Speaking with combat vets, most go to bed with a glass of pure water next to them on a night stand. They might not drink from it but it is there if they want it. No taste of iodine or Kool-Aid. I did it for years. I have known other vets who filled that glass with whiskey. Hopefully, they have found that the water and a good sleeping pill works better, especially at our age.

My big fetish was and is clean socks. If I make a three-day trip I have at least six pairs of socks. Putting on a dry pair of (not always clean) socks in the morning in Viet Nam was almost as good as sex.

## BELIEVING AGAIN. (Mike Strange, C Co, who was helped by Thom Cook)

We were in financial trouble because of my PTSD when I first started talking to **Thom Cook**, who had been the Senior Medic in Charlie Company. Because of Thom's help, I was awarded 100% disability by VA right out of the box within 4 or 5 months. Had to be some kind of record. And, then, Social Security, which automatically turns everyone down the first time, accepted me within 6 months.

My wife and I decided this wasn't coincidence so we're bringing God back into our home.

## GETTING THE VA's ATTENTION (Jim Baskin, Arty FO)

I was with 4th Battalion from Feb '67 to Mar '68. Got medevaced out to Walter Reed after my stay at 6th CC following Dak To.

Also, **Mike Strange** isn't the only one to get his disability AND Social Security on the first go around. I got my SS in 1 month after filing! Evidently the shrink thought I was insane enough to end her life.

## THE VA WILL HELP (Ron Best, B Co Medic)

I never knew that there was help for us in regard to PTSD. I knew something was wrong with me, but didn't know what to do about it. I went to the VA hospital to see about getting some meds or something and accidentally ran into a Veterans Service Rep. He said, "Hello, I haven't seen you here before. What can I do for you?"

I said, "I don't know, I'm just here to see about some meds, possibly for sleeping, etc." He responded, "Come into my office so I can talk with you." I wound up with a 10% rating and a beginning in regard to treatment.

Years later, I called my credit union to check on my balance and the customer rep said, "You have \$15,000 balance". Now, that was unusual! Turns out that a VA reviewer was reading through my records while doing an audit and found a place that showed I had been having trouble breathing (intrinsic asthma from Vietnam). He said the VA hadn't responded, so he awarded me the \$15,000. Surprises like that I can handle.

**Thom Cook**, C Company medic, can explain quite a bit about the VA system and VA law, but this gives an idea how the system is there to help us.

### **A VET LOOKS BACK AND AT TODAY (Peter Klausner, A Co)**

Our son, **Eric**, returned from Iraq in December and is prepping for a trip to Afghanistan with a Stryker Unit. He is currently stationed in Graf, Germany.

The last reunion I attended was Ft Bragg or Boston, I don't remember. Now I am recovering from a "bout" with cancer and don't have the blessings of the MD to go very far. Maybe next year.

You hear a lot of folks saying, "I support our Troops". Often wonder what that means and just how are they supporting them? Is it by voting, by sending mail or presents, speaking well of them, having a loved one there serving? I agree: Afghanistan, Yes; Iraq, No. But, I DO SUPPORT OUR TROOPS NO MATTER WHERE!

My wife continues to spec out the candidates in the homeless drug unit at the VA looking for some of ours. Nearest we have found were a few from the 82nd. We always feed them, give them some tasks around here to do for extra \$ and make them feel loved. I give them "a coin" so they know we are thinking of them. We all suffer in one way or the other, don't we? Wars are terrible things, so much is lost, and we have to ask who wins?

I am guilty of not getting in touch with 4th Batt guys in the area; I will make amends. I try to think of what to say, but always feel awkward. Guess I need more practice.

I read of the loss of the two 4/503d vets who just died. Our numbers are shrinking. You must be getting older.

So much for my rambling on. Thanks for your well wishes, and we shall meet on a drop zone one day!

**NOTE:** Soon after **Eric** redeployed, he was severely wounded by an IED and is in a hospital in North Carolina.

### **MEDIC STILL TAKING CARE OF THE TROOPS (Jack Tarr, C Co)**

**Thom Cook** was the Senior Medic for Charlie Company. Special-Forces trained for 13 months, he joined us just before we deployed to RVN. After his tour with 4/503d, Thom returned to VN with a Special Forces Team. He is one of the few men to have earned a CIB, CMB, Master Jump Wings and Recondo Badge.

He told me something about his service as a Medic that exemplifies the kind of person he is. "The only real fear I had in Viet Nam on that first tour was not dying, but making a mistake as a medic and killing one of our own out of lack of knowledge or not getting there fast enough".

Since Vietnam, Thom has helped thousands of Vietnam vets with their claims to the VA. His success rate of claims accepted and benefits awarded is incredible. As we have contacted more troopers from the Geronimo Battalion, Thom has helped even more vets. Below is an extract from a message of Thom's in August 2007.

"We have claims for 4th Battalion guys going all over the Country. We have already made plans for another trip on our bikes, this time to Arkansas, to see **Michael Strange** and get him working on helping some of our brothers in his state. The new 173d Association President is interested in doing more claims on PTSD and is going to start a program with Smitty and me helping. We will probably go to Houston, TX, and see him.

My wife, **Betty**, tried to get me to quit this business about five years ago. We were driving to the VFW and I lied and said I would quit soon. She asked me what I would do if I quit. We were driving by a golf course at the time and the only thing I could come up with was I would take up golf. That Christmas I had a very nice set of golf clubs which have not seen a golf course yet".

### **DEDICATION OF MY BOOK, "GHOSTS OF VIETNAM" (Mike Talerco, B Co)**

This book is dedicated to the men who died in Vietnam and to those who returned wounded. It is also dedicated to the men who returned home unscathed only to find indifference towards their efforts.

They have no medals, no visible wounds; they are the real heroes of Vietnam because for them the war has never ended. They were not volunteers. Their country required them to serve.

They suffer the wounds of a nation that made them feel unloved, "For no greater love a man can give his country than to lay down his life for it". Although they were prepared to do just that, they survived.

No medals, no wounds, just the memory of what they gave.

For **Robert John "Bobby" Pepe**, the uncle I never knew, who died a few months after going ashore at Normandy on June 6th, 1944.

For **Roberta Kwiatkowski**, my mother-in-law, who upon hearing some of the stories, convinced me to put them in writing. Without her encouragement at the beginning I never would have started it.

And for my grandchildren, who, without this book, would never truly know their grandfather.

And for my son, **Willy**.

**WHY WAS GOD WITH ME?** From a letter by **Rev Billy Smith**, 4/503d Chaplain, in 2010

After 54 years in the pulpit, I have never had a church I loved as much as I did "The Church of the Herd." We were all scared shitless at times, but the Good Lord stood by our side.

Let me share a quick story. While returning from DakTo DEROS, I was kicked off the chopper that had to fly some ARVN from Da Nang to the field so that was the end of my ride. But, I noticed a 'meat wagon' (medical vehicle) backing up and I then saw a young 2/LT lying beside a body bag. He was bloody all over but ready to talk and pray.

After the prayer, he looked at me through young and innocent eyes with tears flowing and asked, "Chaplain, was God with me today?" I replied that his continued breath and heartbeat was a testimony of the presence of God with him. The next reply brought me to my knees again as he asked, touching the body bag, "Why was God with me? This is my platoon sergeant. He was married and had 4 children. Why did God spare my life when I only have a father living and allowed my Sergeant to die leaving a wife and 4 young children?"

There is no answer to a question like that. But I have lived my life, and I am sure you have too, with a guilt feeling of, "Why him and not me?" So, as you all gather to dedicate the 173d Memorial at Ft Benning, I will be remembering the Herd. What did I do in God's sight to be spared and another person die?"

God bless you Fellow Herdsman and we will keep in touch.

Billy T. (Keeper of the Sheep - The "Herd" that is)

**CLOSE SUPPORT - THEN AND NOW** (Jack Tarr, C Co)

When the 4th Battalion arrived in country, **Charles (Pappy) Patchin** was assigned as Artillery FO/Recon Sgt from the 3/319 Artillery. In the year that followed, Pappy directly supported several line companies and was involved in some of the heaviest fighting the Geronimo Battalion experienced. When most of us returned to the States in June 1967, Pappy stayed until May '68.

After retiring from the Army as an LTC with Special Forces, Pappy became a County Service Officer accredited with the American Legion, VFW, VVA and United Spinal (Formerly Paralyzed Vets of America) in Syracuse, NY. He served vets until December 30, 2007, when he retired. Two years ago, when members of the original 4th Battalion were reuniting, Pappy again provided direct support to the 4th Battalion, this time as an expert in veterans' issues. In addition to his regular caseload, Pappy has helped many 4th Battalion guys with their claims.

He is still providing direct support to the 4/503d.

# REUNIONS

## 4<sup>TH</sup> BATTALION REUNIONS (Ron Best, Medic, B Co, after 2008 reunion)

So many good memories of such bad times -- ironic isn't it?

### GEN HEALY'S INTRODUCTION BY BOB BAILEY, 4/503d REUNION, 6/23/06

"General Healy has just one mission tonight --- to once again be together with these fine paratroopers of the Geronimo Battalion --- the soldiers he loves, 'His Boys'.

If I spend more than two minutes introducing him, you can be sure Iron Mike will lock my heels right here in front of you! So this will be short --- but certainly heart-felt.

You have General Healy's bio in front of you, but that only provides some of the highlights of his 35 years of dedicated service to our country.

During his first tour in Vietnam in 1963 and 1964 with US Special Forces he commanded the first Mobile Guerilla Bn, which had a very interesting name: "Mike Force." And, who among the troopers of the 1/501 at Fort Campbell could forget our mascot, "Geronimo the Goat" -- He could guzzle beer like a trooper but refused to jump!

But Mike Healy's most important accomplishment was when he met and married Jackie --- the gracious lady whose strong and constant love and support has made the Healy's a great Army family. Daniel, Michael, Timothy, Sean, Kirk and Patrick --- SIX SONS! And now the Healy clan includes 5 grandsons and 4 granddaughters. When Mike was off "playing soldier", who do you think was the prime force raising those fine boys? You've got it --- Jackie!

Ladies and Gentlemen, before we let Mike have a chance to speak, please welcome the First Lady of the Geronimo Battalion --- Jackie Healy.

Now it's my honor and privilege to introduce our first, and as far as we're all concerned, our only Commander of the Geronimo Battalion, Major General Michael D. Healy".

### AFTER THE 2008 4TH BATTALION REUNION George Coker, A Co

The reunion (my first) was great; it was more than I expected.

The most fun was walking up to the NCOs, shaking their hands, and having them give the blank stare as if to say, "If all the thousands of PFCs I came into contact with were lined up, I would pick you out as the one I had never met."

Next best was telling B company how exciting it was when that VC sniper fired two round into their position and they fired a couple thousand rounds into ours (on Junction City we were about 200 meters apart). Fortunately hot lead rises so our trees took a heavy beating.

Third, Where in the hell did all this love for officers come from?----humor----.

### REUNION NAMETAG (Mike Torrence, A Co)

You asked what first name to put on the nametag at the upcoming battalion reunion. For the name tag, please put Mike. Anyone that remembers me won't know Roger or Mike; but I also know I can't walk around with a nametag that reads, D-F, and that is what I'm probably best remembered by.

## FROM OUR FAMILIES

### SON OF AN AIRBORNE TROOPER (Kurt Liles, son of Ken Liles, A Co)

I am the proud son of an airborne soldier,  
No decision, no choice had I.  
But the childhood I enjoyed and loved  
Has been envied by many, numbered "i".

To Campbell, "Screaming Eagles", "Geronimo!", to Viet-Nam  
Were memories I always shall cherish  
Duty. Honor. Country. That others should not perish.  
"Straight and Stalwart", "Death from Above"  
Those words never a blur.  
Nor the gentle order, "You're the man-of-the-house; take care of them and her."

Proud. Honorable. Long-living, this Brigade 173rd.  
Honor among men. Comrades-in-arms,  
The men that are known as "The Herd."

### REMEMBERING COY TURNER (by LV Turner, nephew)

**NOTE:** Coy Turner, C Company, was KIA May 17, 2007, two weeks from his DEROS out of 'Nam. The letter below was sent to one of Coy's buddies, Jerry Downard, who had made contact with the family.)

Mr. Downard,

It is a GREAT honor to finally have contact with someone Coy shared the last several months with. As Margaret said, Mom and Dad helped raise Coy when his mother left my uncle when Coy was only 2 or 3.

I remember the Christmas before he left for Vietnam. I received a toy gun and handcuff set and Coy played with me. He captured me and handcuffed me. It is a memory I can keep stored in my mind forever.....

The picture I have attached is from the day he left "Harvey's Ridge" or Chance, KY (which is 15 miles south of Columbia, KY). I look upon my face and on the face of Coy.....I am so proud to be standing beside him and his face now tells me the pain he felt in leaving home.

I have also included a picture of the Cemetery, which is across the road from the house my mother and father built. This resting place is where, first my father was buried in 1965, and then Coy was placed beside him in 1967. If you look to the left of the cemetery, you see one stone in front followed by a couple of stones in the next row back, and then three stones with a larger one on the left. The one on the right with a big wreath and the middle stone is Coy's. He is buried between my father on the right and his father and aunts on the left.

To honor YOU and all those that have given so much to this country, we keep a flag on his grave year-round. It is not enough, but seems to be all we can do to honor Coy, YOU, and so many others. As Billy Ray Cyrus put it so well.....You all gave some and SOME GAVE ALL.....but such a high price for ALL of you to pay....THANK YOU.....

I do hope to talk with you and will call you very soon. The picture of Coy between my brother James, my sister Margaret, and myself hangs on my wall near my desk....Again, THANK YOU for being there for Coy....

L.V. Turner

# **TIME FLIES**

## **TIME FLIES** (Mike Strange, C Co)

When I served in Vietnam, I was 19. In 15 minutes, my grandson will be here at my office.  
Where did time go?

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

(49 on 11/15/10) \* = Deceased

**Mike Adams.** James M (Mike) Adams and Rose Ann, (Bravo and HHC), live in Mt Ida, AR. He retired from the Power & Light Company and plays banjo in a band. [mikeandroseanneadams@windstream.net](mailto:mikeandroseanneadams@windstream.net);

**Joe Armstrong.** Joe extended with Bravo until August 1967 and was in the early DakTo battles. He is a VA Service Officer and makes presentations on Agent Orange. Joe and Geraldine (Gerry) live in Sanford, ME. [cwomaine@myfairpoint.net](mailto:cwomaine@myfairpoint.net)

\***Bob Bailey.** Bob was A Company CO when the Battalion deployed from Ft Campbell. Bob rose to Colonel and he and Nancy retired to NC. Bob died of cancer in 2008.

**Al Barlowe.** Luther Aldon (Al) and Deena; HHC/Commo, live in Lenoir, NC. He spent 30 yrs with airborne units and retired in 1993. [labarlowe@yahoo.com](mailto:labarlowe@yahoo.com)

**Jim Baskin.** Jim was an Artillery FO with A, B, and C Companies from 2/67- to 3/68. He was in the Battles of DakTo. He lives in Lebanon, TN [jamesbaskin@bellsouth.net](mailto:jamesbaskin@bellsouth.net)

**J.L. (Jessie) Beacham.** Jessie was a squad leader in Charlie Company. He retired as a First Sergeant and he and Elaine live in Columbia, SC [dustoff@bellsouth.net](mailto:dustoff@bellsouth.net)

**Steve Becsei.** Steve was a machine gunner in D Company. He lives in Yellville, AR. [sbecsei@hotmail.com](mailto:sbecsei@hotmail.com)

**Ron Best,** Ron and Cindy live in West Des Moines, IA. Ron was a Medic in B Co and earned the Silver Star. He was a nurse and respiratory therapist. Ron plays bagpipes and builds guitars from scratch. [docbest173rd4b@yahoo.com](mailto:docbest173rd4b@yahoo.com)

**Alan Boyle.** Alan had made it through 11 months of fighting with Charlie Company. On May 17, 1967, two weeks from DEROS, he was badly wounded in a battle near the DMZ. He spent over a year in hospitals recovering from burns and a broken back. Alan and Eva split their time between their upper New York farm and their house in Hungary. [akb173@gmail.com](mailto:akb173@gmail.com)

**Roger Bray.** Roger (nee Braycewski) was in the weapons platoon of B Company. He and Nancy live in Barnegat, NJ [rbray@comcast.net](mailto:rbray@comcast.net)

**Bob Canuel.** Bob was with B Co. He and Bev live in Holden Beach, NC and winter in Tucson, AZ [rcbctwinpalms@gmail.com](mailto:rcbctwinpalms@gmail.com);

**George Coker.** George was with HHC and then, A Co. He and his best buddy RJ Pool, have compared notes and have gotten together to put together their remembrances of their time in 'Nam. George and Violet live in Arlington, TX outside Dallas. [violetc\\_90@yahoo.com](mailto:violetc_90@yahoo.com)

**Thom Cook.** Thom was senior medic with Charlie Company which lost 22 f the Battalion's 51 KIA in our year in RVN. Thom later joined SF and is one of the few to earn a CIB, CMB, and

Pathfinder badge. He still looks after the troops as President of the local VFW and as VA Service Officer. He and Betty live in Shawnee, OK. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

**Reed Cundiff.** Charles R (Reed) Cundiff went from HHC to A Co, then 173d LRRPs. After getting a BS in Physics, he worked for the Army Research Lab, retiring in 2007. He and Elaine sold their Las Cruces, NM home and are full-time RV traveling the US.

<mailto:reed.cundiff@gmail.com> [reed.cundiff@gmail.com](mailto:reed.cundiff@gmail.com)

\***Elmer (Buddy) Davis.** Buddy was C Company supply sergeant. He earned a DFC saving a crewman as an Air Force para-rescue man during the Korean Conflict. Two sons are currently in the Army. Buddy and Gudrun lived in Sanford, NC. He died of cancer and COPD in June 2010.

**Jerry and Susan Downard** are from Kentucky and were married at Ft Campbell in February 1966. He was in Weapons Platoon, Charlie Co. The Downards live in Williamsport, KY. [jdownard@fuse.net](mailto:jdownard@fuse.net)

**Doug Gilstrap** will always remember his friend from D Company who died in January 1967. He and Diane, his wife of 40 years, live in Brandon, MS. [dfgilstrap@bellsouth.net](mailto:dfgilstrap@bellsouth.net)

\***Guadalupe (Lupe) Garza Gonzales.** Lupe was in HHC Ops. He retired as a Chicago cop, was disabled and learned he had Leukemia in May 2010. He and Edda lived in Naperville IL. Lupe died in November 2010. [Gonzalez2328@yahoo.com](mailto:Gonzalez2328@yahoo.com); [emgon2328@yahoo.com](mailto:emgon2328@yahoo.com)

**Mike Goodwin.** Mike was a medic in Bravo and later with SF. He worked for and then owned a radio station in Mississippi. He and Linda live in Brandon, MS [mgoodwin44@gmail.com](mailto:mgoodwin44@gmail.com);

**Juan (John) Herrera,** joined the Battalion in July 66. He transferred from C to D Co. He and Aurora live in West Richland, WA. [herrjm@yahoo.com](mailto:herrjm@yahoo.com)

**Dayton Herrington.** Dayton, SGM (ret) and Betty, live in Clarksville, TN. He was S-2 and S-3 Ops NCO with the 1/501<sup>st</sup>, Senior S-2 NCO, 4/503d, and Brigade Operations with the Vietnamese Airborne Division during 6 years in Vietnam. He still runs with the troops of the 101<sup>st</sup>. Currently, he is jumping as a member of the WW II Airborne Demonstrations Team, with a home base in Frederick Army Airfield, Frederick, OK. [www.wwiadt.org](http://www.wwiadt.org)

**Chuck Huller.** Chuck, a Medic with B and C Co, was 17 when we deployed to 'Nam. He is divorced and lives in NYC where he still does not have a driver's license. He is co-owner of Bernadetti Gallery and has donated valuable prints to military museums. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

**Hugh Kelley.** Hugh was 3d Platoon Leader in Bravo Company. He and Grace live in Winter Springs, FL. [hkelley7@comcast.net](mailto:hkelley7@comcast.net)

**Peter Klausner.** Peter was in A Company. He developed the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion's web site. He also is webmaster for his 173d chapter's web site in MA and is current chapter president. He and Margaret live in South Easton, MA. Their son, Eric, was badly WIA in Iraq Jan 08 and is recuperating in the US. [logpc@comcast.net](mailto:logpc@comcast.net)

**Jim Lakatos.** Jim was in Charlie Company and badly wounded. He wrote a tribute to the medics and his buddies who saved his life on the 173d web site which is in our stories. He is a high school teacher in Florida. He and Catherine live in Wellington, FL. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.;**

**Ken Liles.** Ken was an A Co platoon sergeant. He served 2 combat tours in Korea and 2 in Vietnam. He and Billie live on Leisure Lane in Tyler, TX. [aliles40@hotmail.com](mailto:aliles40@hotmail.com)

**Curt Liles.** Curt is Ken's proud son. Curt served 20 years in the Navy and retired recently. At the 2010 4/503d reunion, Curt read the poem he had written for his Dad. Curt and his wife, Joy, live in Waco, TX. [curtjoy@grandecom.net](mailto:curtjoy@grandecom.net);

**Noah McBride.** After being with Bravo in Vietnam, Noah was an airframe inspector/estimator for the Government. He recently had bypass surgery. He and Miriam live in Century, FL. [noamirmc173rd@frontier.com](mailto:noamirmc173rd@frontier.com)

**Joe Oliverio.** Joe was in Bravo. He retired as a fire fighter in Pittsburgh and moved to Florida. He and JoAnn live in Brandon, FL. [sapyjoe@aol.com](mailto:sapyjoe@aol.com)

**Charles ('Pappy') Patchin.** Pappy joined the 4/503d when we arrived in Bien Hoa in June 1968 and stayed with us till he rotated back in August 1968. Before joining the 4th Batt, he had FO'd for several other units through some big battles. He went to Infantry OCS and retired from the SF as an O-5. He trained several other FOs and Recon Sergeants during his tour. Pappy was a VA Service Officer in NY. He and Susan retired to Latrobe, PA. [cpatchin@comcast.net](mailto:cpatchin@comcast.net)

**Danilo Perez.** Dan came to the US from Cuba and served with A and D Companies. He lives in Boca Raton, FL. [sirdanilo@hotmail.com](mailto:sirdanilo@hotmail.com)

**R.J. Pool.** Richard J (Dick or RJ) was in HQ and A Companies. He lives in Marston Mills, MA. [richardpool@comcast.net](mailto:richardpool@comcast.net)

**John Pratt.** John was with Bravo Company. He and Karen live in San Antonio, TX. [olervman@gmail.com](mailto:olervman@gmail.com)

**Frank Probst** of A Company retired as an O-5. He was walking just outside the Pentagon when it was hit on 9/11. He and Peggy live in Burke, VA. [probst\\_964@msn.com](mailto:probst_964@msn.com)

**Ray Ramirez.** Ray was in HHC S-3 Ops when we deployed. He later volunteered for Delta Company. Ray has been an officer of the 173d Association at local and National level and was on the original committee to build our new 173d Memorial. He writes articles and makes presentations across the country at veterans and civic groups. Ray is the unofficial "historian" of the Original Geronimo Battalion. He has found many former 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion and 173d troopers. He and Sharon live in Whittier, CA **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

**Jesse Rizzo.** Jesse was with 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, B Co. He and Margaret live in Morgan Hill, CA.

[jesse@rizzoplanet.com](mailto:jesse@rizzoplanet.com)

**Andy Roy.** Antoine E. (Andy) Roy joined Charlie Company in April 1967 and went on to fight in the Battles of DakTo. In two later tours, he was a helicopter door gunner and then went to another 173d battalion. He is divorced and lives in Jaffrey, N.H. [Vietroy789@aol.com](mailto:Vietroy789@aol.com)

**Gary R Schindele.** Gary's name was misspelled on the deployment orders. We found him in July 2010 when Jerry Downard spelled his name correctly. He was a Weapons Squad Ldr in C Company and retired as a CSM in 1987. He taught Special Ed for 10 years before retiring to the golf course. He and Cheryl live in Coos Bay, OR. [gschind@hotmail.com](mailto:gschind@hotmail.com)

**Chaplain (Col) Billy T Smith,** HHC. Billy T joined the 4/503d in late June soon after our arrival. He has been a minister for 54 years old and treasures his time with the "Herd" as his best memories. He is suffering from Agent Orange and is disabled. He and Delores (Dee) live in Clarksville, TN. [billytsmith@hotmail.com](mailto:billytsmith@hotmail.com)

**Harold Snider.** Harold was a squad leader and then platoon sergeant with Bravo. He and Sara live in Rio Rancho, NM. [geronimo173d@yahoo.com](mailto:geronimo173d@yahoo.com)

**Gerry Stesiak.** Gerry was a Medic in A Co and wrote a book about the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion. He retired from the Detroit Fire Department as Division Fire Chief. He and Beatrice live in Wimauma, FL. [gkstesiak@verizon.net](mailto:gkstesiak@verizon.net)

**Tim Stout.** Tim and Suzanne live in River Falls, WI. Tim was OIC of the 173d MP detachment attached to our Battalion and is a former 173d Society National officer. [tstout@pressenter.com](mailto:tstout@pressenter.com)

**Mike Strange.** Mike (Buddy) and Sharon live in Benton, AR. Mike was a point man in Charlie and had a love-hate relationship with his squad leader, SSG Alexander Boxley. Mike's humor hides some of the pain he still has from those days in the jungle. [irontriangle13@yahoo.com](mailto:irontriangle13@yahoo.com)

**Ed Sullivan.** Ed was with B Co in 'Nam and is a retired NYC cop. He is divorced and lives in Glen Haven, CO. [eddsulabn@hotmail.com](mailto:eddsulabn@hotmail.com)

**Mike Talerco.** Mike made PFC three times. He put his stories in a book which is in the final editing stage. He was in B Co and then Recon, 1/503d. He is divorced and lives in Peoria, AZ [mtal5087@cox.net](mailto:mtal5087@cox.net)

**Jack Tarr.** C Co & Jungle School. The 4/503d was Jack's 2d tour in 'Nam and he went back for a 3d. He retired twice and is now part-time tennis pro. Jack & Casey live in McLean, VA. [jtarr5@verizon.net](mailto:jtarr5@verizon.net)

**Mike Torrence.** Roger (Mike) was an RTO in A Co. He retired as an E-8 on the list for E-9. He then spent 20 years with DFAS and had an Iraq tour in 2008. He and Monica live in Carmel, IN. [miket173abn@yahoo.com](mailto:miket173abn@yahoo.com)

**L.V. Turner** was **Coy Turner's** first cousin, but considered him a big brother. Coy was killed on May 17<sup>th</sup> along with 4 others from Charlie Company. When Alan Boyle and Jerry Downard contacted Coy's family, LV wrote a wonderful tribute to Coy. LV grew up in the same small town in Kentucky as Coy and now lives in Avon, IN. [lv.turner@gm.com](mailto:lv.turner@gm.com)

**Wendell Vega**. Wendell joined the Battalion and A Company shortly after we arrived in country. He was an EMT for the NYC Fire Department. He and Monica live in Mt Vernon, NY. [wendellzorro@hotmail.com](mailto:wendellzorro@hotmail.com)

**Frank Veldey**. Frank served with A Co. He is a widower and lives in Richfield, MN; [fveldey@live.com](mailto:fveldey@live.com)

**Charles Vickers**. Charles was a Platoon Sergeant with A Company when we deployed. He retired as a 1SG. He and Lucille live in Fayetteville, NC. [cvickers3@nc.rr.com](mailto:cvickers3@nc.rr.com)